15 Cents EVERY WEEK Nov. 13, 1926

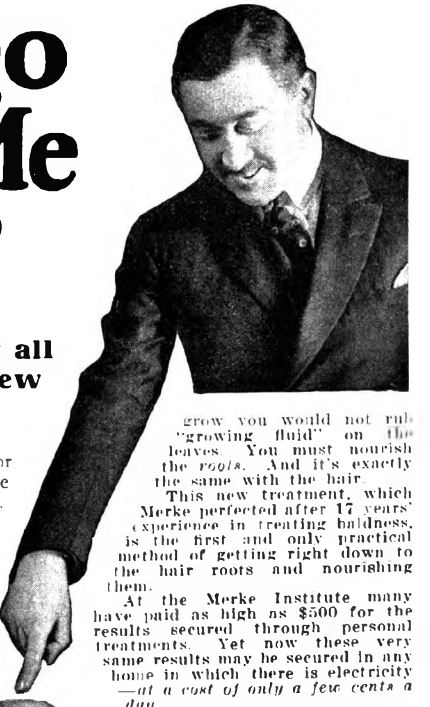
Western Story Magazine

Robert Ormond Case
George Owen Baxter
Max Brand
Herbert Farris
and others

BIG, CLEAN STORIES OF OUTDOOR LIFE

STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

60 Days Ago They Called Me "BALDY"



Now my friends are amazed. They all ask me how I was able to grow new hair in such a short time.

BOB MILLER and I had both been getting bald for years. We had tried almost every hair restorer on the market. But we might as well have used brass polish.

One day Bob left town—a business trip. Weeks passed. I began to wonder if I'd ever see him again.

One afternoon at the office I heard a familiar voice—"Hello, Baldy," it said. I glanced up, annoyed. There stood Bob.

"For Pete's sake!" I exclaimed, "where have you been keeping yourself?"

We shook hands. "Take off your hat," I suggested sarcastically. "Let me gaze on that 'luxuriant hair' of yours. I haven't seen it for weeks."

"Luxuriant hair is right," he retorted. "I've got the finest growth of hair you ever saw!"

I laughed out loud! "Know any more jokes?" I said.

Bob stepped back and swept off his hat. I couldn't believe my eyes. The top of his head, once almost bare, was covered with a brand new growth of real, honest to goodness hair!

A New Way to Grow Hair

That night I went to Bob's house to try his new hair-growing treatment. He sat me in a chair and placed a strange apparatus on my head and turned on the electricity. The treatment lasted 15 minutes. At the end of the treatment I rubbed the top of my head. "Well, Bob," I chuckled, "I don't feel any new hair."

"Of course you don't," Bob came back. "But just you wait a while."

On my way home I read a booklet which Bob had given me. It described a new method of growing hair—discovered by Alois Merke, founder of the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York. It was the only treatment I ever heard of that got right down to the *roots* of the hair and awakened them to new activity. Bob was proof. I decided to send for the treatment immediately.

I Get the Surprise of My Life

Every night I spent 15 minutes taking the treatment. The first two or three days nothing happened. But I could feel my scalp beginning to tingle with new life—new vigor. Then one day when I looked in the mirror I got the thrill of a lifetime. All over my head a fine, downy fuzz was beginning to appear. At the end of a month you could hardly see a bald spot on my head. And after 60 days my worries about baldness were ended. I had gained an entirely new growth of healthy hair.

Here's the Secret

According to Alois Merke, in most cases of loss of hair the hair roots are not dead, but merely *dormant*—temporarily asleep. To make a sickly tree grow you would not rub "growing fluid" on the leaves. You must nourish the *roots*. And it's exactly the same with the hair.

This new treatment, which Merke perfected after 17 years' experience in treating baldness, is the first and only practical method of getting right down to the hair roots and nourishing them.

At the Merke Institute many have paid as high as $500 for the results secured through personal treatments. Yet now these very same results may be secured in any home in which there is electricity—*at a cost of only a few cents a day.*

Merke frankly admits that his treatment will not grow hair in every case. There are some cases nothing can help. But so many have regained hair this new way, that no matter how thin your hair may be, he invites you to try the treatment 30 days at his risk, and if it fails to grow hair then your money is instantly refunded. And you are the sole judge.

Coupon Brings You Full Details

This story is typical of the results that great numbers of people are securing with the Merke Treatment. "The New Way to Make Hair Grow" is a 34 page book which explains the Merke Treatment in detail. It will be sent you entirely free if you simply mail the coupon below.

This little book tells all about the amazing new treatment, shows what it has done for countless others, and contains valuable information about the hair and scalp. Remember, this book is yours free—to keep. And if you decide to take the treatment you can do so without risking a penny. So mail coupon now. Address Allied Merke Institute, Inc., Dept. 424, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York.

Allied Merke Institute, Inc.
Dept. 424, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City

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

Name .....
(State whether Mr., Mrs. or Miss)

Address .....

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

Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXV **Contents for November 13, 1926** **No. 1**

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

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $6.00 ***SINGLE COPIES, 15 CENTS***

NOW FREE

B. W. COOKE
Directing Engineer

B. W. Cooke's FREE TRIAL
6 AUTO Instruction JOBS

CLIP COUPON
5 BIG OUTFITS *Free* OF EXTRA COST

EARN up to $150 a Week!

If you're earning a cent less than $60 a week, *clip coupon now.* Get the **PROOF** that you can be on your way to BIG PAY as an Auto Expert QUICK! *See for yourself* how *fascinating* this training is—how easily you can master Auto Work right in your own home—and how **quickly** you can get in line for the **big Auto Jobs** that pay up to **$150 a week and more**—or a Money-Making Auto Business of your own! Remember these Instruction jobs come to you **ABSOLUTELY FREE** and without obligation. **Clip coupon now.**

TO PROVE that "JOB-WAY" is "PAY-RAISE" Training

Clip coupon now. I'll send you absolutely **FREE OF CHARGE**—with *positively no obligation* on your part—6 **"JOB-WAY" Instruction JOBS!** and my big book. I want you to *SEE for yourself* just why "JOB-WAY" Training is bringing so many men **Big Money** in such *remarkably quick time.* I want you to see how men *without a day's previous auto experience*—and only *common schooling* become Garage Owners, Superintendents, Managers, and earn up to **$150 a week** and more! I want you to see why Hundreds of men have found "JOB-WAY" Training to be such interesting, most practical money-making training!

That's why I make you this unusual offer—with absolutely no strings on it and not a single penny's charge. Clip coupon now and I'll rush your jobs to you *absolutely Free!*

Coupon Brings Full Details of My 5 OUTFITS OFFER

Includes Tools, Tool Bag, Electrical Test Bench and Radio Receiving Set—all Equipment. Also 303 Wiring Diagram Charts, also Socket Wrench and Ignition Wrench sets.

I'll train you AT HOME

Get these free Instruction Jobsnow. See how thorough, how complete "JOB-WAY" Training is—includes all Electrical work—Ignition, Starting, Lighting—all Mechanical, also Welding, Brazing, Vulcanizing—also Business Course, Salesmanship, Advertising—How to keep simple Books—also Students' Magazine, also 5 working Outfits. Nowhere else can you get this original genuine, copyrighted B. W. Cooke "JOB-WAY" Training.

This Big Auto Book Also FREE

Coupon brings this startling, revolutionary Auto Book, too, absolutely Free! Shows how hundreds of men have reached Big Pay in amazingly quick time! Shows what you can do. Send for it now!

Be An Auto Expert

The World's Biggest Business Needs You!

There are so many tremendous Opportunities in this gigantic Auto Industry that I want every ambitious man *who really wants* to make more money, to have these 6 Instruction Jobs, just to see how easily and quickly I can boost his pay way up. Just think! **Seven thousand Millions of Dollars** are paid to Auto men every year for *upkeep alone*—**Nineteen Million Dollars a day!** Think what that **means to you**—the Big Pay Opportunities open to you as a Cooke trained auto expert! It's the one field for the man who wants a BIG pay check! Learn all about it now!

SEND ME LESSONS and BOOK FREE

B. W. COOKE, 1916 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 867, Chicago
Send me absolutely FREE and without any obligation on my part, 6 Auto Instruction Jobs. Also your Auto Book FREE and full particulars of your 5 Outfits Offer.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

Act Quick!

Don't delay a minute. Send coupon right now while I can still make you this special offer of *6 Auto Instruction Jobs* absolutely free—as well as my Big Auto Book, free too! Act now!

B. W. COOKE Directing Engineer

Chicago Motor Training Corporation

1916 Sunnyside Ave. Dept. 867 CHICAGO, ILL.

Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXV NOVEMBER 13, 1926 No. 1

The Tailor-made Wrangler

By Robert Ormond Case

Author of "Timber Beasts and Buckaroos," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A HUNCH.

"WINDY" was seated beneath the bracket lamp with a hand of solitaire spread on the oilcloth-covered table before him when "Lonesome" entered the cabin. It required no sixth sense to perceive that Lonesome was staggering, in a manner of speaking, beneath the weight of some mental burden. His step was ponderous and dignified, as befitted a man who has wrestled with a stupendous problem and triumphantly has it hog tied and helpless. In his pale-blue eyes was the complacence of an intrepid explorer who has stood on a lofty eminence contemplating a realm that would soon be his. His tawny mustache, drooping across his fighting jaw, expressed in some vague way a determination as fixed as granite.

Observing these phenomena with a glittering eye, Windy's mustache bristled with sardonic amusement.

"McQuirk's full of business," he mentally soliloquized. "It sticks out all over him like a rash. He's done attached himself to some hay-wire idea and whereas he ain't said what this idea is, it's my duty as a partner to tell him it's the bunk. Question is, should I ask

him what's on his mind, if any, or let him swell up till he just naturally falls apart in chunks?"

Deciding on the latter course, he continued to regard his cards with an expression of concentrated attention on his lean and saturnine features. But his decision weakened rapidly when his partner, after considerable profane exploration beneath his bunk, emerged with writing tablet and envelope. When Lonesome drew up to the table, placed the writing tablet before him, procured a stub of pencil from the paraphernalia on the window sill, and began to apply himself methodically to the business of writing, Windy could no longer restrain his curiosity.

"What in blazes you up to, McQuirk?" he inquired pointedly, leaning back in his rawhide upholstered chair. "What ails you mostly? I'll swear you act like a bald-headed rooster that has done found an angle worm as big as a bull snake. How come you're all swelled up like a poisoned pup and strut around here solemn as a boiled owl? What's all this writing business?" he insisted with some irritation, as Lonesome, absently chewing his pencil, stared at him vacantly. "You framing up your will, McQuirk? You're figuring out a fine prescription to write on your tombstone, maybe. If the last named, I'll be pleased to help you out. I've got an idea or two that would be illuminating."

Lonesome arose and returned again to his bunk. Descending on all fours, he delved into that shadowed storehouse and emerged with a tattered mail order catalogue. He seated himself again with the voluminous publication before him, and thumbed its pages deliberatively.

"I'm writing a letter, Windy," he explained with the manner of one tossing a satisfying bone to a noisy but unintelligent mongrel. "You know how it goes. A fellow writes a letter once in a while."

"Excuse me," said Windy, glaring. "You can go to blazes, McQuirk. The explanation has done thrown me off the track entirely. It's been a nice day, ain't it? A little hot maybe, but it's a swell evening. We're liable to have another nice day to-morrow, huh? Yes, indeed, McQuirk.

"The grass is drying up on the range," he continued, implacably. "But they's still some good grazing in the flats. Up in the mountains, the Bar-X boys tell me, the grass ain't so good. Do you know what the Oliver lamb crop was this year? A hundred and twenty per cent, by gravy. I got the straight from Shea, who was talking to Lem at the livery stable yesterday. And Lem got it from Judge Brady. Judge Brady got it straight from Herman Oliver over to the John Day. Think of it, old-timer, a hundred and twenty per cent! That shows what this said scientific farming——"

"That's a plenty." Lonesome made a gesture of surrender and sat back in his chair. He eyed his partner malevolently. "You're the most curious and unreasonable critter in seven states, DeLong. Can't you see I've got something on my mind?"

"That's just what worries me, Lonesome," said Windy with an appearance of concern. "You ain't used to it. You ain't equipped to stand up under nothing heavy in the mental line. You're pop-eyed already. If I was to let you go on without telling me about it, you'd bust loose real sudden and make a break for the pinnacles. I'd find you up there picking wild flowers and talking to yourself. And I'd have to shake my head and tell all our friends, 'Pore old McQuirk,' I'd say. 'He took up with a hay-wire idea and it done made a monkey out of him.' Come on now, caballero. Let's have the earmarks of your grief."

He waited and eyed his partner expectantly.

The pair knew each other so thoroughly that Lonesome was almost prepared to swear in advance what Windy's reception of his statement would be. He knew he could not avoid telling his partner. Nor was he secretly adverse to doing so. He knew that his partner's caustic comment would strengthen his own resolution. In his bland, triumphant mood, the triumph of one who has made an irrevocable decision and feels his star of destiny has never before loomed so bright, he knew that the moment would not be complete unless Windy, by his very belligerence and his sardonic criticism, showed that he too was impressed and perhaps a little awed by the stupendous import of the occasion.

He reached for his plug of tobacco and tore off a generous chew. Automatically and unconsciously Windy produced the makings and rolled a brown cigarette with lean powerful fingers.

"It ain't grief, Windy," said Lonesome at length. "It's luck."

"Some folks can't tell that pair apart," observed Windy. "If it looks like luck to you, it's probably grief."

"To show you how all the breaks is coming my way," continued Lonesome, "I got to cover a little ancient history. I got to show how you and me, having eaten the dust on an ungodly lot of hard trails, in a manner of speaking, have done found ourselves in the prime of life, in a layout where we can take our royal ease. I aim to show how you and me, having spent the biggest part of the last fifty years in milling around wherever the dust was thickest, bedding down among the sand fleas and cactus, and knowing the meaning of home only as the place where we hobbled our horses and spread our ponchos, are now men of substance, living on deeded ground and surrounded by neighbors who are raising up crops from the soil and raising up boys who will some day be honest upstanding men.

"On top of that, Windy, you and me was just naturally born lucky. What I mean is, it come to us real sudden when we was least expecting it. Up to a year or so ago, when you and me located here, we had rose through the years too fast and too far to think about anything else but gun fighting and such other little details. We figured that action would take the place of everything, including a home and families of our own, et cetera."

Windy started and eyed his partner with some misgiving, and Lonesome continued.

"Now look at the pair of us, Windy. What happened since we come into the Condon country? I get interested in the schoolma'am. That leaves you out in the cold. You figger I'm hogging all the luck. Just when you're most down in the mouth, along comes the Widow Hogan with as fine a pair of husky, healthy boys as a fellow could ask for. She moves in over to the springs to the west, and right away old Windy DeLong, who hates women like mules hate barbed wire, has done found that they've got their points."

"Leave me out of it," cut in Windy hastily. "This said conference was called to discuss your present pop-eyed condition. Let's admit we ain't got nothing to complain about in general. What's all this got to do with the price of beef? Thinking over them things ain't put you in the shape you're in. Come on now, McQuirk. Let me help you out. You've got a humdinger of an idea which as usual concerns you and the schoolma'am. Let's have it."

"You're always rushing me," Lonesome complained. "Point is, me and the schoolma'am has known each other for a long time now. We've got to understand each other pretty thorough. And whereas I ain't worth the dust beneath her feet, she seems to figger I might be a human being if I was fixed over a little. So"—he eyed Windy fixedly—

"I've been flirting with the idea of matrimony, Windy."

If Lonesome had intended this statement as a bomb, the resulting explosion was far from satisfactory.

"Is that so?" inquired Windy with sarcasm. "Well, I'm danged, McQuirk. You've got an appetite for punishment. You remind me of the fellow they tell about. It seems this hombre went into a saloon and the bartender heaved him out on his ear. He picked himself up off the pavement and rushed in again and the said hard-boiled bartender threw him out again as emphatic as before. The third time he tries it, he sits up where he lit in the middle of the street and scratches his head. 'Well, I'm a son of a gun,' he tells the spectators, 'I do believe that feller doesn't want me in there.'"

Lonesome was puzzled. "I don't get you, Windy. What you driving at?"

"Did you or did you not," inquired Windy, tapping the table with a lean forefinger to emphasize his point, "pop the question to the schoolma'am some time ago? You did. And that red-headed gal turned you down so hard your teeth rattled for a week. How come then you're so optimistic as to try it again? After she tells you a couple of dozen times to go to blazes, you'll be coming around to me kind of scratching your head and looking puzzled. 'Windy,' you'll say, 'after figuring this out, I've come to the conclusion I ain't got the stand-in with that gal that I thought I had.'"

But Lonesome, far from being disconcerted by this thrust, smiled upon his partner compassionately.

"Which goes to show, Windy, you don't know much about this matrimonial business. It ain't to be wondered at neither, being handicapped the way you are by your looks and disposition."

"How do you rate as an expert?" demanded Windy, aggrieved. "If you're getting down to what you might call personalities, McQuirk, I've got the bulge on you. If unbeautiful looks was criminal, you'd have been hung long ago."

"Point is," continued Lonesome calmly, "she turned me down once, but she done so with a 'come hither' expression in them blue eyes of hers, just as if she had said, 'Let's renew this conversation at some later date, Mr. McQuirk, after I know you better.' You see, Windy, I wasn't hardly on speaking terms with her at the time, as you might say. But we know each other pretty thorough now. For almost a year now we've been together an awful lot. I figure she knows how worthless I am, and I'm hoping," he added with an humble sincerity that spoke volumes for the real feeling that lay beneath his casual manner, "she's found in me a little something or other that ain't absolutely no account and worthless."

"The fact she knows you so well is a handicap," Windy pointed out. "But we'll give you the benefit of the doubt. The thing I crave a little light on is this. How come this thing struck you all of a sudden? You knew her just as well last week as you do now. You ain't aiming to pop the question to-night, I take it, or you'd be doing your stuff over to Shuttler's Flats this minute. How come then you come waltzing in here to-night all swelled up and sure of yourself, just like something had whispered in your ear, 'McQuirk, the hour has struck.'"

"I'll tell you, Windy." Though his tanned cheek was already bulging, Lonesome tore off another chew. "It ain't that I'm sure of myself. Just at the minute I can't think of anything any more uncertain than this matrimonial business. But I figure the stage is all set, as you might say. The breaks is heading my way. They ain't nothing whispering in my ear. But they's several little details has occurred to me to-night that gives me a hunch it's just

like you said. 'The hour has struck.' If everything goes according to Hoyle, on Sunday night at eleven o'clock or thereabouts, I figure on doing my stuff."

"Sunday," echoed Windy. "This here is only Monday night. That's the heftiest hunch I ever heard a feller lay claim to. They's lots of things can happen in danged near a week. Why Sunday night?"

"Because the stage I mentioned a minute ago won't be set till Sunday night. You see, Windy"—Lonesome leaned back and eyed the cigarette smoke above his partner's head contemplatively—"it come to me all of a sudden when I was standing by the water trough beneath the locust tree a while back, contemplating the sunset. Way up in the sky where the stars was beginning to shine I seen the new moon. It was like a silver sickle among a handful of glittering jewels."

"What a poetic thought," murmured Windy. "Whereas you and me have seen enough new moons in our time to stretch from here to the Rio Grande."

"We got a new moon now," Lonesome pointed out. "It'll be danged near full by Friday night, getting better by Saturday night, and by Sunday night, it'll be a humdinger and no less. Do you get me?"

"I get you," agreed Windy judiciously. "You can't get by with no quarter moon or half moon. For the business you got before you, you got to have the best they is."

"And that ain't all of it," said Lonesome complacently. "That ain't all the signs that show that luck is with me. Friday's a school holiday, ain't it? Well, sir, she won't be all tired out on Friday night. That gives me three nights in a row, which ain't too much."

Windy nodded. "You get off to a flying start the first night. On the second night you've found your pace and are picking up speed on the straightaway. On the third, you're finishing strong at the home stretch. I can see you've got it all figured out, McQuirk."

"And still that ain't all of it, Windy," said Lonesome with triumph. "I ain't the kind of a feller to do things by halves. Between now and Friday"—he indicated the mail order catalogue before him—"I got time to order up a new outfit from Portland."

Windy stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"Clothes," Lonesome explained. "I've figured out that one of the handicaps I've been up against all the while is that I've been dressed like a tramp."

"Like a tramp," echoed Windy, scandalized. "McQuirk, I hate to have to say it, but they ain't a buckaroo in these parts can outpoint you when you got your war paint on."

"That's where you're wrong, old-timer," said Lonesome firmly. "The outfit I got is good enough for these parts. But they ain't elegant enough for the schoolma'am. You got to remember she don't really belong to the Condon country. She's used to the dudes that are dressed like them in Portland or any other big cities. I haven't had her under observation all this while for nothing. When she talks to one of them city dudes, she's real polite and careful, just like she figures he's a gentleman until proved otherwise. But with me and the rest of the lads she's real casual and frank as much as to say, 'These boys are woolly. But they can't help it and I don't hold it against them.'"

"You got the wrong slant on that, Lonesome," Windy warned. "The schoolma'am never appealed to me as highbrow. On top of that, McQuirk, a leopard can't change his spots. You can't make a slick-haired lap dog out of a timber wolf and you can't fool that schoolma'am none. That red-headed gal knows a thing or two. Notwithstanding you dressed up like a tailor's dummy, she'll still know you're woolly inside."

"I aim to try it once," said Lonesome decisively. "I got a hunch she'll be pleased and surprised when she sees me all togged out like a Shasta daisy. Meanwhile, I won't be riding over there till Friday night. After not seeing me for a whole week, she might be in what you might call a receptive mood. So I'd ought to get off to that flying start you mentioned a while back."

But Windy refused to be convinced.

"You mark my words, McQuirk, and I'm telling you for your own good. Your plans is all O. K. with the exception of this dude outfit you're figuring on. As sure as you're sitting there, them clothes is going to be a Jonah."

But Lonesome merely grinned at these predictions and fell to studying the alluring offerings of the mail order catalogue.

CHAPTER II.

CLOTHES AND THE MAN.

IT was late Friday afternoon when Lonesome rode up the cañon to the scattered buildings of the McQuirk-De-Long homestead. His manner was that of a conqueror returning from distant battlefields bearing the spoils of war. A pasteboard box of large dimensions, securely wrapped and labeled, was beneath his arm. Another bulky package, obviously a hat box, was attached precariously in the rear. Smaller packages of varying sizes were festooned about him.

He pulled up before the cabin. Windy appeared in the doorway, a skillet in his hand, that worthy being in the midst of preparing the evening meal. As he took in Lonesome's appearance, seated grinning among his trophies, his gloomy eye lighted with sardonic amusement. He waved the skillet in a large gesture of greeting.

"You ought to have taken the buckboard to Condon, McQuirk," he averred. "It ain't right to load down your critter that a way. If you don't look like Santa Claus, I'm a horned toad."

"If Santa Claus had to do his stuff in frying pan weather like this," said Lonesome, dismounting and mopping his perspiring face with a huge bandanna, "they wouldn't be no Christmas in these parts. Wow! what a blistering day. I had to take it easy too, on account of all this junk. My critter had it on me at that. Loaded down the way we was, he's been traveling in the shade."

Methodically he removed all the packages and stacked them in a neat pile on the cabin steps.

"You don't mean to say all them gadgets is clothes?" questioned Windy. "What army you aiming to outfit, McQuirk? It appears to me you got enough stuff there for four men and a boy and a half dozen sheep herders. You sure you ain't overlooked nothing?"

"I hope not," Lonesome grinned. "Whereas you'd be surprised at the amount of things a feller needs who aims to be strictly dressed up. You know what this layout set me back Windy?" There was an awed note in his voice. "All of thirty dollars, by gravy."

"Thirty dollars," echoed Windy. "You've been wasting your substance in riotous living, McQuirk. A feller can buy a lot of beans and bacon with thirty dollars. Open up them bundles and lets have a look at them powder puffs you've got together."

"Not now," demurred Lonesome, leading his horse toward the feed rack, "don't you lay a finger on them bundles, Windy. Get a hold of your curiosity until after I've gotten outside of some of them beans you mentioned. Then I'll get all togged out and you can give me the once-over before I leave for Shuttler's Flats."

When the supper dishes had been washed and stacked away, Lonesome laid hold on Windy's arm and escorted that worthy to the doorway.

"Get out," he directed. "And stay

out whilst I buckle on my armor. I want you to see my war paint all at once so you can get the full force of it."

"That ain't right," protested Windy as he was forced unwillingly outside and the door slammed behind him. "You'd ought to let me take in the details a little at a time. Seeing you all at once is liable to paralyze me. McQuirk," he admonished the closed door, "whilst you're doing it, do it right. Comb the burs out of your whiskers. Powder your nose. Yeh, and you'd ought to trim down your ears a little."

"Shut up," came Lonesome's muffled voice from within. "I got a battle on my hands, DeLong. Don't you talk to me till I get the upper hand of this layout."

Seated with his back to the locust tree, Windy eyed the cabin door hopefully while he rolled a cigarette and waited.

Sounds of a muffled struggle came presently from the cabin. From time to time a mutter of profanity rose and swelled into a forceful growling, then subsided again. Thus Windy was able to determine when Lonesome came to grips with each new crisis and successfully overcame each new and mysterious problem.

A sudden lurid explosion from beyond the cabin wall caused his mustache to bristle with appreciation.

"Attaboy, McQuirk," he encouraged. "You've got to cuss 'em a little to show who's boss. Keep right after 'em and don't weaken. Don't let 'em get the idea you're buffaloed or you're sunk. You'd ought to have a referee or they're liable to get a foul hold on you. When you're plumb worn out, just you holler for help. I'll come a running and do my darndest to kind of get you disentangled."

"How in blazes is a feller supposed to tie a bow tie?" Lonesome's somewhat muffled voice was charged with bitter feeling. "I've wrangled the darned thing till I'm blue in the face and the maverick looks like a coil of barbed wire round a fence post."

"It ain't a question of how to tie a bow tie," offered Windy with sprightly humor, "but how to make a bow tie bow. Yessir, that was a sneaky one, and it come to me just like that. But you got me guessing, old-timer. Try a couple of half hitches."

"Ain't you the cute little helper," sneered Lonesome. "I got the bow all right but they's a couple of loose ends that stick up like a jack rabbit's ears." Later his voice came more triumphant. "I got it cheated now, Windy. I cut off them loose ends."

Shortly thereafter a silence enveloped the cabin and Windy realized that Lonesome, having completed his toilet, was undoubtedly adjusting his harness in its minor details, and surveying the effect. Next came the creak of new leather, and the door rattled.

"DeLong," Lonesome's voice was charged with importance. "Are you ready to feast your eyes on a leopard that has done changed his spots. Get set, caballero."

"All set," said Windy, his mustache bristling with anticipation. "I've done braced myself, McQuirk. I've got a good hold and am prepared to hang on. Cut loose the fireworks."

The splendor of sunset was upon the land. A warm glow as of molten gold bathed the farm buildings, the ground, the corral, and the distant pinnacles. But momentarily, it seemed, as Lonesome threw back the door and stepped forth upon the threshold, somewhat bashful and self-conscious, yet swelling with complacent pride, that the glory of sunset had dimmed a little. By contrast, the golden light seemed to fade and diminish.

"Wow," breathed Windy in awe. He rubbed his eyes and looked again.

Lonesome was of the type known in the Condon country as "low hung and

squatty." Of medium height, he was broad of shoulder and long of arm. Long years in the saddle had produced an unquestionable curvature in his muscular legs. In the habiliments of the range, these physical characteristics detracted nothing from his physical appearance. They added, rather, a seasoned touch to his superb physique, and were as much a part of his spectacular personality as his overflowing good health, his genial sunburned features, his tawny drooping mustache, and twinkling pale-blue eyes.

But now his muscular person was clothed in a close fitting checkered suit of emphatic and unblushing design. Standing proudly erect with heels together, much daylight showed between his knees. His shoulders bulged and his sunburned, capable, hairy hands hung pendulously from lavender striped cuffs of a boiled shirt.

There were other paralyzing details that caught and riveted the attention. When the first crashing impact of the checked suit had ebbed somewhat, it was noticeable that a high, stiff collar encased his corded, sunburned neck. In the bow tie with which he had previously struggled, royal purple vied with orange and gold. In that area between the purple tie and the first button of his waistcoat a broad expanse of pale shirt front was visible, relieved by a generous lavender stripe. A lavender bordered handkerchief peeped from his breast pocket. Oxfords of gleaming yellow inclosed his feet. Above these oxfords a brief section of his capable ankles was revealed. Here again, royal purple predominated in large dots on a pale-blue background.

But the crowning detail of his appearance, literally and figuratively, a detail that induced in Windy temporary but complete paralysis, was a gorgeous straw hat, designed, according to the mail order catalogue, along the latest and most snappy lines. It was a rich tan in hue, heavy of crown and brim, with a broad band of deep brown. It was constructed of heavy straw, which gave to its contours an elegant and somewhat corrugated appearance.

This remarkable headpiece Lonesome had placed in position at a somewhat jaunty angle, tilted a little back so that a white expanse of forehead showed between its brim and the point where the heavy sunburn of his features ended at his tawny eyebrows.

Windy was no connoisseur in matters sartorial. His years, like Lonesome's had been spent in the range country, where matters of dress are secondary save on gala occasions. And on these infrequent occasions barbarous and primitive display of radiance was the essence of all that was fitting and proper.

Thus, as Lonesome stood on the threshold in the fading glory of sunset, eyeing his partner bashfully but doubtfully—for in all things the partners had learned to hold the judgment of the other in high esteem—there was no voice raised to point out to him wherein he had failed. There was no one to suggest to him that he had lost even more than he had hoped to gain by the transition. In his own familiar world he was a spectacular and compelling personality. Yet now he was an alien, impossible figure, ludicrous, and not a little pathetic.

In secret, Windy, rising slowly as from a trance, was vastly impressed. Yet wild horses could not have drawn from him a word of approval. He accordingly adopted a sardonic and facetious manner that Lonesome saw through instantly. That worthy breathed an inward sigh of relief for the tribute he recognized beneath his partner's manner.

Windy sauntered in a semicircle, rolling a cigarette, while he eyed Lonesome contemplatively from head to foot.

"North and south," he averred at

length, "and east and west, I've seen some gilded he-vamps in my time. But you're the dangest sagebrush lizard that ever come under my observation. You'd best take off that outfit, McQuirk. You'll never get to Shuttler's Flats in it. If you do, you're sunk."

"How come?" inquired Lonesome, grinning self-consciously.

"You got a reasonable hoss," Windy pointed out. "But they ain't no self respecting critter would as much as let you climb on his back. And if you was able to gentle him and he was persuaded to carry you up to the flats, you'd still be out of luck. If you was to breeze up and strike up a conversation with the schoolma'am, she'd start hollering for help, figuring a stranger was getting set to insult her."

Lonesome's tawny mustache curled in appreciation of the tribute to the wonders he had wrought. He was rapidly gaining confidence. He felt more self-assured, more at ease.

"But the thing that plumb paralyzes me, McQuirk, is that crown you got on your ivory dome. Don't tell me that hunk of alfalfa is aiming to pass itself off as a hat."

"Nothing else," averred Lonesome complacently. "Being an ignorant maverick, you ain't supposed to appreciate the finer points in this business of being elegant. That there hat is supposed to be the last word."

"I've often wondered about this last word," murmured Windy. "It sure is enough to start an argument among peaceable men. Why, that gadget ain't good for nothing, McQuirk. It won't keep the sun out of your eyes. It won't shed no rain. The way you're wearing it, it looks like a hot cake that's done lit on a telephone post."

"It don't need to keep the sun out of my eyes. I'm doing my stuff in the moonlight, Windy. I'm not looking for rain, neither. It ain't supposed to be useful. It's an ornament."

"I'll take your word for it," murmured Windy. "Life's a funny proposition."

"Well," continued Lonesome briskly, "I got to go now, Windy. I'll be a little late as it is by the time I get up to the flats." He squinted toward the west where the golden rim of the sun was just sinking behind the clear-cut crest of the Cascades. Eastward, an early moon was already high above the pinnacles. "Wish me luck, DeLong."

"No use," averred Windy. "You're under too much of a handicap, McQuirk. I said it once and I say it again, them clothes is going to be a Jonah to you. A feller can't expect to ride his luck that a way and get away with it."

Lonesome merely chuckled at these predictions. He descended from the steps and strode toward the feed rack where his saddle mount was tethered.

In walking, new evidence of Lonesome's misfit glory was revealed. Attired in the gear of the range, the mincing gait of the buckaroo when afoot is not an affectation, but is the natural result of the practical outfit he wears; the hairy and flapping chaps with their attendant straps and buckles, the high-heeled boots and heavy spurs, together with the fact that most of his waking hours are spent in the saddle, make the act of walking a stilted and unnatural business.

Lonesome, bedecked for the first time in his present barbaric splendor, still walked as a buckaroo. The result could not be called, by any distortion of imagination, a poem of motion.

His horse eyed him somewhat askance as he approached, but the familiar touch of Lonesome's hand as he adjusted the bridle and the sound of his master's voice reassured the animal. Lonesome swung into the saddle, his glaring oxfords creaking musically, and reined in his high-spirited horse. Mounted, he appeared even more colorful and unreal, a grotesque figure that was, in a manner

of speaking, neither fish, flesh nor fowl.

"Happy days, DeLong," he said genially as he adjusted his questionable headpiece at a more jaunty angle and wheeled his horse toward the east. "I'm off to a flying start in the matrimonial sweepstakes."

Windy waved a sardonic farewell and watched him go, pulling his gorgeous hat lower over his eyes. Presently he faded from view, and the sound of his progress was lost in the cañon below as Lonesome rode blithely eastward toward the rising moon on Shuttler's Flats, in the blissful ignorance of one spurring headlong to his doom.

As he rode, the overflowing exuberance of spirit caused him to lift up his voice in song. His voice was not unmelodious and the nonsensical theme of the ancient serenade of the cook wagon expressed merely the joyous and soaring mood of the moment.

As he rounded a bend in the mighty cañon preparatory to beginning his assault on the pinnacles that stood guard on Shuttler's Flats, he came suddenly upon a scene that caught him like a blow. It was unexpected, for he had thought the cañon deserted, and it was therefore startlingly effective.

As his eye took in each detail of the picture before him, the song faded on his lips and his teeth clamped on a half stifled curse. Momentarily, his mission was forgotten in the face of a situation which laid hold on his deepest and most sympathetic instincts.

Bending low over the saddle, he urged his spirited horse forward.

CHAPTER III.

THE PILGRIMS.

THE tableau before him was one of pathos and a cruelty that might have been caused by desperation. He saw only the cruelty of it and his blood boiled.

To the left of the narrow wagon road that paralleled the river at this point, the seepage from a sizable spring had transformed a section of the roadway into a black and glistening quagmire. Even the infrequent travel had rutted and deepened this already marshy ground until it presented an obstacle of no mean proportions to vehicular traffic.

An ancient and dilapidated wagon of the prairie schooner type stood hub deep in this mire, the bed of the wagon level with the clinging mud. A dejected horse, steaming and crestfallen, stood with head hanging on the firm ground beyond, harness trailing about it. Another horse, a great rawboned bay, lay supine in the mud itself.

The animal's long neck was extended and its head rested in a curiously pathetic pose upon the crest of a huge boulder that showed somewhat doubtfully above the surface. His black mane, plastered with mud from his late flounderings, trailed in the sea of black around him. His ears lay back against his head. The whites of his eyes were discernable through the gloom. The contour of the animal's nose, Lonesome saw, was of the type known as Roman.

There was something appalling in the very bulk of the mired animal, lying so deliberately inert, making no effort to use his mighty muscles further to help himself. It was as though deep in the savage gloomy heart of him he had decided that life was no longer worth living, that this was the hour to die. Only the muscles of flank and shoulder twitched momentarily under that bruising impact of a thick and freshly cut cudgel wielded by a bulky individual who stood on the firm ground near by, cursing and applying all his ponderous strength to the work at hand.

A gaunt woman, leaning forward from the front seat of the wagon, with chin resting on calloused hand, watched the proceedings with an apathetic and somewhat disapproving eye.

So engrossed was the bulky one in the business of beating the fallen horse into insensibility, his heavy features purple and his teeth bared with rage, that he paid no heed to Lonesome's approach.

"Drop that club, you overgrown polecat," thundered the enraged old-timer, reining in his plunging horse and vaulting from the saddle. "Drop it right pronto." He strode forward, his pale-blue eyes cold and hard. "It's low-down mavericks like you that ain't fit to own a horse."

In sheer astonishment, the wrathful one had dropped his bludgeon at Lonesome's sudden and startling command. He turned his distorted face toward the newcomer. As his gleaming eyes took in all the colorful and natty details of the other's appearance, his thick lips curled in a sneer.

"Bah," he growled. He spat on his hands and stooped to recover his cudgel. "Stand in the clear, Willy, or you're liable to get some mud on your pretty necktie." And he swung back his club with a mighty heave, preparatory to delivering another crushing blow upon the prostrate horse.

Never before since he had reached maturity, had Lonesome's dominant and impressive personality been so utterly discounted. At that moment he did not stop to analyze how his gilded regalia had led the other astray. He leaped forward and laid hold on the upraised club. With a mighty wrench, he drew the ponderous one to the firm ground of the roadway. He twisted the club from the other's grasp, tossed it aside, and methodically rubbed the grime from his hands.

For a moment, the larger man stood paralyzed by the suddenness of the maneuver. Then he swung a mighty blow. Lonesome ducked, but not low enough. His hat gyrated from his head and rolled to the edge of the roadway. His own fist, traveling from the hip, all but buried itself in the region of the third button of the other's bulging shirt. His late adversary sat down suddenly and with considerable force on the hard-packed ground.

"Get up," invited Lonesome softly. "Let's continue this little conversation. I got a theory that a feller that beats a horse ain't good for nothing else. Maybe I'm wrong, but I crave to find out. Get up and let's hear any more remarks you got to make."

But the belligerence had departed from the other. He remained where he sat, clasping his arms about his middle. Tears rolled down his flabby cheeks and he blubbered aloud.

Looking at him more closely, Lonesome's animosity faded. The other's heavy features failed to hide the weakness of his chin. The watery eyes were woebegone and disconsolate. The blustering bully of the moment before was now nothing more than a vast quivering hulk.

"Don't you hit him no more, mister," suggested the woman without great interest, from the raised canvas flap at the rear of the wagon. "I told him he hadn't ought to club that horse. He didn't pay no attention to me."

"I'm the unluckiest fellow that ever lived," groaned the seated one. "I try to get over to Cañon City in a hurry. So I take this short cut, and I get stuck in a blasted mud hole. Trying to get out, that horse gets balky on me. He lays right down and quits. Then you come along and I figure you ain't hard boiled—and look what you done to me. All my life I've been unlucky. Gosh, it's awful."

"The first thing to do to change your luck," said Lonesome severely, recovering his hat and placing it on his head, "is to learn that there ain't never any excuse for abusing a horse. I wouldn't have hit you except that you made a pass at me first. Get up now and get a hold of yourself. Where are you

folks heading for? What's your line of work?"

"I'm a blacksmith." The other heaved himself to his feet with a groan. "I've been laying over at The Dalles for about a month. I couldn't get no work and I wasn't feeling any too well anyway. But they's a big mine starting operations up above Cañon City. A friend of mine has got all the blacksmithing and he wrote and said if I could get there to go to work Monday, I could be his helper and work permanent. So I thought I'd pick up this team and drive across instead of paying railroad fare for me and the woman round by Baker."

"You're always full of ideas," complained the woman, in the hopeless voice of one who has rebelled through bitter years in vain. "I told you we'd better take all the money we had and pay our railroad fare so we would be sure and get to Cañon City by Monday and you could have steady work. But no, you had to buy a team and we'd drive across and then we could sell the team and we wouldn't lose anything. Now look what's happened." Her vague gesture included the fallen horse and the gathering twilight of the mighty cañon. Her gesture, too, in some subtle way included the world beyond the cañon where, for her, there had been many shadows. "We can't get to Cañon City by Monday and you won't get the job. He told you positively he couldn't hold it for you longer than then. We'll be down and out again. We'll never amount to nothing."

"How did I know that critter was going to be a balky horse?" the big man defended himself. "I don't know nothing about horses."

"Anybody with half an eye could see that," agreed Lonesome. "But how in blazes you could be a blacksmith and don't know nothing about horses beats me."

"I've never done much horseshoeing," the other explained. "I've always follered the mines and the logging camps."

Lonesome recognized the breed. He was one of the vast army of itinerants in the ranks of labor who move from place to place, hoping always to find the verdant valley that lies beyond the horizon. For the men of this army Lonesome had always held little sympathy, for he felt that they were shiftless at heart. But it was the sad-eyed women among these pilgrims who invariably filled him with pity. They would follow their men across the world if need be, if only the future gave promise of a permanent home.

Looking at this couple now in the fading light, Lonesome realized suddenly that the mired horse presented a crisis in their lives. The woman too, in a manner of speaking, was mired down. There was no hope in her eyes. It was only a job as a blacksmith's helper that was waiting for her man in Cañon City. This was a matter of small consequence to the friend who had offered it. He could find plenty of helpers. It meant nothing to the mine owner or to the world at large.

But to the woman it represented a hope that had grown and withered many times through the bitter years. It meant a cottage from which they might never again have to move, a garden, and flowers, neighbors with whom she could gossip placidly across the back fence.

But the job was gone now, the woman's hopeless manner indicated. It was the last straw, the last pitiful dream that had grown only to fade before her eyes. Like the horse, lying so deliberately in the clinging mud, she had given up. From his knowledge of human nature, Lonesome knew that without the woman's sustaining faith, the man's shiftless instincts would be given full reign, and thereafter the pair would merely be drifting derelicts in the ceaseless cross currents of life.

"Listen ma'am," he said briskly, "don't

you get discouraged. I'm going to get you folks out of this hole. You can go a few miles more to-night before you make camp. To-morrow you can get to the other side of Condon. By Sunday night, you'd ought to make it to Cañon City. How does that appeal to you?"

"Oh, do you think we can?" Momentarily a faint hope lighted her faded features. Then her face fell. "No, we can't, mister. We've been stuck here most of the afternoon. That horse is like some of the rest of us. He doesn't care whether he goes any further or not. So he won't move."

"If he's laid here that long, he's had a good rest," said Lonesome confidently. "We'll get him out of here in a hurry. Draw near," he addressed the disgruntled blacksmith, "whilst I begin your education on how to handle a balky horse."

Stepping daintily to protect his still gleaming oxfords from the mud, Lonesome achieved a vantage point near the mired horse. The gloomy one was at his side.

"You're the first expert on horses I ever seen dressed up like a soda clerk," opined the latter pessimistically. "No offense, mister."

"That's why I'm going to leave you do all the dirty work," said Lonesome, his pale-blue eyes twinkling. "I can't take no chances on getting all this war paint mussed up. I got some mighty important business on hand. Now then," he continued, squatting on his haunches to observe the recumbent animal more closely, "I ain't going to cuss you no more for beating up this critter, but don't you ever dare do it again.

"Now this here is an intelligent hoss. He knows a thing or two. You can tell that by his eyes and the way his ears is placed. He's got a Roman nose, and that ain't to be held against him. An ignorant hoss with a nose like that is most generally worthless when they ain't handled right. But a hoss that knows as much as this critter, when he's got a Roman nose, has generally also got a Roman heart inside of him. You bought this team yesterday, you said. How did he act when he started out from The Dalles this morning?"

"He was all right at first. I figgered I'd picked up a good team. But pretty soon he began to act up. Every time we struck a steady pull, he'd hold back. He'd slow down and get onery when we were halfway up. I'd licked him considerable before we got to this mud hole. When we hit it he slipped on a boulder and fell down. When he got up he started plunging on account of his pulling too hard. Then he fell down again and wouldn't get up."

"That shows he ain't balky by habit," said Lonesome triumphantly. "He started out all right. We'll figger that out later. The thing we got to do now is persuade him to rise up from his bed of royal ease. That's the first detail we got to attend to."

"I've sweat blood over that there detail most of this afternoon," averred the blacksmith. "If you can make him get up, I'll sure take off my hat to you."

"Beating him is the worst thing you could have done," said Lonesome. "The critter's got a Roman heart. The more you torture him, the more he figgers that all he can expect is grief. When he gets that idea fixed thorough enough, you could cut him to pieces in chunks, and still he'd lie there. The thing to do is surprise him. A hoss is got what you call a single-track mind. He can't think of only one thing at a time. Get a bucket," he directed. "Fill it full of water up to the spring."

"What in blazes," inquired his pupil, with a stare of stupid surprise, "do you aim to do with a bucket of water?"

"Get it and you'll see."

Shaking his head, the ponderous one secured a bucket from the wagon and filled it with water from the spring

above the road. Lonesome withdrew to firm ground again to watch proceedings.

"You'd best close up the front of that schooner, ma'am. In about a minute they's going to be mud flying." The woman obeyed and watched developments through an aperture in a lower flap.

"Get down and stand by the critter's head with your bucket of water," continued Lonesome. The blacksmith obediently took up his position on a half submerged boulder within arm's length of the motionless horse. "See that he's all clear of the doubletrees and neck yoke. When he moves, he's going to move right pronto and we don't want him to get snarled up."

"He's all clear," said the blacksmith. "I put a chain around his neck a while back and hooked the other critter on him and tried to snake him out. But he wouldn't move. All right, mister, what next?"

Disbelief was written large on the heavy features of the larger man as he eyed the old-timer. So long had the horse resisted his efforts that he was fully persuaded only a blast of dynamite would serve to loosen the animal from his resting place.

"Take a hold of his ear," Lonesome directed calmly, "and fill it full of water."

"What?" The blacksmith's jaw dropped in ludicrous amazement. "You ain't joking?"

"That's a trick about horses you don't never want to forget," admonished Lonesome. "It don't hurt him none—it just kind of gets his goat. A hoss can't stand to have water in his ear. He's just naturally got to shake his head to get rid of it. To shake his head right he's got to be standing on his feet. Now listen," he cautioned as the other stretched forth his hand. "Get set to get in the clear yourself. You ain't never in your life seen anything move so fast as that critter is going to move. Water in his ear makes a hoss think the whole danged world is coming to an end."

It was human nature that the blacksmith still was unbelieving as he stretched forth his hand and laid hold of the horse's ear. The animal remained motionless as the ear was raised to a perpendicular position and the bucket uptilted above it. So confident had been Lonesome's manner however, that the bulky one's muscles were tensed to leap free should danger threaten.

For a split second, as the water deluged upon him, the rolling eye of the prostrate horse reflected the same unyielding stubbornness with which he had met all previous efforts. Then the stubbornness changed to a gleam of horrified amazement. Immediately thereafter the quiet that had settled upon the scene was shattered by tremendous and explosive action.

Even Lonesome's predictions were outdone. The animal leaped to its feet like a wounded wildcat. The blacksmith staggered back, engulfed by a wall of mud. Other waves of flying mire splashed upon the wagon. Fragments, driven by the horse's furious lunge, splashed at Lonesome's feet. That worthy leaped back hurriedly out of danger.

Even before the effects of the first convulsion had subsided, the horse shook himself, tossing his head vigorously. Then he snorted and plunged forth, obviously intent upon putting as much distance as possible between himself and further indignity. But the triumphant blacksmith, wiping the mud from his eyes, sprang after him and brought him to a halt.

"Did he move, caballero?" shouted Lonesome in high good spirits, chuckling and slapping his knees. "Talk about giving him an earful, huh? Fetch them both back here. Bring the doubletrees and chain. We'll snake this wagon out backwards so you can get a flying start

at it again. You got your share of mud out of this deal, partner. You can see now why I stood in the clear."

"The mud don't bother me none," opined the blacksmith, grinning sheepishly as he brought the team around the wagon and waded back through the mire to secure the doubletrees. "I've got to hand it to you, mister. When it comes to horses, you know your stuff."

Lonesome walked around the team, inspecting the harness.

"Good grief, fellow," he cried accusingly. "Look at them collars. It's no wonder our Roman friend here got discouraged when it come to heavy pulling. It's funny that other critter ain't fallen down on the job, too. You've gone and switched collars on them when you hooked up this morning."

"Maybe I did, at that," admitted the other. "But both them critters are about the same size."

"Yeah, but they're built different. This bay has got a neck that needs a long collar. This one's too short coupled. It's been choking him off every time he got down to heavy work. Didn't you notice he was blowing pretty hard on the grade?"

"I thought maybe he had the heaves or something," said the other apologetically. "It never occurred to me that the collar was at the bottom of it."

"Switch them around again," Lonesome directed. "It's things like that ruin a good horse. You got to remember a critter is dumb. He can't tell you what ails him. Yeah, and with a loose-fitting, low-hung collar like that, it's a wonder the other critter's shoulders ain't galled by this time."

Under his supervision the harness was readjusted. The chain was laid out and attached to the wagon. Lonesome stood back while the blacksmith gathered up the lines and straightened out the team preparatory to dragging the wagon back to high ground.

"Take it easy," the old-timer counseled. "That bay'll be a little skittish at first. But when he finds out that he ain't going to choke when he pulls, and ain't going to be beaten when he don't pull, he'll figger he ain't between the devil and the deep sea no more, and you'll have a team."

This prediction proved correct. After a moment or two of plunging and tentative rebelliousness, the bay settled down to business with the result that the wagon was dragged forth with ease.

"Attaboy," yelled Lonesome. His was the exuberance of spirit with which a Napoleon might have watched his troops changing defeat into victory. "You got a team, fellow. Unhook them. Hitch them on to the south end of your chariot again. They ain't nothing can stop you now. Get going, and it's Cañon City or bust."

There was a new snap in the actions of the lately disgruntled blacksmith as he released the team from the chain, swung them around and hitched them again to the wagon. He seemed to loom larger in the growing light. His heavy features seemed to have caught some of Lonesome's aggressiveness and self-confidence. Like the Roman-nosed bay, it was as though he, too, had taken a new hold on life and was prepared again to throw his full weight into the collar.

With the outfit ready to move, the big man clambered into the seat beside his woman and gathered up his lines. The restive bay, fired with the unloosed energy built up during the preceding hours of resistance, was champing at the bit.

"Hit that there mud hole on the run," Lonesome directed. "Don't stop for nothing. Let the mud fly, just so you stay right side up. Give them their head and let them run up that next grade yonder. You got to sell that bay pretty thorough on the idea that there ain't nothing can stop him no more. Folks," he waved his hand genially, "you're ready to travel."

But they did not immediately depart. Lonesome, standing to one side, discovered that the eyes of the pair were fixed somewhat timidly upon him. The big man, finding no words, fumbled uneasily with the lines. But the woman leaned a little forward in her seat and addressed him. The moon was above the mighty wall of the cañon now and by its mellow light, he saw that the harsh lines of her features seemed to have softened somewhat, as though at the touch of a friendly hand. She had gained new life, new hope.

"Mister," she said softly, "I never heard tell before of an angel appearing in a checkered suit and a straw hat. But Heaven must surely have sent you to deliver us. We thank you kindly for what you have done. We're only poor folks that maybe don't amount to much. But you helped us along when we needed it most."

"G'wan with you," said Lonesome gruffly, his ears burning. "Wasn't nothin' at all, ma'am. A feller's entitled to help get a hoss out of the mud, ain't he? Now you folks just get going," he insisted, as the woman would have spoken further. Gratitude, above all things, was to Lonesome the most embarrassing. "You got a long ways yet to travel. Get set, ma'am, and hang on. Hit that mud hole, big boy, like you was going to a fire. Adios, friend. Happy days."

The woman waved farewell. The wagon began to move. Obedient to instructions, the driver urged his team forward. They struck the quagmire which had been their late waterloo at a dead run. Hub deep, the wagon rocked crazily among the submerged boulders, throwing up walls of mud.

The horses floundered and pitched, snorting, but forged ahead with resistless momentum. The shrill encouraging cries of the woman and the deeper shouts of the man could be heard above the din.

"Whoopee," yelled Lonesome, "you're through. Keep going now. Go on! Go on!" All but dancing in his excitement he followed as far as he dared, halting on a ledge of firm ground that extended into the sea of mud.

Rolling and lurching drunkenly, the wagon was thundering up the grade beyond. The rolling backs and waving manes of the plunging horses could be seen above the canvas top. Fire flashed from steel-shod hoofs and wheels. They were silhouetted for an instant on the crest, then disappeared from view. The rattling sound of their progress faded in the cañon. They were gone.

For a long moment Lonesome remained where he stood, wrapped in pleasant reflection. A warm glow suffused him and his tawny mustache curled with satisfaction. It was good to pause in the rush and hurry of life to ease less fortunate pilgrims over rougher portions of the long trail. The mighty cañon, so stately and so quiet, beneath the high moon, seemed to smile upon him at the moment.

He started suddenly and squinted again at the moon. The guilty realization overwhelmed him that precious time had passed. Beyond the pinnacles was the silver glory of Shuttler's Flats. At that very moment the schoolma'am might be waiting beneath the whispering locust tree at the Norton farmhouse. The stage was all set for the supreme moment of his life. And no matter how worthy the cause may have been, the fact still remained that he had squandered a goodly portion of the first precious evening.

"This said long-whiskered angel had best get a wiggle on," he told himself chuckling, as he turned about on the narrow footing of firm ground and prepared to make his way back to his waiting horse. "Ballyhooing at this side show has took my attention off the big tent. Whereas," he soliloquized cheerfully, "the night is but a pup. I could

have done worse. I'm lucky at that. Milling around so close to this mud the way I have, I've still got all my fresh and youthful beauty. Get going, McQuirk, while your luck holds out."

Even as he said this, a premonition of disaster whispered in his ear. He was standing on a strip of high ground that jutted, isthmuslike, into the sea of mud. It was only three long paces to the welcome firmness of the roadway. Previously, in the excitement of waving the pilgrims farewell, he had danced out upon this isthmus without a thought. With nothing at stake he would have strode back as carelessly. Yet now, with a returning consciousness of his outward glory, he viewed the appalling narrow footing with apprehension.

With his first step the worst happened. Had he been wearing the high heeled boots of the range, to which he was accustomed, he might have avoided disaster. But the broad heels of his resplendent oxfords betrayed him. His foot slipped on the greasy surface of the ridge. He reeled and attempted to regain his balance, but knew it was too late. Summoning all his energy, he attempted to leap sideways to the bank across the intervening mud. But the slippery footing thwarted even his desperate attempt.

It was only by a Herculean acrobatic effort that he was enabled to land upright in the midst of the black slough.

He sank into the glistening mud. It rose over the resplendent oxfords, covered the purple dotted glory of the silk-covered ankles, climbed square by square up the checkered pattern of his trousers. When his feet rested on solid bottom, the black level of the mud was just below his knees.

"Suffering swivel-jointed snakes," breathed Lonesome in awe. "Great gobs of grief." He was thankful, oddly enough, that his hat was safe. That unique headpiece had slipped to a precarious angle as a result of his wild leap. He clutched its brim tightly as he strode toward shore. The mud produced a not unmusical *squashing* sound at each step.

On high ground, he gained a full appreciation of the havoc that had been wrought. He shook one leg tentatively, and then the other, eyeing the effect. From the knees up, he was still a model of sartorical elegance—below was ruin.

His trousers hung in somber folds of glistening black. Ankles and oxfords, lately so natty and trim, oozed swampy material of the shade and consistency of tar.

"Ruin," he repeated in a hoarse whisper. "Absolute ruin!"

Lonesome was a patient man. Lone years had taught him restraint. Yet, as he contemplated the situation in the sardonic light of the harvest moon, as a realization of what it meant to his plans came home to him, it was with difficulty that he could restrain a savage impulse to snatch his hat from his head and hurl it, too, into the mire.

"Bah," he snarled, shaking his fist in a general southerly direction past the mud hole. "Here's where an angel lays down his harp. I fool around with those blasted pilgrims and now look at the shape I'm in. I'm lucky, am I?" His mustache curled in a virulent sneer. "Luck and me is such blasted strangers we don't even talk the same language. Ride on to the flats and call on the schoolma'am, will I? Fat chance, with me looking like a long-whiskered tadpole in distress. McQuirk, you're sunk."

He was aghast at the wreckage of a fine large evening. Obviously, his plans could not be carried forth. In his present state, he presented a sorrier spectacle than if he had been attired in the oldest and most worn clothing he possessed. The state he had prepared with such pains was a total loss. The props had collapsed. The lines he had rehearsed in secret could not now be spoken.

"The favorite in the matrimonial

sweepstakes was left at the post," he soliloquized moodily. "McQuirk, get back to your den while you're still able to travel."

Still muttering, he vaulted to the saddle and turned the horse homeward. Holding fast to the brim of his hat, he urged his mount to a furious pace. As he rode, his trouser legs flapped dismally and dankly about the stirrups.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ABANDONED HOMESTEAD.

"YOU mean to say," questioned Windy, when Lonesome had concluded the somber recital of the catastrophe, "that after sparring around with this hefty alleged blacksmith and after dancing all around the edge of this said mud hole whilst the outfit was getting disentangled, you didn't get no mud on you? And after it was all over, you done fell in? It don't seem reasonable."

"They wasn't no sooner out of sight around the bend," insisted Lonesome, "till I was right in the thick of it. I just got through telling myself how lucky I was to miss the mud, and right pronto thereafter I was in it—plumb to the knees. You can see for yourself what it done to me."

In the light of the bracket lamp Windy appraised the devastation with a glittering eye. Had Lonesome been less disconsolate he would have given way to explosive mirth. But his partner was so utterly woebegone and dispirited, so crushed under the weight of adverse circumstance, that he was assailed by a pang of real concern.

"McQuirk," he said earnestly, "I ain't the kind of an hombre that would laugh at a feller's grief. I ain't even going to point out to you that I done told you these clothes would be a Jonah to your large ideas. I'm an understanding critter that's got the milk of human kindness in him."

"They ain't no doubt of it," said Lonesome bitterly. "If you'd have been there whilst I was knee deep in mud, you'd probably have said, 'Just you move over this way a piece, McQuirk. I'll gamble it's a little deeper.' That's the kind of helpful hyena you are, DeLong."

"Them sentiments don't do you no credit," averred Windy virtuously. "I'll admit they was a time when I would have figgered the breaks was coming your way if anything turned up to prevent you from gettin' set to pop the question to the schoolma'am. But times has changed. Being generous and big hearted by instinct, I'm getting more broad minded all the while.

"Now listen," he insisted, as Lonesome would have made sarcastic comment on his changed point of view, and the part the widow had played in this readjustment. "You want to forget the hard luck you had to-night. You've only wasted one evening. It's a long life, ain't it? You've still got two more nights and a full moon. All you've got to do is work a little faster."

"But I ain't got any pants," Lonesome objected. "These mavericks is ruined."

"They ain't nothing on them pants but mud," Windy pointed out. "Hang 'em out in the sun to-morrow and they'll dry out in a hurry. Then you can curry it out without no trouble at all. Likewise your shoes. They ain't nothing to it."

"You think so?" Despite himself, Lonesome was impressed by his partner's confidence. Hope dawned anew in his pale-blue eyes. After all, he had allowed himself a wide latitude in setting apart three full evenings for the work in hand. Much might yet be accomplished in the two evenings yet remaining. "By gravy, Windy, I believe you've done advanced an idea."

"No less," agreed Windy complacently. "It's so danged simple you grasped it right off."

On the following day, Lonesome hung

the resplendent trousers on the corral fence and watched them like a hawk. In the blistering heat of the sun, the clinging mire changed in complexion to a rich creamy hue. It became hard and brittle in texture. Whereupon, under Windy's direction, he beat the garment with an ax handle, with the result that the soil fell from it in large segments.

He followed up this assault with a broom, and under his energetic manipulation, observed with growing triumph that square by square of the original glorified design, the garment returned almost to its first unblushing splendor. It was true that from the knees down its freshness was dimmed a little. It lacked something of its original brazen fastidiousness. But this, as Windy pointed out, was a small matter.

"You got to remember you're doing your stuff by moonlight, McQuirk. She won't see it. And if she did, what's a little dust between friends. Your layout is going to plumb paralyze her anyway. She won't notice any little details."

A pale radiance illumined the glittering sky to the eastward beyond the pinnacles when Lonesome swung into the saddle and prepared to ride again to Shuttler's Flats. In the fading light his attire was as compelling and colorful as before. His mustache curled with returned complacence and self-confidence. The corrugated brim of his straw hat was pulled low over his twinkling blue eyes.

"DeLong," he said as he reined in his horse, "you're one of nature's noblemen. Last night I figgered I was sunk. To-night, due to your earnest endeavors and gilt edged advice, I'm still in the running. Yessir, you're danged near human, DeLong. It'll be a pleasure, as far as I'm concerned, to do the same for you sometime."

"Now listen," admonished Windy from the shadow of the cabin door. "You watch your step, McQuirk. I've said it before and I say it again. Them clothes is a handicap. The thing to do is to keep your mind on the business, hay wire as it is. If you had rode straight over to the Flats last night, everything would have been O. K. But you met up with the pilgrims in the cañon and the result was you got tangled up with practically the only mud they is in Gilliam County."

"Just so I get across the John Day, they ain't nothing can happen to me," stated Lonesome. "I aim to take the south trail over the pinnacles so they won't be no chance for me to meet up with no more pilgrims, horseback or afoot. My luck's with me to-night. They ain't nothing going to stop me now. Happy days, DeLong. Having only two evenings left, observe me burn up the dust."

He waved a genial farewell and was off, clattering down the cañon at a fast lope, his left hand tightly clutched on the brim of his hat to insure that brilliant headpiece from being dislodged from its precarious position.

He rode more cautiously as he descended into the mighty chasm of the John Day. The previous evening's experience had taught him how easily and smoothly disaster could overtake him in his present attire, should his horse stumble on the rough trail or make a misstep in the shallow waters of the ford. The result could easily be new havoc.

His confidence in his mount returned as the sure-footed animal gained the level of the river without mishap. He laughed at his fears when he crossed the ford as he had done a thousand times before. He was in such good spirits that he even chuckled aloud as he paused a moment before turning off the wagon road, to contemplate the mud hole that had proved his nemesis the evening before.

The cañon yawned below him as he mounted toward the pinnacles in the

glittering stars. He gained the high plateau beyond where the night winds played upon him like the cool touch of fairy fingers. The huge golden moon was above the eastern horizon now, rising from the sage-clad plateau. He was presently riding along in a glorified solitude among the rolling hills.

There was no sound of life about him, save the silvery belllike chorus of coyotes from a distant ridge. Once, in a shadowed draw, a small detachment of beef cattle leaped up nimbly from an uneasy slumber and thundered away to halt on a distant hogback, eying him curiously.

Presently the little traveled south trail that he had selected dropped down into Rock Creek Cañon, climbed the crumbling ridge beyond, and so to the crest of the far-flung table land known as Shuttler's Flats. From this point Lonesome could see, far out on the moonlit plain, the tiny cluster of farm houses that were the headquarters of the Jim Norton ranch, the home of the schoolma'am.

With his goal in sight, he urged his horse forward. There was yet one more minor depression to be crossed ere he gained the unbroken level of the Flats proper. In this depression were located the crumbling buildings of an ancient and abandoned homestead. He allowed his mount to proceed a little slower as he approached the gaunt and somewhat ghostly building.

The sight of an abandoned homestead invariably produced in Lonesome a feeling akin to sadness. There were many such in the Condon country, crumbling monuments to dreams unrealized and hopes unfulfilled.

It seemed breathlessly quiet in the shallow valley where the ancient buildings stood. The wind of the higher levels moaned eerily on the distant ridge. But here the air was calm and still. The sound of his horse's progress seemed unnaturally loud. The buildings threw back the echo like hollow tombs rejecting even the sound of life.

Lonesome peered about him half furtively. In the glittering moonlight each object stood out, clear cut and distinct.

To his right was the dilapidated structure that had once been a home. Each timber and board and shingle, Lonesome knew, had been whipsawed or hewn by the pioneer's own hands. Threshold and roof were sagging. The doors and windows long since had fallen. The doorway was overgrown with a bramble of underbrush and wild honeysuckle. The honeysuckle spoke of a woman's hand.

Lonesome felt baffled by the enigma of life. Whence had come this pioneer in years long past, with an inward, age-old thirst for land that had sent him far out in the bleak frontier? By what decree of fate had he here pitted his slender resources against a hostile environment? Wherein lay the justice of his defeat? He was gone now, and the woman who had labored with him. Only the bleached and sagging buildings remained—and the honeysuckle growing riotously above the empty door.

To his left was a low, sway-backed barn, leaning crazily from the perpendicular. Gaunt crosses with wide-flung arms marked where old feed racks had stood. The corrals alone, constructed of stout juniper posts and interlocked willow saplings, had withstood the impact of time. Hard by the corrals, surrounded by the ruins of a split-rail fence that had long since collapsed, he could see a deep hole looming like a pool of ink against the shadows beyond.

"They even tried to dig a well," Lonesome ruminated, shaking his head. "There was a regular optimist. It's probably a half mile to the nearest water in the cañon. I'll gamble he found it wasn't any closer digging down."

He had passed the ruined barn now. The desolate array of silent structures was behind him. He felt a sudden im-

pulse to hurry away from an environment that seemed to breathe of death and decay. Life was quick in his veins. He was riding a vigorous horse of flesh and blood. He was alone, yet it was as though in the breathless quiet, ghosts of the past were riding at his elbow. The abandoned homestead itself was a symbol of the futility of life, a grim reminder that all things that live and breathe would one day crumble, like those sagging buildings, into dust.

Suddenly through the silence came a sound that made his blood run cold. It began as a low, throaty moaning that grew in volume until it became a prolonged bellow of distress and despair. It seemed to come from nowhere in particular, yet it filled the air, and rolled and reverberated as from his very feet.

Lonesome wheeled his horse. A cold sweat stood out on his forehead and he knew the hair was rising on his neck. The horrible echoes were dying away in a strangled moan. Through narrowed eyes he looked about him. The tortured call had come from the general vicinity of the cluster of farm buildings. Yet they loomed now in the moonlight as cold, detached, and silent as before.

With his hand firm on the reins, and muscles tensed to meet he knew not what emergency, Lonesome slowly retraced his steps. He peered about him unwinkingly and twisted in the saddle to look behind him. His reason told him that some creature of flesh and blood had unloosed that cry of anguish. Yet it had seemed unnatural and unreal, a part of, yet alien to, the mysterious and haunting solitude about him.

He halted again among the desolute ruins. He waited, straining his ears. He was thankful for the brilliance of the calm moonlight about him. Had it been, after all, but a trick of the imagination? He held his breath, and such was the absolute stillness about him that he could hear his own heart beat.

When the sound came again, though he was prepared for it, his teeth clenched involuntarily as he stifled a startled gasp. Nearer at hand, it bellowed up as from the bowels of the earth. Despite its blood-curdling volume and a trick of acoustics that apparently caused it to reverberate simultaneously from all points of the compass, he was able to determine its source. It came from the abandoned well.

He dismounted, leaving the reins trailing, and approached cautiously on foot. Some creature was trapped in the well. But what? With infinite caution, he approached the brink. He crouched down to peer into the blackness. As first he could make out nothing in the depths. Then, as his eyes became more accustomed to the deeper shadows, he could see a vague shaggy outline. Lonesome laughed aloud in sheer relief as detail by detail of the trapped animal was revealed.

It was a gaunt steer, unbelievably bony and emaciated, that peered up at him gloomily but hopefully. His long, lugubrious face was upturned. His wide-spraddled legs planted on the dry bottom of the well, betrayed his weakened condition. From its bony socket, one bulging eye peered up at the watcher with a comical but desperate intensity. As the steer shifted his disreputable head a little, his other prominent optic was brought into play. It stared at Lonesome with a mournful bovine intentness.

"Well, I'm danged," chuckled Lonesome, leaning against the corral and wiping his forehead. "So you're the maverick that scairt me out of a week's growth. Nothing but a wall-eyed steer."

The well was some eight feet deep, greater in diameter than the average, enabling the animal to turn round and round in the circular prison, vainly seeking an avenue of escape. Old rails, Lonesome saw, had once covered the surface of the well. These aged timbers had collapsed beneath the weight of the

inquisitive steer, catapaulting him into the dungeon. Splintered portions of these rails leaned against the walls of the well and were strewn underfoot.

The signs told Lonesome's trained eye that the steer had been imprisoned at least a week, perhaps longer. The animal's almost unbelievably gaunt condition provided additional evidence. It was little more than a skeleton inclosed in rawhide. Its legs were lacerated and bruised from harsh contact with the splintered debris of rails about it, as it had turned interminably in its dungeon, upheld by the stubborn and unyielding hope that some section of the inclosing wall at its back might have collapsed, clearing a way to freedom.

"Wally," Lonesome addressed the animay below him, "you're a tough old maverick. More than a week without food and water, and still you're standing on your own legs. The first five days and nights you probably milled around, figuring maybe you'd missed a way of getting out. The last two days and nights you've been bellering for help that didn't come. I'll gamble them last two was the longest, eh, Wally?"

The surface of the ground surrounding the abandoned well was plowed and marred with the marks of many hoofs. These indicated that the stray band of beef cattle to which the wall-eyed steer had belonged, had milled and pawed around the trap, turning curious eyes down on their fallen comrade. Lonesome knew cattle thoroughly and in imagination he could reconstruct the scene. For a time they had milled about the spot in a state of tremendous excitement. Their bellowing had brought straggling members of the herd running from afar. Then, as suddenly as it had flamed up, the excitement had died away. They had resumed their grazing, ranging farther afield, and presently the wall-eyed maverick, forgotten, and not even missed from the herd, was left alone to his doom.

"Question is," Lonesome ruminated aloud, "how in blazes is the best way to get this animated feed rack out of that blasted hole?"

As was his habit, when wrestling with a problem of great or small dimensions, Lonesome lifted his hat and scratched the top of his bald head with a speculative thumb nail. Under ordinary circumstances this was an unconscious gesture that in some indefinable way accelerated his mental processes. But now, at the unfamiliar feeling of the corrugated hatbrim between his fingers, he started, and his train of thought was interrupted. He lowered his hat until that gilded headpiece, held at arm's length, was revealed in all its impressive glory. Then he replaced it on his head with a decisive gesture and pulled it low over his eyes.

"McQuirk," he told himself with some severity, "you danged near slipped again. You ain't got any time to fritter away with this no-count steer. DeLong told you to keep your mind on your business, didn't he? You done wasted too much time here already."

"Wally," he shook his fist at the trapped animal. "They's no use your looking at me so wistful and expectant. This is your jackpot and you've got to figure your own way out of it. You done walked into this hole yourself, didn't you? You ain't claiming I pushed you in, are you? Well then, it ain't my funeral. I got important business on hand that won't stand no more delay. Just as sure as I take an interest in your difficulties they's something unreasonable bound to happen. I ain't taking no chances. No sir, Wally, I just naturally got to go now."

As he turned to go, the steer tilted his head a little. One bulging eye fixed upon him expectantly. Lonesome saw the animal's tongue, blackened and dry, was hanging out.

"Gosh," he muttered, turning away hastily and heading toward his horse. "I

got to go before I weaken. I've been thirsty myself."

He vaulted to the saddle and again turned his mount northward. He rode slowly and once more the sound of the horse's progress aroused ghostly echoes in the ruins about him. He did not look around. He told himself doggedly that he had made up his mind. Yet, as he rode, he knew—and he cursed himself for his weakness—that he was straining his ears to catch the slightest sound from the rear.

There was no sound. Had the entrapped animal bellowed again in fear of approaching death, it might have steeled Lonesome's resolution. But over the ruined homestead and over the black pool that was the surface of the well was a breathless quiet that somehow seemed questioning and expectant. He knew that the wall-eyed steer was still standing in the depths on gaunt and ridiculously spraddled legs, his melancholy face upturned and his bulging eyes fixed on the glittering circle of sky above him, waiting in the certain knowledge that he would return.

"To blazes with the maverick," Lonesome told himself savagely. "What does he amount to anyway? Down on the Red River bringing the prime stuff north, I've seen a hundred of them stampede over the bluff. It didn't worry me none except that we was losing good beef. So why should I worry about that critter? I ain't lost any steer."

Back of the tangled débris behind the ruined barn he saw a rusty shovel, its weather-beaten handle half submerged behind the creepers. He heaped maledictions upon the ancient but still serviceable implement and reviled himself anew at the thought it suggested.

"I ain't going to dig him out," he told himself. "It would take a couple of hours and would plumb ruin my clothes. No, sir, I ain't going to do nothing at all about that maverick. If he's done found him a grave and walked into it, it don't mean nothing to me. I don't give a dang if his tongue was hanging out. It don't change the facts none, if he did give me a look as much as to say, 'Here comes one of them two-legged, hard-boiled critters that knows so danged much more than me. He'll give me a hand.' "

Once on the high desert, years before, Lonesome had found himself, due to a chain of unusual circumstances, afoot, forty miles from the nearest water hole and with a dry canteen. It was only a matter of some thirty-six hours before he staggered into a borax camp where shimmering sand met blistering mesa. But the searing memory of that tortured interval was with him yet. Even now, after placid years had intervened, at the memory of it he would lick his lips and rub his eyes in an unconscious gesture. His most realistic and horrible nightmare throughout the rest of his life, he knew, would be to dream that he was stumbling once more across a shimmering waste where, in his fevered imagination, he saw sparkling springs boiling up and spilling themselves among mossy boulders.

The steer had not been exposed to the heat of the desert, but he had been at the bottom of a dry well for more than a week without water. He had likewise been without food, which was less astonishing.

Was it possible that the steer, too, in the dim recesses of his bovine mind, dreamed of water and food during his long vigil? Lonesome squirmed uneasily at the thought, and licked his lips. Was it possible that the disreputable maverick could have visualized, during those aching hours, a crystal stream chuckling between green banks in a sheltered valley where there was grass and shade?

"Get going, McQuirk," he muttered beneath his breath. "You're weakening fast. Burn up the dust, caballero."

But he did not burn up the dust. He

pulled up and turned in his saddle to look back. It was a gesture of weakness. From the point where he sat, midway between the valley floor and the crest, the buildings seemed smaller and more compact. Even at that distance, past the sagging barn, he could see the black dot that was the opening of the well. In those shadow shrouded depths the steer undoubtedly was still standing, his legs ridiculously straddled, his head uptilted, and one protruding eye still fixed on the circle of stars above. Why not? The figure of flesh and blood that had appeared so casually in that glittering circle represented his last hope.

Stifling a curse between his teeth, Lonesome wheeled his horse. At that moment the disreputable maverick might be down. Once down, he was through, for it would mean that he had given up. Only his fighting heart had enabled him to keep on his feet thus far. But a week is a long time, even for a tough and fighting breed.

"I'm a-coming, Wally," Lonesome shouted, urging his horse forward. "Keep on your feet old-timer. Just you hang on a while longer and we'll get you out."

He swerved aside at the barn, swung low from the saddle, and snatched up the shovel.

"It ain't going to take me more than a couple of hours," he excused himself. "If I watch my step, it ain't going to hurt me none." At the well he leaped from the saddle and once more approached the edge. He peered down, half furtively, aghast at the thought that even these wasted moments might have proved too long.

He sighed aloud with relief as he made out the long melancholy, upturned face and the bulging, gloomy eyes, still glistening up at him as before. The steer was still on his feet.

"You no-account, pop-eyed ghost," chuckled Lonesome. "If they ever was a walking skeleton that was once a worthless steer, it's you. No account as you are, we aim to get you out. You'll live to look a bale of hay and a bucket of water in the face again or my name ain't McQuirk."

He shed coat, vest and hat, and hung them carefully upon the corral, spat on his hands, and commenced to dig.

It proved easier going than he had thought. The soil was firm, with an occasional boulder, but was not hard packed. He began with a vague idea of digging a chute down into the well, up which the trapped animal might clamber. From his knowledge of digging, he knew secretly that he could not hope to complete such a task in two hours. It would probably be nearer four.

A new and encouraging phase in the excavating problem soon presented itself. It was easier to push the dirt into the well from the trench which he was digging than to raise it to the level of the surrounding surface. He accordingly did so, sending the loose dirt in a deluge about the animal below. Presently the steer was standing knee deep. Lonesome prodded him, and he tentatively and somewhat shakily shifted his position. Lonesome noted that the animal, standing on this new débris, had been raised a matter of inches.

"Well, I'm a son of a gun," he chuckled. "Here's a wrinkle that hadn't occurred to me. The more dirt I heave into the well, the higher up it fetches Wally. If that had been a scientific scheme that was real deep, I'd have thought of it right off. This is a cinch. Hereafter, we shovel down instead of up."

The discovery cut his work in half. Higher and higher the steer mounted from the depths. Lower and lower sank the broad chute. Thus, after some two hours of colossal endeavor, Lonesome cast the shovel aside and wiped the perspiration from his forehead as he reviewed his handiwork.

"You could danged near get out there yourself, Wally. But I expect I'd better lay a rope on you and give you a little help. We'll take it slow and easy, old-timer, lest you collapse just when your blasted freedom is in sight."

He mounted his horse and loosed his rope. He dropped a loop over the animal's horns and paid out the slack.

"All right, Wally," he encouraged, "we'll lean on the rope a couple of times just to give you an idea what it's all about. Then we'll try to snake you out. Don't you get the idea we're going to do it all. Skinny as you are, it's too much to expect my critter to drag you up the grade."

But his fears proved groundless. After the first experimental drags on the rope, the steer realized suddenly that the way was open to freedom. He earnestly endeavored to clamber up the chute. He could not have done it alone, but Lonesome's horse was throwing all his weight upon the rope, and this added strength made him able to do it.

The gaunt maverick burst forth suddenly from the depths. On high ground he stumbled drunkenly. Then he stood with head hanging and stared about him through dim and protruding eyes at the world about him. He loomed in the moonlight, unbelievably gaunt and emaciated, an alien, shaggy creature whose body was composed entirely of hollows flanked by bony protuberances.

"What do you think of it, Wally?" chuckled Lonesome as he retrieved his rope, coiled it and replaced it on the saddle. "I'll swear I never set eyes before on such an aggregation of bones that was still on his feet. Where you heading for, old-timer? Are you on your way already?"

The gaunt steer had swung his head in a semicircle so that he was facing northwest toward the cañon. Now, with a kind of muttering bellow, he lurched in that direction. Divining his intention, Lonesome secured his clothing and mounted to the saddle.

"Water!" he chuckled. "By gravy, I'll trail him. It ain't but a short piece down to the creek. I'll just give myself the pleasure of watching that thirsty critter soak up liquid nourishment till he swells up and busts. I'm entitled to it."

With a rolling, drunken gait, like that of a sailor on a slanting deck in a stormy sea, the steer was heading down the cañon. He was proceeding at a staggering trot, his bony frame sagging, his gaunt head still lowered. Often he stumbled, particularly in rounding a bend in the downward descent. On these occasions his progress was crabwise until he had recovered his balance. He turned his head toward the creek.

"Attaboy, Wally," Lonesome encouraged. "You're on the home stretch, and down hill at that. All you got to do is kind of keep up to yourself."

At the bottom of the cañon, the creek was in sight. It was low water and a stretch of sand intervened between the bank and the point where the stream chuckled over glistening boulders. With the momentum built up by his downward descent the steer charged drunkenly across this flat, splashed into the current, and stood knee deep, his muzzle buried in the cooling flood.

Grinning, Lonesome reined up on the sand near by. There was nothing unusual in the picture. It had in it an element of the ludicrous, with a touch of pathos—a worthless maverick, knee deep in the current, drinking with such infinite relish that he seemed to be consciously smacking his lips. He swelled visibly before the eyes. In that moment Lonesome felt lifted up, exalted, as though he, too, had just emerged from the burning desert and was wading knee deep in cooling water that was life.

"Them fellers that is irrigating down below is sure out of luck," he chuckled. "Wally's drinking up the creek."

At last the steer's thirst was quenched. Slowly he turned and made his way back to the bank, pausing ere leaving the creek to take one last drink. He walked ponderously and with great effort. Yet already he seemed to have gained strength. Some of the vast depressions in his shaggy body had filled out a little. His bony protuberances seemed less pronounced.

He did not pause on the strip of sand. He made his way directly to a tuft of tinder-dry wire grass and munched at it hungrily.

Looking about him, Lonesome saw that there was little grazing in the cañon. Too many bands of cattle had recently passed through that way. Further down, where the cañon widened, was a green field, securely fenced. The green, Lonesome knew, was a second crop of alfalfa. The first cutting was stacked in a corner of the field nearby, surrounded by an even stronger inclosure to protect it against the inroads of passing stock.

"I reckon I'll do the job right," he decided aloud, eying this stack. I'll go and heave a gob of hay over the fence for Wally. They's slim pickings here abouts. Weak as he is, that maverick's going to pass out before he can find enough grass to keep him going."

He herded the steer down the cañon to the fence. The gaunt animal eyed the stack longingly. Dismounting, Lonesome approached the fence, and spreading the barbed wire apart with infinite caution, eased himself through.

"This here is Clayton's fodder," he soliloquized as he gathered up an armful of loose hay. "He'll never miss it. Sink whatever teeth you got in this, Wally. It had ought to keep your ribs apart for a spell."

He heaved the hay over the fence and dusted his hands.

The gaunt steer attacked the hay with avidity. Beaming, Lonesome stood with hands on hips and watched the rich alfalfa disappear before the onslaught of the starving animal. He detached another great armful from the stack and heaved it over the fence.

"That had ought to hold you for a while, Wally," said Lonesome, shaking the trailing straw from his person. "Let this be a lesson to you, old-timer. Just you keep away from wells after this. They ain't healthy. Next time, they's liable not to be anybody come around to help save your worthless hide."

He squinted at the moon, high above the cañon wall, and suddenly was aghast at the flight of time.

"Get going, McQuirk," he admonished himself severely. "You ain't got any more time to waste on this picayunish business. If Windy knew what I'd done, he'd figure I was plumb loco."

He turned hastily to the fence and spread the wires apart. He thrust an arm and leg through, proceeding with caution, despite his hurry. He had entered the inclosure to the left of where the steer now stood, munching the hay. Emerging, he chose the panel at the right. The posts were closer together and the wires consequently more unyielding. Halfway through, he realized that he should have departed through the other section. But it was too late now to draw back.

Lonesome knew barbed wire and hated it cordially. This feeling was a result of his early training in the panhandle when wire clippers were an essential part of the buckaroo's equipment. He knew its fiendish tendencies to seize upon any object that brushed it ever so lightly. Fabric attracted it as a magnet attracts steel. He proceeded, therefore, with profane but concentrated care.

Awkwardly holding the taut wires apart, he eased his body through. A barb caught in his coat. Another laid hold on his trousers leg above the knee. With meticulous care, and muttering beneath

his breath, he disentangled himself painstakingly so that the fabric would not be torn. Free from the perverse clutch of the wire, he arched his body, at the same time lowering his shoulders to escape danger from above. Then he slowly moved outward, shifted his weight to his left foot, drew the other leg after it, and so stood erect, breathing a sigh of relief.

"The feller that invented barbed wire ought to be shot," he muttered as he adjusted his hat. "Well, I cheated it that time."

He took a step forward, and distant pinnacles reëchoed to his yell of anguish and dismay.

It was as though a ghostly hand had laid hold upon him from the rear. Simultaneously the harsh tearing of fabric told him the truth. He had not been free of the wire after all. Careful and studied as his movements had been in crouching low between the strands of wire, a jagged barb had craftily laid hold of his trousers from above. While he was straightening up, and believing himself to be in the clear, its iron clutch was still upon him. Havoc followed his first step forward.

With stony calmness, he backed up to the fence, and, fumbling behind him, released the torn fabric from the tenacious clutch of the wire. Twisting his body, he was able to survey a portion of the devastation that had befallen him. It was sufficient. He could not see the exact point at which the tear began, but a goodly section of checkered material hung flapping in the breeze.

It required no sixth sense to inform him that he presented an appearance, which, from the standpoint of a social call, was far from correct.

Through gleaming eyes he peered about him. By contrast to his own furious mood, the moon loomed calm and serene above the cañon wall. His horse was waiting nearby, reins trailing. The sound of the night wind and the chuckle of the laughing stream was in the cañon. From nearer at hand came a crunching sound as the wall-eyed steer lazily and contentedly masticated alfalfa.

He leaped toward the animal suddenly, aiming a swift kick at its midsection. The animal flitted awkwardly but nimbly out of reach. He charged it again, and all but kicked himself from his feet. But the maverick gave evidence of his rapid recovery from his late weakness by easily dodging him. It circled, shaking its head and eying the hay longingly.

As abruptly as he had begun the assault, Lonesome turned back to his horse and leaped to the saddle. He rode away, clutching the brim of his hat. His course was not northeast toward Shuttler's Flats, but in a southerly and westerly direction.

The wall-eyed steer returned to the hay. As he munched contentedly, one heavy-lidded, protruding eye watched with gloomy and bovine curiosity the horseman disappearing rapidly into the moon-bathed distance.

CHAPTER V.

BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON.

"MCQUIRK," averred Windy, leaning back with the satisfaction of an artist who contemplates his masterpiece, "that there pattern don't jibe just the way it ought to, maybe, but outside of that little detail, which don't amount to nothing, you're all hunky-dory again. Generally speaking, when it comes to patching pants my taste runs to nails and rivets. But with an outfit like yours, a feller has got to use what you might call finesse. That's just what I done. Henceforth, in a manner of speaking, McQuirk, you can figure you're sitting pretty."

"It feels kind of tight behind." Standing up for inspection beneath the bracket lamp, Lonesome eyed his partner some-

what doubtfully over his shoulder. "You sure it looks all right, Windy?"

"It'll do," stated Windy with conviction. "It's a little puckered in spots, maybe. But who's going to notice it? Your coat tails cover up most of it, anyway. On top of that, you've got to figure on what's liable to happen. It'll be moonlight, won't it? Being a nice night, the schoolma'am won't take you into the house. You'll probably sit on the porch. Long as you're sitting down you won't have no cause to worry. You'll be a regular lily of the field."

"But when I leave?" Lonesome objected. "I can't back off the porch and down them steps and clean over to my horse without exciting comment and suspicion, can I?"

"You won't have to," Windy pointed out. "Ain't you got any imagination at all, McQuirk? When the time comes to say good-by, what happens? You'll say, 'Well, I got to go now,' and you'll get up from your chair. The schoolma'am will say, kind of wistful, 'Oh, do you have to go so soon?' Then the pair of you will kind of walk slow to the steps. You'll chin a while longer and you'll say, 'Well, I'd best be moving along.' The schoolma'am will be leaning against the veranda post looking at Shuttler's Flats and the moon with a far-away look in her eyes. And she'll say, 'Isn't it a glorious and wonderful evening.' So the pair of you will stagger down the steps and meander over toward the locust tree where your horse is waiting.

"Under the locust tree"—Windy carefully enumerated each detail—"is shade. Surrounded by that said shade, and after a minute or two of whatever preliminaries you figure the occasion justifies, you will flit into the saddle. 'Less you've forgotten all you ever learned about being a buckaroo, your troubles are over. No, sir, McQuirk, there ain't nothing to it. Just you forget them pants. You're the same as before. This is the third night, and by the same token it ought to be your lucky one. Two evenings is plumb wasted, due to your own hay wire ideas. But forget them. Keep your mind, if any, fixed on the idea that this is the time to do your stuff. Between times, thank your lucky stars that you have had what you might call a valet de luxe, battling at your side. I'm referring to that alteration and repair expert, old Windy DeLong."

Windy had, indeed, performed wonders with the slender facilities at hand. When Lonesome had arrived, cynical and embittered from his session with the wall-eyed steer, his partner had refused to accept defeat. Searching about in suit cases and rarely disturbed shelves, he had found needle and thread, those necessary if little used adjuncts to a bachelor establishment.

While he worked upon the trousers the following day, a sulphurous discussion had raged. Lonesome, after the episode of the barbed wire, had acquired a firm conviction that the cards were stacked against him. Windy had been forced to use all his resources of sarcasm, invective and persuasion, to sell Lonesome on the idea that he should make one last attempt. It was his success in the mending of the trousers that caused hope to kindle once more in Lonesome's breast.

It was now Sunday evening. Still somewhat doubtful, Lonesome had bedecked himself once more in the gilded finery. Under his partner's assurance, he rapidly gained confidence. Windy saw the decision crystallize in his pale-blue eyes. With the indomitable courage that was the strongest trait in his character, Lonesome was prepared to make his third, final, and desperate attempt.

"Now listen, McQuirk," Windy admonished severely as Lonesome was prepared to depart. "In most every line of activity in which you take a hand, you're always a crowd. When

it comes to action, the odds is always with you. When you and me gets into a jack pot, it's generally you that says, 'Come on.' And it's me that follows saying, 'Let's go.' But in this matrimonial business, you're like a ship without a rudder. You're like a pop-eyed fuzz-tail that needs a good rider. Speaking frank and earnest, you ain't got the judgment of a horned toad.

"Point is"—Windy fixed a glittering eye on his partner and his voice was impressive—"the ungodly luck you been having is your own fault. Just you unfold your ears and listen to me. Don't let nothing stop you from getting to Shuttler's Flats. I told you last night and I say it again, don't turn aside for nothing. I'm going over to call on the widow to-night or I'd ride along with you to kind of look out for you and protect you. That's the kind of a partner I am. I wouldn't leave you till I'd done delivered my prize package right at the schoolma'am's door."

"It ain't necessary, Windy." Lonesome's voice indicated his returned confidence. "I aim to see the schoolma'am to-night or bust. This business of not being able to ride over to the Flats without a lot of grief has gone far enough. I've rode over to see Miss Emmeline a hundred times before and didn't think nothing of it. When I see you again to-night, you can figure I've done my stuff. You'll know my luck has changed."

They mounted their respective horses and bade each other a genial farewell in the gathering twilight. Windy rode westward toward O'Hara's Springs, and the widow. Lonesome headed eastward, clutching the corrugated brim of his resplendent hat, his eyes fixed on the pinnacles outlined against the glittering stars.

It was long after midnight when Windy rode homeward from the Springs. He was wrapped in a pleasant reflection as behooved a man who had made the most of a fine large evening. The widow had been more than ordinarily cordial. The boys had listened with breathless interest to further and startling anecdotes concerning Laramie Luke and the redskins. Ere he had departed, too, the widow had brought forth two huge and soul-satisfying huckleberry pies which the quartet had demolished with ease. What more could a man ask of a kindly fate?

But as he approached the homestead, memories of his own pleasant evening were forced into the background by thoughts of McQuirk. For himself, this had been merely a more than delightful Sunday evening, congenially spent. But to Lonesome the same time interval had undoubtedly meant something far more vital and climatic. The same moon that had shone so benignly over O'Hara's Springs and loomed now so pale and calm high in the heavens, must have been a witness to his partner's assault on the stronghold of matrimony.

Though wild horses could not have drawn it from him, Windy shrank from the prospect of seeing Lonesome. He knew that his partner had either scaled the pinnacles of triumph or had been hurled into bitter depths of disillusion and gloom. Either way would be bad enough. Though he thought it to be successfully concealed beneath a brusk and cynical manner, Windy was generous and keenly sympathetic at heart.

At the thought that the schoolma'am might have rejected his partner's advances, he squirmed uneasily as though Lonesome himself stood before him, his tawny mustache drooping with dejection and in his pale-blue eyes the hurt expression of a desert rider who, having been given a brief glimpse of a verdant valley, is driven back again to bleak and bitter trails.

From a selfish standpoint, the other alternative was even worse. Should the schoolma'am have accepted Lonesome,

he, Windy, would henceforth be an outsider. The bond that had held them together through strenuous years would be shattered. They would no longer be partners. Though he had been faced with this possibility since Lonesome's first interest in the schoolma'am, he was staggered anew at the thought. He discovered that he had never before realized how much it would mean to him.

It meant that they would no longer ride down the years together, careless, carefree, chuckling. No longer would they meet the simple crises that form the fabric of life, the joys, the sorrows, the good luck and bad, with the genial challenge, "Make it two." It would be as though fate had spoken the words aloud. "The trail forks here. So long, McQuirk. Happy days, DeLong."

He was sure that Lonesome, notwithstanding the misfortune that had dogged his first two attempts, had seen the schoolma'am to-night. He was so sure of it that he gave the matter no second thought. He was concerned only with the outcome. In all sincerity, he had done his best to help Lonesome achieve his ambition. His conscience was clean on that point. Yet deep within the inner recesses of his own soul, a man's thoughts are his own.

Thus, as Windy pushed homeward beneath the glittering stars, he was torn with conflicting emotions. One moment, he would urge his horse forward, inspired by a strong hunch that Lonesome had made his attempt and failed. By what right could his partner, hard-bitten product of a harsh environment, expect that the school-teacher, born of a gentler clime and a higher stratum of society, should smile upon his advances?

While this hunch lasted, Windy was vastly uplifted. Mentally, he passed in review his speech of condolence. It would be real sympathy, too. "McQuirk," he would say, "It's the white man's burden. You got to grin and bear it. You and me has always agreed that women are the bunk."

But in the next depressing moment when he recalled details of the gilded finery with which Lonesome had prepared himself for the gala event, he was assailed with doubts that crystallized into certainty. That colorful costume must inevitably have helped to bridge the social gap between his partner and the school-teacher. This fact, plus the unquestionably warm friendship which existed between the pair, might lead to ruin. In that event he would be forced to beam upon Lonesome, slap him on the shoulder, and wish him happiness and luck. And while doing so, deep within him, where none could hear, would be murmured the words, "DeLong, you're sunk."

As he surmounted the crest and so came into view of the scattered buildings of the homestead, he saw a light gleaming in the cabin window. Lonesome was home then. The issue would not longer be in doubt.

He unsaddled his horse and turned him into the feed lot. He approached the cabin door, but hesitated with his hand on the knob. Not often in his career had Windy faltered when it came to a crisis. But in this instance he felt the need of additional moral support. He fumbled in his pocket, produced the makings, and rolled a brown cigarette. Lonesome's features would undoubtedly tell the truth, and upon the nature of that truth rested much of his own future. He struck a match with a report like a pistol, lighted the cigarette, and inhaled the smoke deeply. Then he cast the match aside and entered the cabin.

Lonesome was seated at the oilcloth-covered table with a hand of solitaire spread before him. He looked up as the other entered. By contrast with the piercing intensity of Windy's black glittering eyes, his own glance was genial and careless. He nodded briefly

and turned his attention again to the cards.

His features told Windy nothing. If it was a pose, it was superb and faultless. He seemed merely placid and at ease, mentally and physically. His manner in examining the cards was that of one who spends an interval of lazy relaxation before retiring for the night.

Baffled, Windy slid into the chair opposite his partner and rested lean elbows on the table.

"McQuirk," he inquired softly. "how'd you make out to-night?"

"Not so good," Lonesome turned up his cards methodically, scanning the layout before him. "They's a trey of clubs buried that I can't get out. I'm afraid Sol's got me licked."

"To blazes with the cards." It was with difficulty that Windy restrained his mounting impatience. "What I crave to know is, did you get over to Shuttler's Flats to-night? Did you make talk with the schoolma'am?"

"Yeah." It was evident this was an answer to both questions. Lonesome scratched his jaw reflectively. "Yeah, that's what I done, Windy."

Windy waited in vain for his partner to continue, then gave way explosively and profanely to his raging curiosity. He extended a long arm, and with his doubled fist pounded vigorously on the table.

"Don't you stall no more, McQuirk. You're the most unreasonable and aggravating hombre in seven states. Never mind them cards. Look me in the eye and answer a question or two. You claim you rode over to the Flats and talked to the schoolma'am. Did you make any matrimonial talk? You popped the question, huh? What did she say?" For the first time, such had been the intensity of his interest in Lonesome's status, he noticed that the other was no longer clad as a lily of the field. His gilded grandeur had vanished.

"Where's them dude clothes? What did she think of your war paint, huh?"

Lonesome leaned back in his chair and eyed his partner with irritating calm.

"You're such an excitable feller, DeLong," he murmured, reaching for his plug of tobacco. "You always was that way—all nerves. As for me, I'm one of them intelligent hombres that always has a hold of himself. Nothing ever gets my goat. No, sir, DeLong, not after to-night." He paused and bit off a generous chew so that his tanned cheek bulged. There was in his manner the first outward intimation that an unusual event or series of events had come to pass. "Nothing is ever going to surprise me no more."

Studying his partner and moved by the knowledge that Lonesome was prepared to relate his story, Windy was utterly at a loss to tell from the other's appearance whether the news was good or bad. Lonesome's manner might have been that of one upon whom the world had smiled. It might also be a mask that covered the ruins of blasted hopes.

"You're sitting across the table," began Lonesome "from the luckiest feller that was ever hit by a brick and woke up to discover that the said brick was solid gold."

"She called your bluff then, huh?" Windy barely whispered the words.

"You're always crowding me," stated Lonesome plaintively. "Just as soon as I get set to answer one question, you knock me cold with half a dozen more. It ain't as if I was a long-winded, unreasonable critter."

"Have it your own way," Windy cut in desperately. "Just you start in and tell it from the beginning. Tell it in your own simple-minded and inspiring way. But make it snappy. Otherwise you'll be going around telling all your friends, 'Poor old DeLong,' you'll say. 'I hadn't been talking more than a

couple of hours getting ready to say something when the unreasonable critter up and fell apart in chunks. I don't know what ailed him.' All right, McQuirk, I'll put up one detail to you at a time. Did you or did you not pop the question to the schoolma'am?"

"I did not," stated Lonesome blandly. "I didn't have time. I only got to see her but a minute or two."

Inwardly, Windy whooped exultantly. His partner had failed then, despite his tremendous preparations for the event. The forks of the trail were still far ahead.

But hard on the heels of this joyous reaction came an overwhelming curiosity.

"You only got to talk to her a minute or two?" he repeated. "What in blazes have you been doing all evening, McQuirk."

"Riding back and forth between here and the Flats, mostly. You see, Windy"—Lonesome hesitated for a fraction of a moment as though at a memory that was still somewhat disconcerting, despite his mellow mood—"I had to come back again to get some more clothes."

"Clothes? What happened to your dude outfit?"

"That dude outfit is done numbered among the missing." Momentarily, in Lonesome's blue eyes, gleamed a pale reflection of the sinister mood of that earlier moment. "I fetched them home, that blasted Romeo outfit, and took them off out there by the water trough. I stacked them all up with the hat on top. Then I fetched the can of kerosene and poured it on the pile and struck a match to it. Whereupon"—his complacent mood enveloped him again—"they went up in smoke. That there straw hat burned like a torch, Windy."

"You burned them up?" echoed Windy, aghast at such vandalism. "You done destroyed that ace-high, rainbow-hued outfit that would make a buzzard think he was a green and yellow canary!"

"No," corrected Lonesome, I burned up a hoodooed layout that had done made a monkey out of me long enough. I danced a war dance around them when the blaze was the brightest and poured on more oil. When the smoke had drifted away and the ashes were getting cold, I done got into my old clothes again. Yeah, Windy, I done eased into my woolly chaps that had done shed the rain and kept my legs warm so long. I done put on my boots which made my feet feel at home again. My neck wasn't choked with a collar no more and the old bandanna was loose and easy. I was comfortable again, and somehow or other, I felt like a different feller.

"So I climbed into another saddle on another critter and started for the Flats again. When I come to Jim Norton's house——"

"Hold on," demanded Windy, fixing a glittering eye on his partner, "don't you try to hold out nothing on me, McQuirk. You ain't aiming to tell me that you just naturally got peeved at that dude outfit all of a sudden? When the schoolma'am hadn't even seen it yet? And you done rode back all the way from Shuttler's Flats just for the privilege of burning 'em up? Come on now—give me the straight of this business. When I left you this evening you didn't think no more of that dude outfit than you did of your right eye. Something happened meanwhile. The question is, what? If the truth's in you, old-timer, let's have it."

"The truth is," said Lonesome, "that when I got up to Shuttler's Flats and was so close to Jim Norton's house that I could danged near have heaved a rock on the roof, I met up with a polecat. Yessir, I danged near shook hands with the critter. It was right pronto thereafter that I decided the

dude oufit had done outlived its usefulness."

"Wow!" breathed Windy. "A polecat!"

"Wow is right," agreed Lonesome pessimistically. "I danged near wore my critter out trying to outrun myself getting home. At that, my horse was just as anxious to burn up the dust as me. I gave him a bucket of oats when we got home. He earned it."

"How in blazes did you happen to meet up with the critter?"

"My hat blew off," Lonesome explained. "They was quite a breeze on the Flats. I'd been hanging on to the maverick all the while on account of it riding kind of loose. But finally I got to within shouting distance of Jim Norton's house and got to figuring how I was on the home stretch at last after all the grief I'd had, and how in a couple of minutes I'd be talking to the schoolma'am, explaining to her how come I hadn't seen her the last couple of nights and the whole week before that, and so forth—you know how it goes. So I kind of forgot myself and let go of my hat. Whereupon the blasted maverick leapt off my head. One minute it was there and the next it wasn't. The wind blew it over the fence and away it went, rolling and bouncing across the fields.

"I was riding along the edge of the summer fallow at the time. You know that north and south fence. Well, sir, there was no gate in it. So I had to leave my critter and chase that blasted hat afoot."

"Why didn't you leave it go?" inquired Windy. "You'd have taken off your hat as soon as you saw the schoolma'am anyway."

"Why does a duck swim?" retorted Lonesome without heat. "Why does water run down hill? Why is they a hole in a doughnut? The answer to them questions is, 'Nobody knows.'

"So I chased that hat across the summer fallow. I ain't much of a foot racer anyway and the going was soft. I would danged near catch it, but just as I was stretching out my hands to reach it, the danged thing would speed up again. Once it got so far ahead I got discouraged and was ready to quit, figuring it aimed to roll clean over to the Blue Mountains. Whereupon it quit running and laid there as quiet as you please. So I staggered up. And when I was about to spring on it, spread eagle, it kind of shook itself and started off again.

"They's three thousand acres in that field. I only ran across a corner of it, which was about a mile. When I was plumb wore out and had begun to wonder what I was chasing the blasted thing for anyway, I could see it didn't have much further to go cause the line fence was ahead, piled high with tumbleweeds caught in the wire.

"You know how them tumbleweeds are up on the Flats. They roll for miles and hang up on the line fence until they're piled higher than the fence. And the rest of them galloping weeds can roll up and over them and continue on their way. Well, sir, I could see that long pile of tumbleweeds ahead stretching from east to west, and I knew it must be the fence. That athletic hat couldn't go no further.

"I seen the maverick galloping up and roll into a kind of cave between two big tumbleweeds. I was feeling more optimistic now that the critter was trapped. I come up to this cave and got down on all fours and kind of crept in. There that blasted hat was lying peaceful as you please, just as if it hadn't led me a merry chase over the biggest stretch of summer fallow south of the Columbia River. So I stretched out my hand, and it was then I noticed that they was something else in this cave beside me and my hat. The cave into which I had busted so unceremoniously was a castle, in a man-

ner of speaking. And the polecat was king.

"He had a kind face, this said polecat, and kind of dignified looking. He was a striped critter, about as big as a tomcat, and with a bushy tail. I'd never got so close to one before. I never will again if my luck holds out.

"He looked me over kind of calm and thoughtful as much as to say, like the Quaker ship's crew said as they chopped off the fingers of the pirates that was trying to climb up on the deck. 'Friend, thee isn't wanted here.'

"After that"—Lonesome mopped his forehead at the memory, and strove for words to express his horror—"it was awful, Windy. It was like the whole world had come to an end. They ain't nothing in the English language nor anything else that can begin to describe the grief that has done attached itself to a feller under them circumstances.

"I rolled out of that cave like a dozen army mules had kicked me simultaneous. If I'd have been a bird I would have flew. If I'd have been a hog I would have rooted clean out of sight into the ground. But all I could do was run, which I did, fanning myself meanwhile with my hat, and not even pausing to wonder why I was ever born. I had figured I was plumb worn out from sprinting across that summer fallow. But Dan Patch himself would have trailed in my dust as I come back.

"And that was that." Lonesome heaved a deep sigh. "With age comes wisdom, Windy. In the past, I'm ashamed to say, they's been occasions when I've done lost my temper in an argument, and without knowing what I was doing I've done called a feller I was arguing with a polecat. I ain't going to do it no more. A feller can't even hate his worst enemy that bad.

"So I hung my saddle on that juniper up above the feed loft. By next spring, maybe, I'll be able to use it again. I give my critter a bucket of oats and turned him out on the range. By fall, he'll probably have forgot what he carried on his back to-night, and he'll be ready to make up again."

"So you burned up your clothes," murmured Windy in a hushed voice, "and rode back again. You ain't got an appetite for punishment, McQuirk. You're a glutton, no less. I expect you spent the rest of a pleasant evening telling the schoolma'am all about it, and listening to her merry laughter, huh?"

"No," said Lonesome, beaming anew. "When I got to Jim Norton's, I found that the schoolma'am had just got back from Arlington. Jim Norton had driven down and fetched her up in the buckboard. She's been down to Portland ever since Friday morning."

"Ever since Friday morning?" Windy repeated the statement somewhat stupidly. "You mean to say that all the while you been earnestly endeavoring to ride over to Shuttler's Flats that she ain't been home at all?"

"It was fool's luck," said Lonesome, grinning. "I'd been wallering in it all the while and didn't know it. You know what she told me, Windy? When I climbed down off my critter, she come out on the porch. All that moonlight we been having this weekend wasn't wasted after all. It was glistening in her hair, and shining in her blue eyes as she held out her hand to me.

"She looked me over kind of smiling and joyful and says, 'You don't know how pleasant it is to see you again, Mr. McQuirk. It's been ages, hasn't it? Do you know,' she says, looking at me real critical, after we've passed a few remarks that's neither here nor there, 'it's just like home to see you again. After the men I have seen in Portland with their white faces and soft hands and their tailored clothes. You couldn't wear such clothes, my friend,'

she says, and she puts her hands on my shoulders. 'And I wouldn't want you to. Just as you are, Mr. McQuirk,' she says real soft and gentle, and with a soft hand she fixes my bandanna a little, tilting her head to one side to admire the effect and smoothing it all the while till it makes me want to purr."

Unconsciously, Lonesome patted with vast complacence the gorgeous bandanna that encircled his muscular neck. "'Just as you always are,' she says, 'I like you. You are a part of the glorious Condon country that I have learned to love. You are a man among men—real men, I mean, and not tailor's dummies. Not only that,' she says and blushes a little. 'I will be frank and say that you are, even as yourself might say, easy to look at. In the spectacular garb of the range, you are more colorful and dominant and romantic than any of those pale city men who beneath their princely raiment are paupers at heart.'"

"Gosh," breathed Windy. "That shows what education does for a gal. How come you could remember each word she said that a way, McQuirk?"

"Each word," said Lonesome, his tawny mustache curling, "was a pearl."

"But it seems to me," Windy pointed out, "that you couldn't have asked for no finer time to do your stuff. She's done paved the way herself. All you'd have had to do would be to say 'Ma'am, seeing that I'm so colorful and rheumatic——'"

"Romantic," Lonesome corrected.

"'Spectacular and whatnot,' Windy continued, 'let's you and I just get together and make it a partnership.' Some such honeyed line as that would have turned the trick, McQuirk."

"I figgered that out myself," admitted Lonesome. "Those things kind of come to you in the moonlight and all. 'Whilst she's got her hands on my shoulders,' I says to myself, 'I'm entitled to ease my arm around her waist, ain't I?' But when I raised my hand" —he heaved a big sigh—"she grabbed it and led me inside.

"After that, she talked an arm off me about her trip and I didn't get a chance to say nothing. She was pretty tired too, so after while I up and left."

Windy leaned back and eyed his partner contemplatively while he rolled a cigarette. Lonesome's pale-blue eyes were fixed unseeingly on space, as though in imagination he stood again at the step of Jim Norton's farmhouse, alone with the schoolma'am in the moon-bathed splendor of Shuttler's Flats, the touch of soft hands on his shoulders. Still wrapped in thought, he picked up the deck of cards and shuffled them absently, his gaze turning to the layout before him.

"I get you, McQuirk," said Windy at length. "You're lucky she never saw you in that ungodly layout. You're lucky they was ruined beyond repair. It's lucky she went off to Portland and was gone all the while and was getting her ideas on clothes firmly fixed. You old snake in the grass." His mustache bristled at the thought. "You was even lucky you didn't get to pop the question."

Lonesome made no reply. On his genial sunburned features was a frown of concentration as he studied the cards before him.

"So she talked the arm off you, huh? What was she talking about?"

"If I can't find that blasted trey of clubs, I'm sunk," said Lonesome. "What was she talking about? Clothes. It seems her trip was a shopping expedition. She was telling me all about the clothes she bought in Portland."

Tinfoil

by Herbert Farris

Author of "Stolen Moose," etc.

BEFORE he got what he wanted, "Society Red" O'Hearn had held down his job as deputy sheriff for a year. Drydust's blacksmith had just decorated the window of Red's new jail with a strong set of iron bars, and the young deputy was pridefully looking over the work.

"If any guy breaks out of *that* jail," he said positively, "he's plumb welcome to be free."

The blacksmith grinned. "I personally guarantee them bars," he said as he gathered up his scattered tools. "If anybody busts 'em, you let me know, an' I'll make you a new set. Course, though, if you let some fellow file his way out, that's different. I don't guarantee 'em against files."

"I'll guarantee that part," said Red. "I'll see that nobody gets a *chance* to use a file on 'em."

"I suppose," the blacksmith speculated, as he started for his shop, "that you'll be on the lookout for a prisoner now that you've got your new jail?"

The blacksmith's tone was jocular, but Red frowned thoughtfully as he took his way back to The Brody House. At that very moment Drydust was harboring a man who was probably the most desperate criminal in Montana. Ed, or as he was known to the police, "Mute" Mullen, had come to Drydust a week before, and had brazenly announced his intention of remaining in the village during the coming winter. Mute had made his brief statement, openly and defiantly, in Lem Bragg's soft-drink parlor, and he had looked Red coolly in the eye while speaking. The young deputy had wisely held his tongue and his temper. Not to have done so would have placed him at a distinct disadvantage with Mullen. At least Red had thought that it would, so he had quietly turned and left the place.

Red seated himself on The Brody House porch. With his broad-brimmed Stetson shading his eyes from the September sun, he pondered the situation. What was Mullen's game? Why was the fellow in Drydust? Red had no answers for the troublesome questions. Of one thing, however, he was certain. Mullen was either planning a big job, or he had recently committed a crime somewhere in the State and was only waiting for the excitement to die down.

Red was still moodily considering this matter when a voice interrupted his train of thought. Red's tilted chair came to the floor with a thump. Even before he saw him, he recognized the voice of the speaker. "Hard-rock" Jim Lane had come again to whine out a tale of woe. Frowning his displeasure, Red regarded the weazened prospector-miner.

"Red," the little man was saying excitedly, "I'm a lot worried, so I've come to you. Ever since I got my down payment on that Lucky Lode group of claims, I've been worried; but now it's gettin' worse. I don't know——"

"*I* know," Red interrupted, as his annoyance fired his temper. "You take that down payment and put it in the bank—like I've been tellin' you to do for the last four months."

"Now, Red," Hard-rock Jim whined, "you know how afraid of banks I am. There's been over a dozen of 'em robbed right here in Montana in the last year. Even the one here in Drydust was——"

"But they didn't get away with anything!" Red interjected proudly. "And both of 'em got good long terms in Deer Lodge. You put your money in the——"

"I won't! It's safer right where it is. It's safer where it is, if the law'll give me the protection I've got a right to expect."

"You've got a right to expect a lot of things," said Red angrily. "One thing you can expect is to wake up some mornin' with your throat cut, an' your down payment salted down in some crook's pocket. I got no sympathy with some of you old-timers that're so afraid of banks."

"Now look here, Red," the old man whined placatingly, "we'll never get through arguin' about banks bein' safe, so it's no use talkin' about it. I'm here demandin' my rights. I'm American, an' my prop'ty's got a right to be protected."

"Go ahead," Red invited in a resigned tone; "what is it *this* time?"

"Well, it's this. I want you to make that rat-faced little Holder keep clean away from me an' my cabin. He——"

Red interrupted with an uproarious laugh. Little "Cig" Holder in the rôle of a desperado was the biggest kind of a joke. Cig, so called by reason of the inevitable cigarette which always drooped from a corner of his flaccid mouth, was surely anything but a desperate character. He was a bit of flotsam from a great city. He had been a flunky on steamboats, had traveled for a time with a circus, had—— But the list of Cig's occupations was interminable. Red had often listened to Cig Holder's yarns, and had enjoyed them immensely.

Said Red, putting a close to the interview by rising: "Don't make me laugh any more, Hard-rock, Cig's as harmless as Paddy's pet pig. That little human cigarette holder might pull off some little thing, but don't you worry none at all about him doin' a job of robbery."

As he walked across the street to Lem Bragg's place, Red's thoughts were still occupied with Mute Mullen. In the soft-drink establishment the young deputy encountered his old friend, Tom Applegate, Drydust's veteran stock buyer. Applegate was not only a sympathetic listener; he had a remarkably keen mind, and might suggest a solution

for Red's difficult problem. Unhurriedly Red told his story.

"Trouble with you, boy," said the old stock buyer, when Red had finished, "is that you're pretty young. In time you'll learn to cross your bridges when you get to where they are. You needn't worry about Mullen—he's gone to work. I think the fellow means to go straight—if the sheriff's force'll give him a chance."

Red was skeptical. "I got his record the other day. The boss says for me to keep an eye on him, even though he ain't wanted for anything right now. But where's he workin'?"

"At Henderson's. He took a job for the winter."

"Alibi stuff," commented Red quite shortly.

"Maybe, but Mullen says that all he wants is a chance. He knows he's got a hard name, but he wants to live it down. He told Cig Holder——"

"Holder again," Red cut in with an amused laugh. "Cig had better be careful not to be seen too much with a man like Mullen; already Cig's gettin' a reputation for bein' bad. Hard-rock Jim thinks he's after his roll." Briefly Red told of his interview with Hard-rock. Applegate listened gravely.

"That old fool *is* takin' a long chance," he said. "Livin' down there all alone in that cabin of his! It wouldn't surprise me none if somebody *did* come along an' make him pony up one of these days."

"I don't see where he's got much cause to worry." Red was mildly astonished at Applegate's attitude. "Nobody around here is likely to take a chance on a long term in prison for three or four hundred dollars. But I've been tellin' him right along that if he *was* afraid, he'd better put his money in the bank."

Applegate looked quizzically at Red. "You're jokin', ain't you?" he asked seriously. "I thought everybody knew he's got close to three thousand cached somewhere in his cabin."

"But he told me that his down payment on that Lucky Lode group was five hundred, an' he must've spent a hundred or two of that"

"His payment was five hundred," Applegate explained, "but before he sold that group of claims, he had over twenty-five hundred cached away. I've known little Hard-rock for nearly twenty years. He's made a few little strikes at odd times, an' he's always been mighty savin' with his money. I tell you, Red, he's got somethin' in his sock that'd make a robbery worth while."

Red gasped. "Now I'm sure I know why Mullen's hangin' around Drydust," he said positively. "Three hundred wouldn't make him take a chance, but three *thousand*—that's worth his while. I'll see Hard-rock right away an' have another talk with him."

But thoughts of Mute Mullen and Hard-rock Jim were temporarily banished. Drydust's justice of the peace had suddenly bustled into Lem Bragg's place, and mysteriously summoned Red to his side. A warrant was hastily thrust into Red's hand.

"You'd better pick that fellow up quick," whispered the justice of the peace. "He was caught dead to rights—he'll have to plead guilty."

"Why, judge——"

The surprised deputy was staring at the door through which the justice of the peace had disappeared. The thing that had astonished Red was the fact that the warrant which he had leisurely unfolded called for the arrest of Cig Holder. So far as Red knew, it was Cig's first offense in Drydust. With a shrug Red started in quest of his man.

An hour later, when Red produced Cig Holder in court, the justice of the peace read the complaint to the little wanderer. With the dead stub of a cigarette swinging from a corner of his

weak mouth, Cig Holder listened attentively.

"So long as she reads petit larceny, judge," he said quietly, "I'm ready to cop a plea of guilty to it. If she had read *grand* larceny, though, you can believe me, I——"

"Is Cig Holder your true name?" interrupted the justice of the peace.

"No, judge," Cig replied meekly. "True name's Lemuel Holder, Cig's just a moniker the boys around Drydust give me. Last name's Holder, and I'm always smoking a cig." The little man paused and grinned disarmingly at the frowning justice of the peace. "Holder, and cig. Cig-holder, see?"

"I see," said the justice of the peace dryly. "And you're pleading guilty, are you?"

"Sure. Right quick, just like that."

"Well, I can be just as quick as you —six months."

Cig's flaccid mouth flew open. "Good gosh, judge, he gasped, "you couldn't give me any *more* than six months!"

"If I could, you'd get it! This ain't your first offense, by a long shot—it's just the first time you've been caught. Lock him up, Red."

When they reached the jail, Red made a thorough search of his prisoner. With the exception of about twenty dollars in cash, Cig's belongings were of no importance. Red transferred the prisoner's cash and a small pocket knife to his capacious Mackinaw coat pocket.

"Cig" he said with genuine regret, "I'm right sorry you got such a heavy jolt. I reckon the judge's dinner didn't set well. I thought you'd sure not draw any more than ninety days."

"Ninety!" exclaimed Cig. "Thirty would've been more like it. But I'll tell you one thing, Red. You've been white with me, and I'll come clean to you." Cig paused and looked Red squarely in the eye. "This jail of yours won't never hold me for no six months."

"You're right, Cig," Red agreed, "it won't. This jail ain't meant to hold *no* prisoner for six months. Thirty-day men is all I aim to keep here—you're goin' into the jail at the county seat. You'll be here only until the stage gets in next week. An' now is there anything you want from uptown?"

"Plenty of cigarettes. Buy Zebra brand—you've got my money in your pocket."

"Comin' up, when I bring your supper to-night."

That evening Red brought his prisoner a carton of cigarettes and a substantial dinner from The Brody House. "Cig," he asked thoughtfully, "what did you mean when you told me this afternoon that my jail wouldn't hold you no six months? Did you mean you'd break out?"

Cig, who was busily engaged with his dinner, looked up with a cheerful grin. "Just what I meant," he admitted frankly. "I've got so used to living outdoors since I hit this country that I'd do anything to keep from serving a long term. I wouldn't have minded thirty or sixty days so much. But what difference does it make? You're taking me in to the county seat, aren't you?"

"That's just it," Red replied. "I'm not. I just telephoned the chief, an' he says they've got a full house up there, an' for me to keep you here. So I reckon I've got to."

"Well," said Cig earnestly, "I'm giving you fair warning. I won't stay in this or any other jail—if I can possibly make my get-away."

Red enjoyed a hearty laugh at little Cig Holder's expense. The idea of the little city rat breaking jail was a ludicrous one, and Red concluded that Cig was jesting. Why, jail breaking was a serious offense. Red so informed Cig, and added that for Cig, breaking out of jail would mean his breaking into the "Big House" at Deer

Lodge. Cig only shook his head stubbornly.

Red promptly forgot Cig's boast. The deputy's thought and attention were centered on Mute Mullen. Aside from wounding his vanity, Red considered that no particular harm would be done if little Cig did make good his threat to escape. Naturally the boys would kid him some, but he could stand it. But it was different in the case of Mute Mullen. Mullen had a bad reputation, which was State wide, and Red was resolved that come what might, the clever crook, who was just now posing as an honest workman, should not get away with anything in Drydust.

Save for the evenings, which were a trifle cool, September passed like a month in summer. In October there were nights of freezing weather. Along the streams alder and cottonwood were glorified with red and gold leaves, and generously lavished a portion of their treasure upon the earth. Then came the first winter storm in November, and Red became more vigilant than ever. If Mullen was contemplating some crime—and Red thought there was little doubt of this—he would undoubtedly choose a stormy evening for his work.

"If I could only get that Hard-rock Jim to put his money in the bank," Red said to Tom Applegate one evening, "I'd feel reasonably safe. There's not much left for Mullen to do here in Drydust. He might be after the bank itself, but I don't think so. They've just put in a new vault, an'——"

"You must be workin' on a hunch," Tom Applegate interrupted laughingly. "Mullen's been behavin' himself all right, hasn't he?"

"Up to date—yes. But winter'll be here in earnest mighty soon, an' his feet'll be itchin' to get out of here. An' when he goes, he aims to take something out of Drydust besides his wages. From now on I'm goin' to keep my eye peeled."

That evening, when Red visited the jail, he placed Cig Holder's dinner on the small table and fumbled in his pocket for the sixth carton of cigarettes he had bought for his prisoner. Cig took the cigarettes and looked at Red thoughtfully.

"You've been so blame good to me, Red," he said, "that I hate to do it."

"Hate to do what?"

"Hate to break jail on you. But winter'll soon be here, an' I can't afford to stick around much longer. A man won't be able to travel when the snow gets good and deep." There was something appealing in the little man's eyes, a wistful note in his voice as he continued: "I could stick it out here, Red, if you would let me work outside some—make me a kind of trusty. You know what I mean."

"Yes, I know what you mean. But there's no outside work for you around here, Cig. If there was, I'd sure like to give you a chance." Red's eyes twinkled as he added, "I reckon you'll have to go ahead an' break out of this jail, Cig."

"I'm sorry to do it—for your sake, Red."

Cig's serious expression amused Red. "Thanksgivin' is comin', Cig. It'll be here mighty soon, an' you're the only prisoner I've got, so I'd like to give you a real feed. Would you like roast turkey with cranberries, or would you rather have goose with stuffin'?"

"You needn't bother about me, Red. I hope to eat my Thanksgiving dinner a long way from here."

Cig Holder was joking, of course. And yet he was so serious in manner and speech that for a moment Red felt almost apprehensive. This feeling he shook off promptly. Cig was a great hand to joke; he had to pretend to be serious in order to make his play good. Nevertheless, before leaving the jail,

Red examined the bars at the window and made a careful search for a file. The bars he found intact; there was no evidence that they had been tampered with. Reassured, he made some jocular remark before leaving and thought that he detected the flicker of a smile it played for an instant over Cig's weak mouth.

Four days later a gray sky threatened the village. A real storm, possibly a blizzard, was impending. At noon there was a hint of snow in the air, and the clouds were moving almost imperceptibly toward the west. With darkness the wind sprang up; it was from the east, and it was cold. Winter had come to Drydust.

On his way to dinner at The Brody House, Red casually dropped in at Henderson's.

"How's Mullen?" he inquired solicitously. "Does he seem to be satisfied here?"

"Seems to be," came the terse reply. "And not only that but he's a mighty good, steady man, too."

Red dropped the subject of Mullen, asked a few more random questions and left for The Brody House. It was an hour later when he struck out through the gathering storm for the jail. In his hands was a well-filled tray for Cig Holder. He unlocked the jail door and entered.

As usual, Cig was seated near the small table, smoking a cigarette. He rose when Red entered, and stood near the table, his hands in his coat pockets. Red advanced, and, leaning slightly forward, placed the tray on the table.

"It's turnin' cold out, Cig," he was saying. "If it keeps on like it's started, there'll——"

While Red was speaking, Cig's right hand came stealthily from his pocket. His hand tightly gripped the top of a heavy woolen sock. He leaned slightly toward Red, his body tensed, and his right arm swung slowly to a position behind his back. The sock did not hang limply. It was an improvised weapon, for in the toe of the sock was a rounded weight of some description. Cig was breathing heavily with excitement. It was hard for him to restrain himself, to wait for the propitious moment. But at last it came. Red was now bent well forward. Straight at his head Cig launched a terrific blow. There was a dull sound as the blow went home, then a crash as Red fell forward across the table. Cig straightened; then his arm shot back. He was ready for another blow if it was necessary. A glance told him that Red was unconscious, and he allowed the weapon to drop to the floor. A moment later he had seized Red's keys, unlocked the jail door and fled through the night.

Five minutes later Red came unsteadily to his feet. In the dim light of the kerosene wall lamp, he looked dazedly about him. His head was swimming. He sat down and stared foolishly at the empty tray, and food and broken dishes strewn upon the floor. His Stetson was there, too. He picked it up, looked at it in bemused fashion, then clapped it on his head. Suddenly he leaped from his chair. He understood it all now. He dashed to the door, and found it locked.

"The ornery little jail-breakin' rat," he muttered as he went back to his chair. He was still a trifle dazed, and he sat down again. "Well, in a way, I sure had it comin'," he went on. "An' the little cuss sure did give me fair warnin'. But what in thunder will the boys around here say about this! Locked up in my own jail! If I get out of here in time to get word to Pine Bluff over the telephone, I'll still make that little shrimp wish he'd never——" He had noticed the loaded sock with which Cig Holder had laid him low. He picked it up and looked at it curiously. He inverted the sock and allowed a silvered round object to

drop into his hand. "Now, what the Sam Hill!" he ejaculated, his eyes opening wide in his astonishment.

The round object which Red was holding in his hand was half the size of a man's fist. His eyes widened still more when he discovered what it was that had fashioned Cig Holder's strange weapon. It was painstakingly built up from the tinfoil that Cig had saved from the many packages of cigarettes delivered to him by Red.

"That's sure a new one on me," Red muttered. He dropped the object into the sock, and the sock into his pocket. "Good evidence if we ever catch the little rat. Dog-gone him for a——"

There was a sharp rap at the door, and Red sprang to his feet.

"Red! Oh, Red."

It was Cig's voice. There was no mistaking it. But after gaining his liberty, what did the little fool mean by returning? Red started for the door. Cig was undoubtedly secure in his belief that he had made good his escape, and had returned to taunt him. Red knew that it would avail him nothing to shout for help. The jail was a long way from other buildings, and besides the wind was now blowing a gale.

"Red! Oh, Red! Are you in there?"

"Where else would I be, you little devil!" Red was almost beside himself. "You'd best open that door, you little rat! If you don't, I'll see that you're brought back to stand trial for this, if you get clean to China."

"Shut up, Red, and listen!" The voice from the storm was supplicating, insistent. "Red, so help me, I *want* to let you out! If you'll just promise me first that you won't shoot——"

"I'm not goin' to shoot you, you little fool! Come on an' open up!"

"And you won't beat me either?"

"Of course I won't!"

"Well, listen first." Cig's mouth was close pressed to a crack in the door. Listen, Red. There's murder being done down at old Hard-rock's cabin. I was just passing by on my way to Pine Bluff, and——"

"Then let me out, you idiot! Let me get down there!"

"Sure, Red." Cig was fumbling with the lock. "Just wanted you to be sure it wasn't me." The door flew open and Red rushed out. "If I hadn't come back, you would have thought I did it, and they'd never let up if I was wanted for murder. I——"

"Will you shut up?" Red interrupted. "Come along. Talk on the way, if you want."

Red led off through the storm. "Tell me," he demanded, who was it, an' what's happened?"

"I heard a scream, see?" Cig was trotting briskly at Red's heels. "It come from that cabin. I ran up and peeked through the window. It was Mullen. He was turning everything upside down. Hard-rock was there flat on the floor. I think he's killed. If I hadn't come back, you would have sure thought it was me. You couldn't help it, after me escaping that way. I can do my bit in jail, but no murder for mine."

Red did not hear the last of Cig's speech. He had been right after all about Mullen. Cig had dropped behind, for Red was running now. Nearing Hard-rock's cabin he approached cautiously. He walked swiftly to the single frost-rimmed window, found a corner of the pane that was clear and peered through. On the floor, as Cig had told him, was sprawled the form of Hard-rock. Red looked about eagerly. There was no one else in the room.

As Red darted for the front door of the cabin, he heard the pad of running feet through the snow. At first he thought it was Cig coming up, but Cig was standing breathless at his elbow. The sound Red had heard came from the back of the cabin, and he started in pursuit. It was dark, and he was

running in the teeth of the gale. The pelting snow almost blinded him. Nevertheless, he had run but a short distance when he saw the blurred forms of a man and a horse. The horse was near a tree—probably tethered to it, Red thought—and the man was racing toward the animal. Red's gun flashed from his holster. He fired, and as he did so the man turned upon him. An instant later two guns flashed in the darkness; they flashed again. With an exclamation of delight, Red saw his man fall to the snow. He rushed forward.

"I've got you, Mullen!" he shouted. "I've——"

The flash of a gun barking at short range almost blinded Red. The man in the snow scrambled to his feet. Red tried to shoot, and discovered that his gun arm was hanging limply at his side. He became suddenly giddy. His legs tottered under him and he went down in the snow. As he fell he saw that Mullen was weaving an uncertain path to his tethered horse.

"I'll get you yet!"

The muttered words hissed sharply between Red's teeth, ground together with his excruciating pain and his iron determination to get his man. He scrambled to his feet. Mullen had almost reached his horse. Red felt about for his gun and found his holster empty. Of course, it was lost in the snow. As he staggered forward, Red uttered an exclamation. His groping left hand had come in contact with the weapon Cig had used upon him so effectively. He drew it forth, and by sheer effort of will centered upon the business at hand. To his joy, he found that he had almost reached the unsuspecting Mullen. Half blinded with the snow and the pain from his wounded shoulder, Red grasped Cig's weapon firmly and ran the last few steps.

"You will, huh!"

Mullen had untied his horse, and with his left foot in the stirrup, was mounting. Red spoke and swung with all his might, and Mullen fell at his feet. The horse snorted, reared and galloped off through the storm. Then Red felt his last ounce of strength leave his body. With a contented sigh he fell across the prostrate body at his feet. He had got his man.

Two days later old Tom Applegate, who had taken Mute Mullen to the jail at the county seat at Red's request, entered the deputy's room at The Brody House. Red was sitting up in bed, talking to Cig Holder, who was lounging in a chair near the window. Applegate's expression denoted mild surprise at Cig's presence.

"He's my nurse, Tom," Red explained with a laugh, "an' when I get up from here, which I will in two or three days more, accordin' to the doc. Cig's goin' to finish servin' out his term. But there's a lot of wood that needs sawin' an' splittin', so I'm goin' to let him work outside some." Red grinned ruefully. "Cig likes fresh air, an' I aim to see that he gets it. I ain't takin' any more chances on gettin' another crack on the head. Cig says he won't try it any more, but I——"

There was a timid knock at the door, and Red's speech was interrupted by the entrance of Hard-rock Jim Lane, who stood blinking in the doorway.

"There's the man we thought was dead when we peeked in his cabin the other night," Red said to Applegate. "Now what can I do for you, Harrock?"

Hard-rock shuffled his feet uneasily. "I didn't like to bother you, Red, when you're all knocked out like this," he apologized diffidently, "but I just had to come around to get my money."

Red looked inquiringly at Applegate, and with a guilty start the old stock buyer fished in his coat pocket and brought forth a small slip of paper,

which he swiftly tendered to the old miner.

"Here's your deposit slip," he said. "Red told me to put your money in the bank. I went to Pine Bluff in such a hurry I completely forgot to give it to you."

"It's all right, Hard-rock," Red interjected. "You needn't look sore about it. You can take that slip an' go right down there an' draw your money down —right now, if you want."

Hard-rock was staring sullenly at Cig Holder. "I ain't sore about you puttin' my money in the bank," he said slowly. "I figure to leave it there, but——" Hard-rock paused to glare again at little Cig. "Do you aim to let this galoot run around loose like he's been doin' for the last two days?"

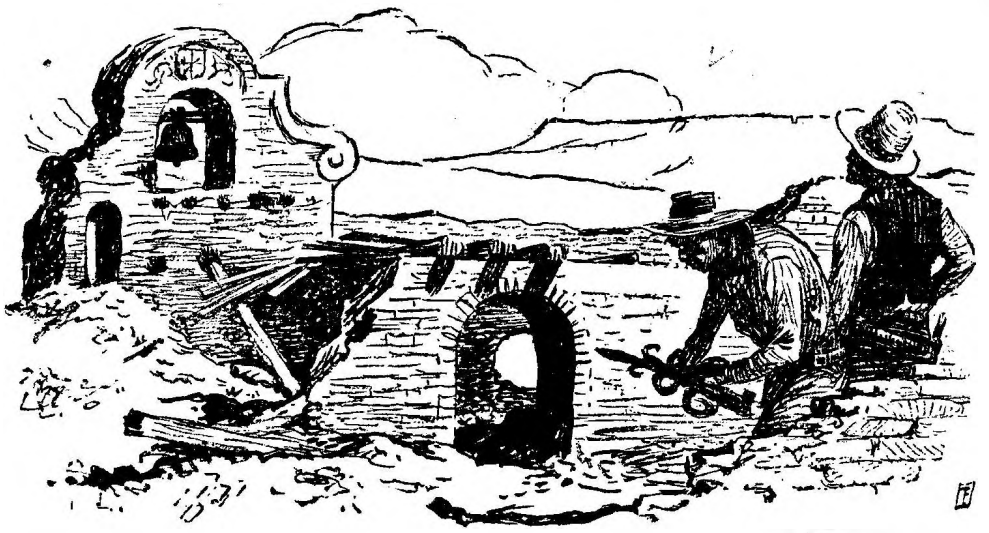
"Why, Hard-rock," Red chided gently, "I'm surprised at you. If it hadn't been for Cig, you'd've lost your money. Instead of callin' him names, you ought to figure on puttin' something in his sock. It ain't long till Chris'mas, you know."

"I reckon you're half right, Red," Hard-rock's seamed old face was actually beaming as he shuffled to the deputy's bedside. He produced a worn wallet, and an instant later, to the surprise of every one, a twenty-dollar certificate fluttered down upon Red's pillow. "That'll put somethin' in his sock. Buy him some more cig'rettes while he's in jail. But before you give 'em to him," old Hard-rock added with a grimace, "you be sure an' keep out the tinfoil."

COSTLY INDIAN FUNERALS

A FUNERAL expense account totaling $2,296, covering the burial of a minor son in an Oklahoma Osage Indian family under government guardianship, was recently submitted for approval to the secretary of the interior. The cost of the funeral is regarded as one of the highest that has come before the department of the interior from the many restricted Indians under its jurisdiction. The account is from a local undertaking firm. The charge for the casket was one thousand dollars, and there was an additional item of one hundred and forty-five dollars for burial clothing.

Almost half the total expense of the funeral, however, was represented by the ceremonial feast. This was invoiced at a total of $1,028, covering wearing apparel given to mourners and every variety of food served at the funeral. The Indian parents of the deceased youth both receive annual shares of Osage tribal funds derived from oil royalties, and they were charged with the account jointly. It was allowed by the department with the understanding that such heavy purchases for funerals among the Osages shall hereafter be submitted to the Osage Indian Agency for approval in advance.



The Bells of San Filipo

By George Owen Baxter

Author of "Trouble Trail," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

JIM GORE is an ordinary prospector, a hard-working, unimaginative son of toil who plugs away at his little find with steady persistence. One day he sees a Mexican near his shack, a man who runs when he surprises him, and lets fall at his feet a bag of old silver bullion.

It is the little town of San Filipo which furnishes the clew, in the tale which a native tells of old silver mines in the neighborhood and the ancient silver bells of Conquistadore days.

And then Jim comes across a man who would make an ideal partner for him in his search —Don Cristobal Estaban, alias The Doctor, alias Colonel Dice, a fugitive from the justice of numerous towns, reckless, keen-minded, and powerful. It is he who captures the fleeing Mexican and vainly attempts to get information from him. And then, as he and Gore doze in the twilight, there is a tremor in the earth and they hear afar off the sound of ringing bells, the sound which legends say will usher in a new reign of plenty for San Filipo.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE START.

JIM GORE was already upon his feet, while his new friend remained sitting, with his ear inclined toward the earth and one hand raised for perfect silence. But so faint was that melody of far-off bells that the first puff of wind, sighing about them, cut off the music. And when the wind died again the sound had died also.

Yet The Doctor remained in his attentive position for another moment.

He said at last: "Is there a church in San Filipo?"

"There's the wreck of a church!" said Jim Gore.

"With bells, though?"

"No! Not a bell. The bell tower went down with a smash when the town and the church was burned."

"No bells?" echoed The Doctor.

"Not one."

"Then what does it mean, old son?"

"Ghosts!" cried Jim Gore, the words fairly bursting from his throat. "That's the long and short of what it means!"

"Look here," chuckled The Doctor, "I'm a very credulous sort of a fellow. And I'm specially partial to ghosts. But what do you mean by the ghosts of bells?"

Jim Gore was busy for a moment catching his breath and mopping his brow.

"I ain't no soothsayer," he declared at last. "I dunno nothing about ghosts and don't *want* to know nothing. But I'll tell you that them are ghost bells that you hear down yonder in the valley. Yep, they come from the bells of the old church—dead bells—bells that ain't got no body no more'n a spook has! They hunted through that damn church, but they ain't found no bells left. The bells ain't there—but the voices of the bells still stick!"

The Doctor did not laugh again. He remained most soberly silent.

When he spoke again it was to say gravely: "When do we start down to have a look at the old town, partner?"

"Some other night—not this night!" exclaimed Jim Gore. "I got the creeps already, and I'm free to say it!"

"Buck up!" murmured The Doctor. "I think that this is the very night we should start. What do the people in the town say? Have they heard those bells before?"

"Not long ago they heard 'em, and they say that they's an old saying in the valley—that San Filipo is gunna be rich again when the bells of San Filipo begin to ring once more. Well, I dunno but what they's something in it. The greaser has found a bunch of silver down there."

"Where could it have come from?"

"All across the other side of the valley—there used to be a pack of silver mines there. If there was moonlight, even by the moonshine you could see the dumps from clear over here."

"Ah!" sighed The Doctor. "I begin to understand!"

His hands became intensely active.

"What are you doin'?" asked Jim Gore.

"I'm chucking the bullets out of these guns and cleaning them. I hate dirty guns when there's a chance of running into a little flock of wild trouble floating through the sky like a bunch of geese. I hate dirty guns when a time like that comes."

"Doctor, d'you aim to go down to that town to-night?"

"Of course!"

"Curse it!" pleaded Jim Gore, "I tell you that I feel sort of curled up and weak inside of me! Let's wait till to-morrow!"

The Doctor laughed softly. And his laughter put every nerve of Jim Gore on edge.

"Heads up!" said the gambler. "When you see trouble, the thing to do is not to sit still, but get up—with a gun in each hand—and go asking questions. Or better still, go ready to use your own eyes. Do you believe me?"

"You may be right. But I got an idea that it would be a lot more peaceful right up here in this shack to-night."

"Who wants peace?" said The Doctor. "What do we live for? The trees and the stones and the mountains have plenty of peace. But dogs and horses and men—they live to use their hands and their heels and their—teeth, Jim! The more action, the more life. Otherwise, we might as well go to sleep and keep on sleeping till the end of time! No, no, Jim, we don't want peace!"

Jim Gore chewed a liberal chunk from the corner of his plug of Star tobacco.

"You got a nice, smooth way of talkin'," said he. "I enjoy hearin' you a lot. But I got to say that from my way of lookin' at things, I differ from you. I take off my hat to you. I wish you all the kinds of trouble that is invented or that grows natural in these here mountains—which by my way of thinkin' is plenty. One greaser floatin' around through these here hills ready to soak a knife into the innards of you—that, by my figurin', is plenty of trouble for any one man, even if he is full growed like you. But for me, Doctor—I like sleep, plenty of sleep! And

as far as ghosts go—I say, give 'em room. Don't crowd 'em none!"

The Doctor was laughing again in the soft way that went through and through the soul of Jim Gore.

"Partner," said he, "I think you'll change your mind."

"Not me!"

"Well, then, do you want to stay up here in the night with the greaser, all alone? Or do you want to go down to San Filipo with me—and meet the ghosts?"

Jim Gore groaned. "That's a terrible choice to have to make!"

"I'm sorry. But take your choice. After all, partner, the ghost of a bell won't hold a knife at your head."

"You're young," said the miner gloomily, "and bein' young, you ain't particular believin'. But when you get older, and by the time that you're my age, you'll find out that they's plenty of things in this here little old world that don't bear no explainin'. They's plenty of things that has to be took hold of with gloves, and they's plenty that don't want no handlin' at all!"

"I believe you," said the younger man calmly. "The question now is, though, will you come along with me and take your chances with me?"

"Ah, well," sighed Jim Gore, "I dunno whether to thank Heaven that I'm old enough to have sense, or to wish that I was young again, and had plenty of nerve!"

"Well?"

"I suppose that I'll go along. Otherwise every time I hear a whisper in the wind, I'll figger that you're lyin' down yonder in that damned town with your throat cut from ear to ear, and that what I'm hearing out of the wind is the whisperin' of your ghost come back to tell me that I was a quitter for not goin' down—and gettin' my own throat cut, too!"

"Good!" said The Doctor cheerfully. "Then we start!"

"We start. Wait a minute till I take a look at my gat."

"Take a good look. I'll brisk up the fire for you."

He stirred the embers to a flame and by that flame Jim Gore went over his weapon slowly and carefully. When he was ended in that examination, he stood up with another sigh which was very like a groan.

"Are you ready, old-timer?"

"Oh, I'm ready, I suppose. There'll be luck on this trip, though."

"Do your old scars begin to ache?" smiled The Doctor.

"They begin to get fever and shootin' pains," sighed Jim Gore. "But, come on, you young blood lover. I'll stick to your shoulder steady enough, and if you don't take no back steps, you'll find that I'll go as far forward as you do!"

"I believe you," murmured The Doctor.

And they swung down the steep slope into the valley side by side.

There was little conversation. It seemed to Jim Gore that the traveling wind as it passed his ears carried whispers of warning, and with every step that he took his heart felt more cold. He would have turned back a dozen times on the way, had it not been for the dauntless carriage of his companion, who went ahead with his chin raised high and with a careless way of humming and of whistling. New tunes and old came softly from his lips as he walked.

"Look here!" broke out Jim Gore at last.

"Well?"

"I'd like to ask you one honest question."

"And I'll answer it honestly if I can. I don't mind questions from a friend."

"Then tell me, man to man—d'you really feel as happy as you sound and as you look?"

The Doctor did not laugh.

"I'll tell you the truth," said he. "Down in my inwards I'm about the worst-scared man in this valley—not even excepting you."

An oath of astonishment exploded on the lips of Gore.

"D'you mind tellin' me, then, why in the name of the Almighty you want to plug away at this here little game tonight—you bein' so very scared, as you say?"

"Why," said the irrepressible Doctor, "that's what really makes it fun. Because, Jim, if we weren't frightened almost to death, there'd be no game at all. It would simply be like betting on a sure thing!"

Jim Gore threw up his hands.

"Is that the way you feel about it—honest?"

"That's the way I feel about it, honest!"

"By Heaven!" breathed Jim Gore, filled with great awe. "I got to say that you plumb beat me!"

CHAPTER IX.

A SONG IN THE NIGHT.

A THIN sickle of a moon rode through the eastern sky as they reached the valley bottom and approached the village of ruins. And they heard, far away, the strumming of a guitar—a pulse, rather than a musical sound—and then the singing of a gay tenor voice. The Doctor paused and raised a hand. Jim Gore stopped also, and above the noise of their heavy breathing, and the creaking of Jim's thick cowhide boots as he stirred uneasily, the song went on, soared to a thrilling climax and then died away.

"Well?" said Jim Gore, feeling that his strange companion had found something worth notice in this singing.

"Did you say that that town was empty of people?" asked The Doctor.

"Pretty nigh. They's a few lyin' around and sleepin' in the sun all day and yappin' out their songs like that in the night. Why?"

"Because that's not yapping. That is singing, and there's a difference. The fellow who sang that song may lie around during the day, but he has done better things than that in his life. He has studied music where it is really taught. He has worked pretty hard, old son, to learn how to sing like that."

"Worked?" exclaimed the miner. "Are you jokin', Doctor? How come that singin' could be work?"

"More work," said the other deliberately, as they started on again, "than you'll put in at your mine. It means working with your strength until you're tired, and working with your brains, too, all the time!"

"I dunno," said Jim Gore, "that I foller the drift of what you got to say about that, Doctor. You're a smart feller, but I'd like to have you show me how it come that makin' a noise is worth workin' to learn how to do!"

"I'll tell you," said Colonel Dice. "Some people open their throats and do what you say—simply make a noise. And others make music. And the ones who make music are very well paid for it. Very well paid! Think of a man, partner, getting a thousand dollars a week for simply singing a few moments every night!"

"A thousand dollars a week!" echoed the miner, pausing and taking off his hat, as though to let this mighty thought work more freely into his brain. "A thousand dollars a week. You ain't stuffin' me, I guess?"

"Oh, that's a fact. And for the really great singers a thousand dollars a night."

"Great heavens!" whispered Jim Gore. "That'd be three pounds of gold all worked out and clear profit. Gosh, will you think of that?"

"Or—a few of them—three thousand dollars every time they come out and sing!"

The prostration of Jim's mind before facts like these was complete. He mopped his brow and refused to walk any farther until he had grappled with this mighty problem.

"Now, Doctor," said he, "will you tell me how folks come to be so simple that they'd pay big money to hear a gent yap?"

"Do I seem like a simple man, Jim?"

"Simple? You? Simple like arithmetic, than which there ain't nothin' more unsimple. That's how simple you are, partner! Simple like a dog-gone vein that's pinchin' out and turnin' corners in quartzite. But you don't mean to tell me, Doctor, that you've spent time and money goin' out of your way to listen to yappin' like that?"

"Not very much better yapping than that!" was the reply. "Wait a minute! There he goes again!"

They were nearer, now, and though the voice was so softened by distance that the lower notes were felt rather than heard, yet there was much more body to the music he made, and Colonel Dice swayed his head in rhythm with the strain.

"No, by Jove!" said he, as that song ended in turn. "I've paid good money and lots of it to hear fellows who yapped not a whit better than our friend yonder with the guitar. That man could make a very handsome salary on the stage, I tell you!"

"Well," said Jim Gore, "he ain't gunna. Because if he's the gent that I got in mind, he ain't never been outside of San Filipo. He told me so."

"Who do you mean?" asked The Doctor.

And Jim Gore told him, briefly, how he had seen Diego Ramirez sitting idly in front of the ruined house of his ancestors.

"And you think that he's the fellow who's singing now?" asked Cristobal Estaban.

"I got no manner of doubt about it. He had a face like he could sing pretty good."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You seem a mite heated up about this greaser."

'He's no greaser, my friend. No greaser ever spoke perfect Spanish like that! Listen again—no, by Heaven—not Spanish this time, but the purest Italian."

"Is that the way dago sounds?"

"That's the way! So this fellow sits in front of his house and wastes all of every day?"

"That's what he does."

"And he's never been away from San Filipo?"

"He says that him and his folks has always lived there for more generations than I got years under my belt, almost!"

"Then," said The Doctor, "he is an admirable liar. I can tell you that. He has studied—in Paris, most likely. What's his appearance?"

"Maybe eighteen, maybe twenty-five. I don't read a greaser none too clear."

"Nearer twenty-five than eighteen, I should say. What's the look of him?"

"Mighty pretty. Pretty enough to be a girl. Lazy lookin' like a girl, too!"

"Humph!" said The Doctor, "not too lazy to study like the devil when he learned how to sing. Not too lazy to learn how to lie like a young devil."

"I dunno that I could say that he was lyin'!" said Jim Gore, remembering the apparent frankness of the ragged youth. "But he didn't look like nothin' much—I'll tell you that. He looked like pretty near nothin' at all!"

"What the devil could he be doing up here?" said The Doctor, thinking aloud.

"Settin' in the sun and hatchin' cobwebby dreams," suggested his rough companion. "He had that sort of a look about him. Looked like it would pretty nigh kill him to have to do a lick of work."

"It sounds," said The Doctor, paying no heed at all to this interpretation, "like a gentleman."

"Gentleman? He's poorer than me, and I ain't no millionaire. But I am compared with him."

"Don't you see?" said his companion. "That's the very point. Here's a fellow come to San Filipo—for it's absurd to think that he learned Italian and how to sing it in that heap of ruins—here's a fellow come to San Filipo, living like a low beggar and spending his days, apparently, sitting idly in the sun. And yet, if he has nothing else, he has a voice which is worthy of bringing him in a good living on any stage in any country."

"Maybe he don't know it no more than I do," suggested Gore.

"An idea which is not worth a snap!" replied The Doctor. "Because in the place where he learned how to sing the cash value of a good voice is perfectly appreciated. There he begins again—just the guitar, this time. And he handles even it like an artist. An artist he is—sitting here mooning through the days, talking about his decayed ancestry, and changing gossip with the loafers in the town. That's how his days are spent."

"Sure. I seen that with my own eyes."

"But what about his rights, Gore?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just as much as I say, and no more! While we are dodging the ghosts of those old bells, I think that we'll have to do a little inquiring into the nature of that young fellow with the fine voice and the ragged clothes. Ragged clothes?"

He shook his head dejectedly, as though this point worried him a good deal.

"After all," said Gore, "what difference does it make?"

"This difference, son. Every queer fellow in San Filipo may be hunting for the same thing, exactly, that we're hunting for! And so we have to keep our eyes open. Who's that?"

They were close to the village now, and across the field near by a fleet shadow ran.

"Hello!" called The Doctor. And then in Spanish: "Why do you run, friend?"

The shadow dodged in the thin moonshine as though it had seen a leveled gun. And in another instant The Doctor had leaped in pursuit. The boy ran fast as a darting terrier, but The Doctor leaped behind like a long-striding greyhound. Presently he overtook the shadow and came straight back to Jim Gore with a youngster of thirteen or fourteen trussed over his arm.

"He's too scared to talk," said The Doctor. "Let him sit down and get his wind."

He deposited the boy on the ground and there the youngster sat quaking and gasping in his breath.

"So," said The Doctor gently at last. "What is the matter, my boy?"

There was only a frightened groan.

"What is your name?"

"Filipo, señor."

"Are you named after the town?"

"After the blessed saint, señor."

"Quite right. And why did you not stop when I called? Why did you not answer me, my friend?"

"Ah, señor, forgive me!"

"Of course I do. I only ran after you because you tried to run away, you know. "I'm not going to harm you. Why the devil did you run?"

"Ah, kind señor, I thought it was the ghost coming for me!"

CHAPTER X.

A BOY'S STORY.

"GOOD!" murmured The Doctor. "We are getting nearer to the ghost every moment, Gore!"

"I don't like it," said Jim Gore.

"Jokin' about this sort of thing is mighty like to be dangerous, Doctor!"

"Don Cristobal is my name," said his companion, softly but sharply. "That is my name, señor."

"Sure, Don Cristobal," grinned Gore.

"But the ghost——" The Doctor spoke to the boy.

"Heaven shield us from it!" breathed the boy.

"Brave Filipo! We will help to shield you—my friend and I."

"I am no coward," said Filipo, rising from the dust and facing them in the filmy moonlight. "I can fight boys my own size. I have fought until I was all blood, and I have not cared. But the ghost——"

"That is different, of course!"

"Of course, señor! That is very different! Can you find four grown men in the village who will go to the convent at night?"

"I suppose not."

"Indeed, they will not go. And who can blame them?"

"I have never heard of this ghost, except vaguely, Filipo. Why is it so feared?"

"Because when she is seen, a man will grow dumb and never be able to speak again."

"Frightful!" said The Doctor, in his gentle voice. "Are there any dumb men in the village now?"

"Not that I have known. But my father remembers that when he was young there was an old man who had seen the ghost and therefore had become dumb."

"Really?"

"It is very true. My father would tell you."

"Did that old man talk about what he had seen?"

"Señor—being dumb, how could he talk?"

"With signs, I thought. But perhaps he wrote what he saw?"

"He could not write, señor."

"You see," said The Doctor to Gore in English, "how stories grow up. A man becomes dumb—perhaps he was born dumb. He cannot write. But it is said that he has seen the ghost. How was it learned?"

He returned to the boy.

"Let us walk on into the village together. We will guard you, Filipo."

"I thank you, señor."

"This ghost—is it known who she is?"

"She is a young nun, señor."

"That is attractive."

"She is very beautiful, men say."

"Those who have seen her say so?"

"I cannot tell, señor. I only know what is told me."

"Right. The beautiful young nun—why does she haunt the nunnery?"

"It happened many years ago, before I was born—before my father, also. But all men know that it is true."

"I shall believe you implicitly."

"When San Filipo burned, on the day that the dam was broken——"

"I think I have heard of that."

"On that day, when the flames reached the nunnery and the nuns ran away from the fire, there was one young girl who had just become a member of the order. And she was telling her beads when the flames came. Her sisters called to her:

" 'Alicia—the fire!'

" 'I have nearly ended!' said she, and continued on her knees.

"They ran out then and left her, and the fire grew, and the nunnery began to smoke, and still Alicia did not come out."

"Poor girl!" said Don Cristobal. "I can see it—I can see her and the cursed beads——"

"Did you say, señor——"

"Nothing. Get on with your story!"

"One of the nuns, a very brave woman, ran back with her cloak wet and thrown over her head. She ran through fire and smoke. She came to the room

and there was Alicia on her knees with the smoke rolling in and the fire leaping along the floor.

"'Alicia! Alicia!' she called to her. 'Come with me, in Heaven's name!'

"'I come at once, sister!' said Alicia. 'I have almost ended!'

"'Come now, or you will burn!'

"But then a great wall of flame rose in front of the older sister and forced her to run back to her friends on the outside of the nunnery. And, after that, Alicia was never seen, but the roof of the convent fell in a little later, and they knew that she was dead!"

"A frightful thing!" said The Doctor gravely.

"Afterwards, when the stones were cool enough, they went in and they searched in that room, but there was no trace of her burned body. And they searched in all of the convent, but not a bone of her was found. It was a great mystery, for certainly she could not have escaped from the fire! Do you not think that it was a great mystery?"

"Prodigious!" said The Doctor.

"But in the next year, when the fire was long out, and a man was walking by night between the church and the nunnery, he saw a woman wrapped in a black cloak with a white cloth across her forehead, and her face as white as the cloth and her hands as white as her face. And she walked out from the church and went across to the nunnery, and as she walked she told the beads of the long rosary which hung around her neck. It was the ghost of Alicia, the nun! And it is said that that man could never speak thereafter, but he was forced to write out the thing that he had seen and to warn other men to avoid the nunnery and the church forever, because a curse would come on them and they would be made dumb if they saw the dead girl! And that is the whole story and the true story, just as my father has told it to me, and word for word, he says, as his father before him told him!"

The Doctor paused and sighed.

"Peace to her poor soul!" said he.

"But she being a holy woman, why should her ghost walk in that place?"

"Perhaps there was a secret sin?" suggested The Doctor.

"Ah, I did not think of that. Perhaps it was that!" said the boy.

"But are you always in fear of this ghost?"

"Ah, señor, not always, but to-night we heard the dead bells of San Filipo. And after they have spoken, it is known that the ghost roams near the town. So when you called to me as I was running home from the cows, it jumped on my back—the fear of the ghost. I would not stop—it was a terrible thing to me, señor!"

"Of course it was. And I am sorry for that!"

"Not that you should be sorry. I was a fool not to have known a man's voice. Well, it is ended now!"

And he shuddered.

"Then the whole village is filled with fear?"

"Except Señor Ramirez."

"That is Diego Ramirez?"

"That is he."

"Is he not afraid?"

"Hush! He is singing again! He is afraid of nothing!"

"How can that be?"

"My mother says it is because he is so lazy that he knows not even a ghost would bother with such a worthless fellow as he is! Consider, señor, that all day he sits in front of his ruin of a house and does nothing but sing and sit, and sit and sing. And so into the night, unless it is to go inside to eat or sleep."

"Does he live on air?"

"When he came back to San Filipo he had a little money, and he lives on that, like a grasshopper living in summer. But when it is all gone, he will have a cold winter!"

And Filipo laughed maliciously.

"He had been away, then?"

"Ah, yes, for many, many years! I have never seen him in my life until a little time ago."

"How long, Filipo?"

"A month, señor? Yes, I think that he has only been here a month."

"Well, he is having a happy time of it, I have no doubt, with his singing."

"Do you think so, señor? My mother says that there is a curse on grown men who are as idle as he!"

"Well, perhaps there is. But I hope not. He sings very well."

"My mother says, 'too well for an honest man!'"

"He is bad, then?"

"No, I know nothing. Only my father says that he will come to no good end. He offered Ramirez fifty cents a day, which is much money, to help him with the herding of the cattle. And he yawned in my father's face.

"'I have still a little money,' said Diego Ramirez. 'When that is gone, then I shall begin to think of working, my friend. But do not spoil my happiness with talk of money and work now!'

"Was not that a rude speech?"

"A terrible thing!" said The Doctor.

"But my father says that when the money of Ramirez is gone he may rot before we will give him work or so much as a crust!"

"That will teach him a lesson, the rascal!"

"Will it not? Here I leave you, señor. For my father's house is down this alley."

"Good night, Filipo, and forgive me for frightening you."

"It was not you, but the thought that was in me of—but I shall not name it. When one is in the village, señor, it is better not to name it!"

"Thank you, Filipo. I shall remember!"

And the boy was gone, walking a pace or two, and then leaping off at full speed as though the fear of the ghost stole out at him from the silent black shadows that fell from the ragged tops of the walls.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VISION IN THE CHURCH.

THE singing had ended and the singer retired when they passed his usual post, which Jim Gore pointed out to The Doctor. The latter did not pause, but he seemed to see enough even in passing to familiarize himself with all that had been the glory of the house of Ramirez.

He expressed his opinions to the miner.

"That was a great house, Gore!" said he. "There was a time when the people in that house lived like princes, you can be sure! In that courtyard there have been big coaches with six or eight blood horses strung out in front of 'em and fellows in livery perched on the seat and behind, and outriders togged out like dukes and earls. There have been more stirrings of silk and lace and gold and plumes and tassels in that house than you have ever seen in your life. That fellow was a little king. And now his descendant sits in the sun all day and whacks a guitar at night. That's really the devil, and I tell you that it must be working on the heart of that Diego Ramirez. He's not what he seems. He's no idler."

"My eyes didn't see what they saw, then," said Jim Gore.

"We'll see what time shows us," said Cristobal Estaban. "In the meantime, let's get on with our hunt."

"Aye, but where do we begin?"

"With the nine ghosts, Jim!"

"What nine ghosts?"

"The bells of San Filipo, old son. Here's the church. Let's duck into this alley."

He led the way, side-stepping into the blackness of the alley. Down it they

went, climbing over moldering heaps of the fallen adobe bricks, gradually turning into the dust from which they had first been compacted. Jim Gore, utterly confounded by this boldness, drew his gun and walked second, his frightened eyes busy every moment with all that was around him.

Presently Gore stopped.

"What's that?" said he, pointing.

A jumble of confused, ruined walls, some fallen and some standing, but all more lofty and better preserved than any building in old San Filipo except the church itself, loomed against the sky and the dimness of the moonshine. The reason for their better preservation was not that the hand of time had fallen upon them, but simply that the substance of which those walls had been reared was hewn blocks of stone, a truly mighty masonry.

"The nunnery," said The Doctor.

"Let's get away from it," said Jim Gore, whispering.

"And yet," said The Doctor, "it frightens me enough to make me want to get inside it and look around me there!"

Jim Gore laid a resolute grip on his arm.

"We're after the bells—the ghosts of the bells. Ain't nine ghosts enough for you in one night's work, Doctor?"

"You're right!" sighed The Doctor.

And they went on together until they stood in view of the church itself. It stood in a dignified isolation. The buildings around it, when they fell, seemed to have sagged back from the house of God. They dropped upon their own foundations, and the church perhaps seemed more huge and substantial now than it had ever appeared before. That was partly because of the dullness of the light by which they viewed it. One of the big stone-built towers had fallen and its fragments lay strewn across the open court near the building. The other tower still remained—the bell tower from which the nine silver throats which were cast in Barcelona had sent their calling up and down the valley of the San Filipo. And looking through the dark arch of the lantern in which they had hung, it seemed that their ghosts *had* been those which had sent the bell-like murmur through the night air and up the hillside where the miner and his new friend waited and watched.

"You see?" whispered Jim Gore. "There ain't anything that we can find. This here has been hunted over about ten thousand times, I s'pose."

"I don't think so," said his companion. "They may have searched it once or twice, but never very hard and never expecting to find anything. There are too many stories about ghosts and what not connected with this church and its vicinity. What did the boy tell us? That the ghost of the dead nun walked out from the bottom of the church——"

"Good heavens!" breathed Jim Gore. "You ain't going in, partner?"

"Have we come all this distance to turn around and go back?"

"Well, we know what the church is now, and we know where the convent is. Dog-gone it, colonel, ain't that enough for one night's work?"

"I think," smiled The Doctor, "that nearly all the other hunters came to the church in a frame of mind like yours—or worse! Because we don't believe in their superstition—we're simply afraid of it by instinct, you might say. But they have religion behind them!"

He added: "Come on, Jim, or else I'll go in by myself."

"Would you do that?" quaked Gore. "Would you go in there all by yourself?"

"Watch me and see!"

But Gore, as he cast a frightened glance around him, decided that it would be less awful to accompany his daring guide than to remain in the open stretch with all the black, eyelike casements of

the church in front and the nunnery behind, gazing out upon him. So he freshened his grip upon the revolver and walked well behind Estaban, treading as lightly as he could, and yet making far more noise than the quick and apparently careless stride of the younger man.

They had entered through a fallen door at the base of the church and now Estaban took from a pocket a small electric torch, the light of which he cast far before him. They found themselves in what had once been presumably a cellar, but now it was filled with a vast quantity of junk. Crumbling heaps of adobe brick littered the floor, and among them the vast fragments of a wall which had pitched in. But beyond the wreckage of adobe and stone masonry there was a confusion of half-burned furniture, and there were tangles of wire—how it had come there, who could tell?

They even found heaps of broken glass. In fact, that cellar looked very much like an immense junk heap. Through this confusion they threaded their way, and gradually made the circuit of the foundations. The building had seemed large from the outside, but wandering in this manner through the interior, it was like a little world of its own.

They had reached the farthest corner of the church when the electric torch suddenly went out. They were left plunged in utter blackness, and Jim Gore whispered with chattering teeth:

"Doctor, can't you get it workin' again?"

"I'm trying," whispered the colonel. "I've never had the cursed thing act like this before."

"Is the battery run out?"

"I think not. There's a fresh battery in it. Something out of kilter, I suppose. Well, we'll have to get out by feeling our way, I suppose."

He started ahead and Jim Gore set his teeth to crush back the overwhelming sickness of spirit which had fallen upon him. A wind had raised and a thousand whispers began to stir in the blackness around them.

Luck was with them in another moment, however, for they rounded the corner of the church and stole forward saw before them a large arch from which the outer wall had fallen away, allowing a dimness of moonlight to enter aslant. This would guide them for at least a section of their journey back to the outer world of night.

But just as the heart of Jim Gore strengthened, his leader stopped short and grew rigid. And at the same time Jim Gore was aware of a black-robed figure which left the shadows at the corner of the church and stole forward into the dim moonshine of the arch. The figure was lost in the folds of a sweeping black cloak, and a white inner hood was drawn closely around the white face—the face of the beautiful nun of San Filipo!

Fear sometimes dulls the senses, and sometimes it sharpens them. It sharpened those of Jim Gore. As if in a blaze of sunlight he saw every detail. He noted the dead whiteness of that face—pale as the linen which surrounded it—the wide, blank, unseeing eyes which stared straight before, and the absence of either sorrow or joy from that dead countenance. And he saw the glimmer of the beads of the rosary, and he saw the hands, mortally white as the face itself, which counted the beads as the vision walked forward. He noted, too, that the feet of the nun, stepping among all the fragile débris which littered the floor of the cellar, made no sound. No, though all the sighing of the wind had ceased at that moment, there was not so much as a breath of noise from the sweeping cloak or the stepping feet.

Then she passed from view beyond

the pillar—and with that The Doctor came to life again. He leaped straight ahead, but Jim Gore gripped him, and strove to cry out. Strove to cry out—and from his numbed throat not a sound came!

Was it not the curse of which the little boy had told them? And The Doctor himself, turning to beat away the detaining hands of his companion, writhed his lips, but made not the volume of a whisper in sound.

Next he wrenched himself free, and quickly rushed away after the ghostly vision.

Jim Gore followed, stumbling and falling every second step. And when, by luck, he saw a glimmer of light straight before him and following it came panting out in the open court beyond, he found The Doctor standing there already rooted to the spot and with a fallen head.

They exchanged one glance with horror-stricken faces, and then stole together from the wide court and through the black peril of a narrow alley, and so out onto the open street where, far away, they heard the yapping of a dog—or was it a coyote? Even that sound was like a blessing to the frightened ears of the two!

CHAPTER XII.

NEW ARRIVALS.

THEY needed no interchange of opinions to tell them what they wished to do then. But hurrying straight ahead, they left the jumbled ruins of San Filipo and strode out onto the valley beyond—the blessed open valley with the bright stars and the thin moon about them.

Then: "Thank Heaven, I ain't dumb! I can speak, Chris. Lemme hear you talk!"

"Damnation!" groaned The Doctor. "We've acted like a pair of frightened curs! Gore, why did you lay hands on me in the cellar of the church? I might have caught her!"

"Caught her?" cried the miner. "Good grief, partner, I'd as soon have seen you try to catch the devil himself!"

"Would you? Well, Jim, I didn't catch her. And why not, I can't say to this moment. I was only delayed a moment by you. She seemed to be heading straight out from the cellar of the church—but though I ran faster than any woman could have run, when I got to the courtyard she seemed to have disappeared into thin air."

"Seemed to? Why, man, she did!"

"Nonsense!"

"Can't a ghost appear and disappear?"

"Who's talking about a ghost?" said The Doctor, shuddering violently.

"I am—and you're thinking about it, too. I can see your face!"

"If there's one day that I want to wipe out of my life," said The Doctor, "it's this day. I've never acted such a part as this before. I hope by Heaven that I never act it again. Gore, there's only one way to redeem ourselves—and that's to go straight back to San Filipo now and hunt through that church!"

"Would you really do that?" asked Gore, almost mute with wonder.

"Of course I would—and I will!"

And The Doctor turned resolutely back.

"Wait a minute!" called the miner.

"Well?"

"You aim to say that that ain't a ghost?"

"I do, of course."

"Did you ever see a woman with a face as white as that?"

"The moonlight might make her face appear white."

"I seen you by the moonlight. You looked pretty pale, Doctor, but you wasn't as white as that. And her hands was the same color as her face—dead white, like paint. No blood in that

flesh, Doctor. And how can there be any life where there ain't any blood?"

"Gore, it would make any man have the shivers to hear you yap like this."

"I'm tell you just the facts. I ask you, startin' in, would any real woman in the flesh have had the nerve to walk straight past us like she done—two strange men in the middle of the night in the cellar of that old church? No, sir, I say that she wouldn't, and you know that the same thing is true!"

"I know nothing of the kind," said The Doctor gloomily. "So far as we can tell, that girl may merely have been throwing a very large bluff—playing the part of the ghost that all of San Filipo knows about."

"Estaban, damned if I ain't surprised at you," remarked the miner. "You got pretty good ears, ain't you?"

"Fair, I suppose."

"Did you hear a sound when she stepped through all that noise-makin' junk?"

"The wind was stirring."

"Not when we seen her. There wasn't a breath of wind. I noticed that particular."

"You were so scared, Gore, that you forgot about the wind."

"And how about you?"

"I've never been so badly frightened in my life."

"Then when I tried to yell out to you not to run after her, I tell you, partner, that I couldn't peep!"

"It was fright. Fright will close up the throat of a man well enough. It closed mine when I turned around to tell you to let me go."

"All right, Doctor, have it your own way. You can explain everything that you want to. But you can't explain the way that she went out like a candle that the wind had hit!"

The Doctor bent his head.

"It's true," murmured he. "I can't explain that. And yet she might have dodged out of sight. There were a hundred places where she could, have hid."

"Was she walkin' as though she might of dodged quick out of sight?"

"She might have changed her gait."

"Nope, Doctor, she don't have to run to get away. She just can snuff herself out as thin as air, and by Heaven, you know it as well as I do."

"Perhaps I think so. That's the very reason why I won't admit it. There can't be such a thing as a ghost, Jim. There can't be. No, sir, that was a girl—and a howling beauty, at that! A face cut out of stone!"

"Aye," said the miner, "but more life in a piece of stone than there ever was in her face!"

"Well," said The Doctor, "we go back to-morrow night."

"Not by my advice. We've got our warning, now, and if we go back a second time, the curse'll sure get us!"

"Jim," said The Doctor, laying a hand on his shoulder, "I know that you've got just as much courage as I have. I say that I'm going back to San Filipo just as I went to-night, and I'm going straight to the church, and straight to the corner of the church where we saw her—and you're going with me!"

There was a groan from Jim Gore, and then:

"Well, partner, I suppose that I ain't gunna quit on you, but I'd rather take ten years in jail!"

"That," said the other quickly, "is because you were never in jail!"

They went on up the hillside, slowly, beginning to feel the fatigue of the long day and the frightful tension of their night adventure combined. When they reached the little shack, they had barely energy to look, to see that the silver and gold dust of Jim Gore, which they had secreted before leaving, was still safely in its hiding place. Then they turned into their blankets and fell soundly asleep.

In the middle of the night Jim Gore

heard a subdued cry. He sat up and saw his tall companion, a blanket trailing from one shoulder—his eyes wide and unseeing — stalking stealthily through the dying moonlight, one hand stretched out before him as if he were feeling his way, and the other hand gripping a leveled revolver.

He stumbled over a rock and this seemed to waken him, for he straightened with a jerk and a subdued exclamation.

Turning, he encountered the frightened eyes of Gore. Without a word The Doctor returned to his blankets, rolled in them, and presently his regular breathing announced that he was sound asleep. Jim Gore, after a long moment, slept again also, but all through the rest of the night he was haunted by the sense of impending disaster from which even the courage and the fighting skill of his companion would not be able to extricate them. And he dreamed of stealthy Mexicans, knife in hand, stealing upon them, and of the walking ghost of the nun, and of tall Colonel Dice striding to confront these evils, but walking as in his sleep, feeling his way, his gun pointed at the empty air!

When they wakened in the brightness of the morning, they were almost as tired as when they fell asleep. Breakfast was cooked and eaten in silence, and then Jim Gore, by force of habit, went into his hole and started to work with single jack and drill.

His heart was not in his employment, however. Presently he came out carrying his tools with him, and slumped down in the shade beside The Doctor.

"It's all right, Jim," said the other. "You can't be interested in dragging three dollars a day out of the rock when you've got the scent of a million in your nostrils. But after we've tried and failed at this new game, you'll be able to go back to the old stand easily enough."

"After we fail?" muttered Jim Gore. "Have you got your heart set on missing before you even try to shoot?"

"We've got one chance in a hundred," said The Doctor cheerfully, seeming to have recovered his usual spirits. "We're trying to get something for nothing, and that never works out. I've tried it all my life. And look at me now!"

"Aye," muttered Gore, "but you've had your good time!"

"Perhaps I have. Not in spending the money, but in trying to get it. And yet I've had the coin, too. I've had it in chunks of a good many tens of thousands at a time, and spent it in a whirl. But what have I left of it? A pair of guns and a good constitution!"

He laughed as he said it.

"But the game is all that is worth while, Jim. Not what you get out of the rock, but the fun of hunting it. Isn't that so?"

"I dunno," said Jim. "D'you suppose that if I ever struck my million I'd ever take to the drill and the single jack again?"

"Of course you would. They'd trim you out of your money in no time, and then you'd be back here plugging away at a hole in the stone and a good deal happier than when you were dropping thousands every day in New York! And the fun we'll get out of this hunt will be worth more than any coin we extract."

"The fun of ghost hunting?" asked Gore sullenly.

"Exactly that! What's that coming to San Filipo?"

He pointed across the valley, to a dust cloud.

"A bunch of cattle comin' in," suggested Gore.

"No, men on horseback, I think. I can make them out."

Both could make them out in another moment—a dozen or fifteen tiny figures of horsemen followed by three or four

big wagons, each dragged by several spans of horses—and all so small in the distance that they needed ten minutes to cover a space equal to the breadth of one's hand.

"What's it all about?" asked the miner.

"It has something to do with our friend the ghost," said The Doctor. "You can lay your money on that."

CHAPTER XIII.

RAMIREZ MAKES AN OFFER.

THE train of horsemen and of wagons disappeared into San Filipo, but that was not the only unusual disturbance of the day. Before the afternoon had reached its hot beginning another and a different procession wound out of the village. It consisted of a long, straggling file of riders and carts and pedestrians—perhaps thirty souls could be counted by the two watchers from the height.

"What the deuce can *that* mean?" said Jim Gore.

"Some go in and some go out," said The Doctor. "A peaceable exit, however, with all their chattels. What the deuce can it mean?"

They spent the rest of the afternoon in conjectures, and when the evening turned to dark even Jim Gore had recovered a sufficient amount of curiosity to overcome even his dread of the ghost of Alicia. Down they went from the mountainside and into the valley, but they had not come to the outskirts of the town when a horseman shot up out of the dark and hailed them in ringing Spanish:

"Who goes there?"

"Is this an army post?" snorted The Doctor to his companion. "Make no answer," he continued to Jim Gore.

And they walked on side by side.

"Who goes?" shouted the Mexican again, thrusting his horse in front of them.

Señor Estaban made answer in softest Spanish:

"Son of a coyote, carrion eater, dog of a greaser, why do you stop a man and try to talk man's talk?"

The dull moonshine winked on the barrel of the Mexican's rifle—but, as though realizing that he was hovering on the brink of eternity, with the hand of The Doctor ready to push him over the edge, he suddenly wheeled his horse away and darted off at full speed.

"He lost his nerve, the skunk," chuckled Jim Gore.

"He hasn't finished his play," said The Doctor. "We'll have another talk with that fellow before the morning. You can do a little betting on that, Jim!"

It came long before morning. In a scant three minutes a veritable cavalry charge swept toward them through the dim moonshine.

"Down on the ground!" commanded The Doctor, and set the example by throwing himself headlong on his belly, with his pair of revolvers stretched out at arm's length before him. Jim Gore, his heart in his mouth, imitated that good precept.

The effect was immediate. The half dozen riders split before them and swerved away on either side. One gun exploded, but apparently it was merely a wild shot, for the two did not hear even the singing of the bullet. From a little distance, the cavalcade halted, and one rider, advancing a little, called out:

"Friends?"

"Who in the name of the devil should we be?" asked The Doctor in anger. "And what do you mean by stopping two peaceful travelers? Are you robbers—or fools?"

There was an exclamation of impatience from the rider, but then he urged his horse a little nearer.

"Is Señor Gore one of you?" he asked.

"He's here," answered The Doctor.

"Señor Ramirez will be happy to talk to both of you, then. It is by his orders that we stop all men bound for San Filipo, friends."

"Ramirez, Ramirez, Ramirez!" murmured Estaban. "You see, Jim, that your guitar-playing idler, your boy who day-dreamed in the sun, has turned into a leader of men. Eh? Oh, we shall find a great deal in that same idler!"

He added, loudly: "What is the right of Señor Ramirez to stop us or shut us away from San Filipo?"

"You must know, señor," said the Mexican rider, "that on this day he has secured the control of all of San Filipo. It is his, señor, to the last foot of the last building, and all the land, and he has the power to keep off trespassers."

"This man talks like a lawyer," said The Doctor to his companion. "Confound the whole breed! Lawyers and gunmen are riding in the service of this obscure beggar, this time killer, this man of little account — this Diego Ramirez! We'll sweat on account of Ramirez before we're through!"

He stood up and beckoned to Gore to follow his example.

"We'll go in with you," said The Doctor to the Mexican. "You and your men can lead the way and guard us on the side, but I want none of you behind us. You understand?"

"It is very agreeable to me, señor," said the Mexican, and gave the directions in swift Spanish to his followers. He himself rode up beside the two to escort them into the wrecked village.

"Are you a friend of this Ramirez?" asked The Doctor.

"I am, señor. I am Pedro Blas."

"Pedro Blas, I am glad to know you. I have read an account of the travels of one of your famous ancestors."

"Ah, señor," laughed the other, "that rascal Gil! I claim no relationship to that fictitious scoundrel, I thank you! And your name, señor?"

"I am Cristobal Estaban."

"Ah! You are true Mexican, then? I thought from my friend——"

"I called him a coyote and a greaser," said The Doctor carelessly, "because he yapped like one. I hate a noisy man, Don Pedro. I hate 'em."

They reached the outskirts of the village and now they entered along the main street. At the word of the leader, all but two of the scouts fell back and returned to their work of riding slowly and cautiously through the night around the town.

"It is the grace of Heaven that I was on duty and heard the call," said Pedro Blas. "For the rest of them are rough fellows and they would have been as apt as not to open fire with their rifles. Diego Ramirez has brought up some tough rascals from Mexico, I can tell you. Here we are near his house, my friends!"

They turned in through the gate into the ancient patio and there they found a fire blazing in the center of the open space with a single man seated before it—the graceful form and the handsome face of Diego Ramirez. He rose and greeted them. What a change in this Diego! From the tattered beggar, he had become a man of fashion, in a wild way. He wore a short Mexican jacket ablaze with gold lace. Silver conchos gleamed down the sides of his trouser legs, and on his head was a sombrero which was netted around with jeweler's work.

He greeted them with a cordial wave of the hand and called:

"Jim Gore, I am glad to see you! Very glad! I have had my men looking for you. And your friend I am glad to see also."

"A Señor Estaban," said Pedro Blas.

"My countryman," said Ramirez, "you are very welcome. I am engaged in a work in which I can use strong men, señor, and brave men."

"My friend Estaban," smiled Señor Blas, "was about to exchange bullets

with six of our men. Luckily I was in the party."

The fine eyes of Ramirez flashed up and down the form of The Doctor.

"I think that you have saved the blood of several of our friends, Pedro," said he. "Señor Estaban, I am still more glad to have you with us!"

And he shook hands most cordially with the tall man.

"And yet," he added, scanning Estaban, "not truly Mexican, I think?"

"And not truly American," said The Doctor grimly. "I am afloat between two nations. A man without a country, if you wish to put it that way. But what is this work of yours in which you could use us?"

"I have brought to San Filipo," said Ramirez, "a number of brave fellows to guard the town, which I have recently bought, land and buildings."

He smiled to illustrate the last word, and waved genially toward the shattered wreck of a house which surrounded the patio.

"And what," said The Doctor, "is worth guarding in it?"

"You have come directly to the point! What there is worth guarding in it, I do not know. But I trust that I shall find out. And in the meantime, I have hopes, of course, or else I should not have hired so many first-class men—and fighters!"

"Something worth fighting for," said The Doctor, "is usually gold or silver. But that is your own affair. How could you use Gore and myself?"

"As I use the others. No, señor, as I speak with you, I see that I might be able to use you in a larger way. It is necessary that there should be some lieutenants in so many men!"

"And the pay?" said The Doctor calmly.

"Five dollars a day and food."

"Five dollars?"

"Or ten to an exceptional man like yourself, señor."

"This is very kind."

"Not at all. I intend to spend freely, because I hope to make great returns. That is a matter of course, unless I were a fool. In the meantime, what do you decide?"

"To take it under advisement," said the careless Doctor. "I have never been a hired man. But we'll think it over—eh, Jim?"

The latter obediently nodded. In this affair, which was becoming momentarily more complicated, he felt that the only thing he could do was to follow the lead of his more active-minded comrade.

"Señor Ramirez?" called a man, entering the patio.

"I am here, Gonzales."

"We have ridden the rounds to the north and found that two of the people have been trying to come back into the town."

"And you?"

"We turned them and herded them down the valley a little distance."

He laughed mischievously as he came into the light of the fire—a swart, bow-legged, scar-faced Mexican of middle age.

"And then——" He began, but here he caught sight of the face of The Doctor, and he leaped back with a cry of alarm.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRIENDLY MEETING.

OH, the little world!" murmured The Doctor. "We meet again, Gonzales, my friend."

"Merciful Heaven watch over us!" breathed Gonzales. "It is Estaban!"

"Old friends, then?" said Ramirez, regarding the pair curiously.

"Sacred devil," gasped Gonzales, still backing away and pulling nervously at his lone, sparse black mustaches. "This cannot be he!"

"Ah, yes, my dear Gonzales," said the tall man. "It is I. But let me prove

it. When I was last with you, I made you a promise, did I not?"

"Señor?"

"I shall fulfill the promise now! I was to take you by your mustaches, and wag your head for you, Gonzales, in the presence of other men. And now the time has come, *amigo mio!*"

And he glided a long step toward Gonzales.

"Señor," snarled Gonzales, "I give you a true warning—you see that I am armed!"

"Gentle Gonzales! And I, also—but keep your hand from your gun or your knife. Otherwise there will be a dead Gonzales, and not simply a shamed dog of a Gonzales to-morrow!"

"Señor!" broke in Pedro Blas. "What will you do?"

"Keep from between us!" said Estaban curtly. "It is a line of danger—is it not, Gonzales!"

And, with a sudden forward leap, he reached Gonzales with his long arm and seized the droop mustaches with a movement of incredible swiftness.

The cry of rage and of shame from the Mexican was mingled with a still greater share of terror.

"Friends—to me—to my help!" he screamed. "The devil himself has me!"

But though he gripped both his guns, and even drew them half out of the holsters, still he did not fully expose them, but let them fall back into their guards and merely caught with both hands at the strong wrist of The Doctor.

It was such a frightful thing that the blood of Jim Gore ran cold. And he, looking askance at the faces of the others, saw them fairly trembling and white with shame and disgust—and with fear also. For Gonzales was a known man. Of all the bravos who had accepted the money of Señor Ramirez to come north to San Filipo, none had a record so long and so dangerous as had this Gonzales. And yet he submitted himself, without even attempting to use a weapon, to the most horrible degradation.

For The Doctor, keeping his grip upon the mustaches of the Mexican, wagged his head back and forth with savage jerks, while he said through his teeth:

"It was by firelight that I made the promise, Gonzales. And there were other men standing near us. I, then, weak as a new-born infant, covered with my blood—I then promised you, Gonzales, that if I lived I should treat you in this fashion. For why should I kill you? Why, Gonzales? When to live and to be despised as a cur is more terrible?"

He gave a final wrench which twisted the wretched Gonzales entirely around.

"So live and be shamed till you die like a starved dog in a gutter!" said The Doctor in a great, terrible voice.

And he stepped back from his work.

Gonzales whirled back toward his tormentor—whirled with his arms flung up as though either to leap at the throat of the big man or else pour forth dreadful curses. Next he clutched the butts of his guns, but The Doctor, with his arms folded, smiled calmly upon him, and the iron of that derisive glance went into the soul of the Mexican. His convulsed face twisted to grief and to shame, and, turning again, he stumbled from the patio with sobs and moans tearing his throat.

The Doctor watched him go, and then laughed, and Jim Gore felt that that laughter was more horrible than all which he had seen in the scene before.

"It is really enough," said The Doctor. "I knew it at the time, as I lay fluttering like a bird's wings between death and life. I knew it then—that there was one way in which I could make this Gonzales repay me. Because what is death? What is blood? And what is agony, compared with this?"

He turned to the others.

"Do you agree with me, my friends?"

There was no answer.

More frightful than the humiliation of Gonzales was the knowledge that that man of battle had not dared to lift a hand in his own defense. And they stared at The Doctor with a mingled aversion and respect.

"You see?" said The Doctor to Ramirez. "It would not do for me to help you in this work of yours, Señor Ramirez. Your men look at me with an ugly eye!"

"Señor Estaban," said Ramirez coldly, "they have seen a very ugly thing just now!"

"That is as you wish to look at it," replied The Doctor. "For my part, I may say that this has been a very pleasant meeting. A new friend has been made"—here he waved to Ramirez—"and an old debt has been paid. But I suppose that the best thing I can do now is to leave San Filipo and go my way."

"Señor," said Ramirez, as coldly as before, "I shall not dispute with you in this matter. I fear that you are right."

"Adios, then, Señor Ramirez. I wish you luck in your work. I shall come to wish it to you again later on."

"Do not, if you please," said the handsome youth. "For I must tell you that Gonzales has many friends in San Filipo. And they will not receive the news of what has happened to-night very calmly. If you were to return, I might find them quite beyond any control of mine!"

The Doctor smiled.

"Although you would strive your best to contain them," he suggested ironically.

"By all means," said Ramirez, looking him calmly in the eye.

"I understand you very well, señor."

"We are clear to one another, I believe," said Ramirez in his former tone.

"Adios, Señor Ramirez."

"Adios, señor."

"Ramirez," said Jim Gore, "I'm sorry that there's been what looks like a fallin' out between you and my partner, Estaban."

The eyes of the young Mexican opened a little.

"But is he really a partner of yours?" he asked.

"Him and me are hand in glove," said the miner heartily.

"Is it possible!" murmured Ramirez. "But you are not leaving with him?"

"Me? Why, Ramirez, I got to go where my partner goes."

But here he received a swift glance from The Doctor, a look so impregnated with meaning, that it said as plainly as words: "Stay with them for a while at least—and then come after me if you will."

So, as the tall man walked from the patio, the miner lingered unwillingly behind.

"But," went on Ramirez smoothly, "I know that you are not growing rich from your work on the mountain, Señor Gore, and I have a job here which needs the eye of a good miner, perhaps. Do you understand? I could make it very much worth your while to stay with me!"

"The mine ain't much," protested Gore, playing the part which had been assigned to him by his departed companion, "but it looked to me to-day as though the vein was sort of opening up."

"I tell you," said Ramirez patiently, "that my work in San Filipo will not require more than a single week, I hope. Could you not leave the mine for a single week, my friend?"

"A week is seven days," said Gore sententiously.

"And at what rate would you hold yourself?"

"I dunno that I've figgered it out," said Gore.

"For the week, amigo, a hundred dollars in gold!"

Jim Gore started. It was higher pay than he had ever dreamed of before.

"A hundred dollars!" he echoed.

"All of that, and if we have luck which your work helps us toward, there will be a bonus—of ten times that much. A hundred dollars certainly—and the hope of a thousand, Señor Gore!"

"But," said Gore weakly, "there's the mine and my stuff in it!"

"I'll send men to-morrow—or up with you to-night, if you wish—and they shall bring down everything that belongs to you. Will that do?"

It seemed to Gore that this golden proposal fenced him round about and that there was no way in which he could withdraw from the temptation. But here a timely interruption gave him a chance to rally his scattered wits.

For a horseman came to the entrance of the patio, stopped his pony with a violence that flung the poor beast back on its haunches, and then ran into the open space with the wisps of dust cloud which the horse had raised clinging about him.

"Ah, my friends," gasped this man, "have I heard a true thing?"

"It is true!" said some one.

"It was Estaban himself?"

"Yes."

"Heaven give him to our hands. We shall overtake him!"

And he whirled about to race from the patio when the voice of Ramirez, raised to a clarion strength and clearness, stopped him.

"What is your name?"

"Porfirio Vega, señor."

"You are a friend, then, of Gonzales?"

"I am his half brother!"

"And you know this Estaban?"

"I know that devil—yes!"

"Then you shall not ride after him, but stay here to tell us a little about him!"

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

EDUCATION OF NAVAJO CHILDREN

A PROGRAM of education for Indian children on the Navajo reservation in New Mexico and Arizona was inaugurated with the opening this fall of a large government school at Fort Wingate, New Mexico. The institution, known as the Charles H. Burke School, began the fall term with an enrollment of two hundred children. Within a few months, the capacity is to be increased to four hundred Indian pupils. Present plans provide for a faculty composed of a superintendent and seven teachers, but this also will be increased as time goes on. Congress appropriated fifty-five thousand dollars for the school's maintenance during the current fiscal year. The institution is a boarding school, as the distances on the Navajo reservation are so great that pupils cannot attend school during the day and return to their homes at night.

The site of the school is the old Fort Wingate military post, once used as a station for soldiers before the settlement of the West. The post was transferred two years ago from the war department to the department of the interior for use as a school for Indians. Expenditures amounting to approximately $350,000 were made by Congress in converting the barracks, quarters, and other structures into school buildings and dormitories for pupils.

Lift the Latch

By Frank Triem

Author of "Out of the Frying Pan," etc.

SHORT and deep-chested, and with a voice like his namesake, "Bullfrog" Kerrigan set down the fork he was wielding above the skillet on the little cook stove and turned inquiringly to a corner of his cabin. Upon the silence of the mountains—a silence broken only by the far-off roar of the wind through the tall firs and the spatter of grease in his frying pan—had intruded a new sound. It was the metallic jangle of a telephone.

Bullfrog crossed to the instrument and picked up the receiver. "Yeowp?" he croaked.

The voice of the storekeeper at Mountain Meadows, a good forty miles away, came to Kerrigan's ears. He listened for a long time in complete silence; but, as the other concluded, Bullfrog's heavy, sagacious face grew perturbed until he looked much like a worried bloodhound. "Y'say this here strangler person is headed my way?" he inquired eventually. He is, is he? All right, Zeke—Thanks."

He hung up and, oblivious of the smoking skillet on the stove, crossed to the door. He flung the panel open, and, for a time, stood there, staring unseeingly at the buildings of the Sansdun Mine Corporation. For five long months he had guarded them without seeing another human being save for the few visits of the man who brought his supplies. But now it looked as if he were due for a little excitement. Beyond the snow-capped mountains the sun went down in a blaze of red. The wind that came at him out of the north was chill with the menace of approaching winter. Bullfrog shivered a trifle disconsolately and reëntered his cabin.

Kerrigan was still considering the warning that had just come to him when he picked up the coffee can. It was very

light, he noted absently; and, when he peered in, he saw that there was enough left for three or four days at the most.

"Reckon I'll ring up Zeke and tell him I'll be needing more," Kerrigan told himself. "Some one might be coming by this way, and, anyhow, I want to find out more about this strangler person."

He crossed to the instrument and took down the receiver. He cranked industriously at a little handle protruding from the case. Nothing happened; and, with a frown on his heavy features, Bullfrog twisted it again. The receiver at his ear gave out no whisper of sound. Three times he tried before at last he hung up and turned back to the stove. Somewhere along the forty miles between him and civilization, the line had gone dead. The mishap had occurred within the last five minutes, Kerrigan realized. The question was—had it been an accident, or had the wires been cut?

The uneasy look on Bullfrog Kerrigan's dark face grew more pronounced as he turned and peered at the door.

After he had been recognized and had fled from Mountain Meadows, Philip Medoci, who was known in the dark underworld of a big city as "The Strangler," had wandered about the hills for a time trying to decide what to do. Medoci was a giant of a man with wintry gray eyes and something inhuman about his face; but, in spite of his powerful physique, there was a vague quality of flabbiness to him.

He had made his laborious way from one bleak range of hills to another until he was most thoroughly and completely lost. Not that that mattered particularly, he told himself; for The Strangler was a wanted man, a man with a price on his head. He was better off among these forgotten hills and valleys than he had been back in civilization. But still—"I got to find some place to hang my hat or I'll freeze to death!" he rumbled, as he made his way through a tall growth of virgin fir. "Shelter and food—unless I find 'em I'll croak. There must be places out here."

Although the sun had just set in the west the atmosphere of the hills was bitterly cold. Snow was on the higher peaks; and, away to the north, the solitary man perceived an army of gray clouds banked. With a series of hearty curses the big fellow went stumbling down a slope. And then he found himself standing upon a road—an old road that obviously had been long disused. He could see the tracks of some hooved animal, paneled in a place where the way was of hard-packed clay; but he realized that they must have been made sometime when the earth was wet—the previous spring, probably.

"I can't be no worse off following this cow trail than hiking over them infernal hills," Medoci told himself. "It must go somewhere. Although I don't reckon there can be much at the other end."

Before The Strangler had advanced many hundred yards, however, he caught sight of something that made him halt with a scowl on his harsh face. Paralleling the road fifty yards or so distant he saw a wire—a single wire—obviously used for telephone communication.

"There must be people living out here, after all!" Medoci decided. "And if they've got a phone—if they hear I'm around—I may stumble into something bad. I'll just 'tend to this now."

So the big man scrambled down a rocky incline to the tree on which the wire was suspended, scaled it with much difficulty, and managed to hack the line in two. After that he descended and continued on his way. Only now he was more cautious in his advance; he scanned the clearings ahead carefully before venturing into them. Philip Medoci was taking no chances.

The Strangler spent that night in a deserted tie-cutter's cabin, standing at the edge of a clearing whose grass, yellowed by months of summer heat, reminded him of fine-spun gold wire. There wasn't so much as a shred of blanket in which he could wrap himself, but he shivered through the cold autumn night surrounded with dried leaves and twigs. In the morning he arose, dusted himself off, and left the building. This was the second day in which he had had nothing to eat, and he was beginning to notice the omission.

Through the long hours of a chill, sunless morning, Medoci plodded forward along the old road, stopping but seldom. Once he found a small tree on which still hung a few clusters of little black berries; but, when he tried to eat them, he found that even his hungry stomach rebelled. They were dried-out and bitter beyond belief. With a grunt of disgust he strode on along the forgotten road.

And all the while the country was getting wilder, more broken, and desolate. Deep, somber valleys into which the sunlight would seldom penetrate even in summer, and jagged plateaus, and towering crags were strewn all about the killer. Wild life was thick and unafraid. Once he saw a group of deer —two does and two fawns—watching him curiously from a little ledge a scant seventy-five yards distant. Philip Medoci drew his automatic pistol, then hesitated. He was badly in need of food; but he had few shells, and he didn't think he could hit one of the animals. So he finally re-holstered the weapon and continued on his march.

And then, somewhere in the late afternoon, he reached a point where the old road ended. Buildings had once been here, the crude frame buildings of an old logging camp; but they had long since disintegrated into moldering ruins. The roof of what had been the mess hall was fallen in, and The Strangler noted a tangle of poison ivy growing out of the window.

"This ain't no place for me to hang out," he told himself. "I got to find food and shelter—but that telephone wire? I reckon it can't have come all this way just to connect a deserted camp. I'll foller it and see where it goes."

So Medoci retraced his steps along the old road a hundred yards or so, until his eyes discerned the single strand where it left the road and cut up over a ridge. And after that he put in two hours of the most strenuous climbing he had ever known, with the black cord overhead leading him on and deeper into the wilderness. Medoci began to despair of ever reaching its termination.

It was yet an hour or so from sundown when he stumbled into a narrow trail leading along the edge of a precipitous bluff. Careful inspection of the dried earth showed him that at some previous date a pack train had been along here; but obviously the trail was seldom used. The telephone wire followed it, however; and, with a dubious shake of his head, Medoci struck into the path. The sun dropped against the edge of the horizon, and its round, red face was flattened. Lower and yet lower it dropped; a weird crimson glow flickered upon the rocks, the trees, the solitary man's brooding face. The glow flickered and vanished. Dusk was at hand.

And then, even as The Strangler was girding up his spirits for another night without shelter, he stumbled out upon the edge of a deep valley. The telephone wires fell down the embankment before him. Next second he made out through the thickening gloom the forms of buildings—three or four big buildings, with empty, staring windows and cold chimneys, and a smaller cabin perched on the opposite side of the valley. From the length of stovepipe protruding from one wall of this latter structure rose a lazy curl of smoke.

Temporarily setting all caution aside, Philip Medoci proceeded at a stumbling run down the side of the valley. He galloped past the deserted buildings, one of which bore the label of a great mining corporation, and was advancing toward the cabin. His hand was on his gun, and his cold, glacial eyes were narrowed to slits. Hunger had accentuated a natural ferocity until The Strangler was in a mood to kill with or without provocation.

His heart was beating a trifle more heavily than usual, but he was outwardly calm as he made his way up to the door of the cabin. Here he halted, listening intently; but no sound came from within. He perceived a length of rawhide thong protruding through a small hole at the margin of the panel. It was the latchstring, he told himself. He took a step forward, yanked at the thong—and the door swung open before him.

It didn't take The Strangler long to convince himself that the cabin was empty. He also perceived that it hadn't been so for very long—probably not more than ten minutes. The remains of a supper were still steaming on the little pine table; the fire in the cook stove flickered cheerfully. With great haste Mr. Medoci seated himself at the table and began to devour what was left of a small roast. He threw the fork from him and fell to work with nature's implements. When he had finished he wiped his fingers on his shirt front and got to his feet.

The Strangler peered curiously about him. The little cabin, he saw, was neatly furnished. It was obviously the headquarters of a single man—the mine watchman, probably. But, as the interloper inspected the place, an idea came to him. He had often read about such things—people who lived by themselves in these desolate regions mining and storing gold, just to be doing something. There was a chance, he told himself, that a search of the cabin might disclose something of value.

"There ain't no harm in trying, anyway!" he told himself. "But first I got to fix it so's no one can walk in on me—bar the door, or something."

He crossed to the panel and inspected it carefully. It was secured from within by a heavy bar, hinged at one end, and with the other sliding up and down in cleats. To this latter end was fastened the rawhide thong which, pulled from outside, lifted the bar and permitted the door to open. Medoci saw that by drawing, the thong inside the door it would be effectively locked against any who might wish to enter. He did so with a rumbling laugh. Then he set about ransacking the cabin.

But ten minutes later The Strangler gave up the hunt, angry and dissatisfied. He had convinced himself that there was nothing of value here, and all his work had been for nothing. With a growl he seated himself upon a chair. And then, abruptly, he turned and peered at the door. To his ears had just come the sound of deliberate steps. Some one was approaching the cabin.

Philip Medoci realized as he crossed swiftly to the entrance and stood considering, that the newcomer couldn't get in unless he himself opened the door; what would be the best thing for him to do?

On came the steps; and at last The Strangler reached a decision. With narrowing eyes he drew forth his automatic and silently lifted the bar holding the panel shut. The approaching individual couldn't be more than six or ten feet distant. Another step, and another—with a jerk Medoci drew the door open.

In that first second of mutual inspection the killer perceived he was facing an amazingly short and barrel-chested little man, with deep-set, twinkling eyes, and whiskers that were short and thick. Next instant, before Medoci could press the trigger of his weapon, the big six-

shooter the other was holding exploded. He felt his gun wrenched from his hand while his whole arm went numb. He glanced down in vague surprise.

A booming voice much like the croak of a bullfrog reached his ears. "Queer way of greeting folks you drop in on, ain't it?" his captor inquired. "You'd oughta left the latchstring out, mister. I knowed, when I seen it pulled in, some one was hyar. Just back up an' set down. I'm itching to make talk with you!"

In a murderous silence Philip Medoci retreated into Bullfrog Kerrigan's cabin and seated himself upon a chair. His big hands clenched and unclenched.

Bullfrog advanced easily, his gun muzzle covering his uninvited guest. Medoci noted, with sudden hope, that Kerrigan handled the gun almost carelessly. Once he thought he saw an opening; but, even as his muscles tensed for a spring, the little man with the big voice was again on the alert.

And then the thing The Strangler had been hoping for happened. Kerrigan was advancing into the room in the general direction of the kitchen table when an old pair of overalls Medoci had flung upon the floor became entangled in his feet. He stumbled—growled a profane remark—and went to his knees.

With a spring like that of a leaping panther, the killer was upon him. Kerrigan tried to retrieve his gun; but one of Medoci's big hands grasped his wrist, and he couldn't. With the other hand Medoci had Kerrigan's throat in a mighty grasp. Powerful as Bullfrog was, he was helpless. He struggled and threw himself about; The Strangler merely grunted and tightened his grasp. Once only the little man succeeded in landing on his opponent's jaw. The blow made the big fellow's head whirl, but he managed to retain his hold.

The battle had been in progress a scant two minutes when the combatants suddenly went over sidewise. Bullfrog was underneath; and, as Medoci came down upon him, there sounded a sickening snap. Kerrigan's eyes protruded, and he managed to wheeze something; but he was fast losing strength. Thirty seconds later he was limp, only twitching a trifle.

Philip Medoci kept up his strangling grasp, a little longer, then got to his feet and stood looking down. He was still dizzy and confused from that crack on the jaw but he noticed that one of his opponent's legs was doubled under him at an unnatural angle, and he remembered that snap. He decided that the other's leg was broken.

The Strangler stared curiously at the hand out of which Kerrigan had shot the automatic. For the first time he perceived that it was dripping and red. He glanced about the cabin but could see no water. He turned toward the open door and strode out into the night.

"I got to wash this hand and get my head cleared up so I can think straight!" he told himself. "I wonder where the pump is? Probably around in back, somewheres——"

The wind that came at him out of the north was freezing cold, he noticed absently. He plunged into it and reached the corner of the cabin. Next instant Medoci halted and whirled as, from somewhere behind him, there came a thud. He relaxed as he perceived that it was only the cabin door which had blown shut.

And then an oath escaped his lips, and he sprang toward the entrance. For he had noticed something else; the latchstring, which he had pulled in nearly an hour before, was still as he had left it. The door was barred. Philip Medoci was locked out.

For a long time he stood before the closed panel, staring at it while he tried fully to comprehend just what this meant. And he came to realize that he was locked out of the only place that afforded food and shelter, so far as he

knew, within forty miles. At last he roused from his stupor. He strode up to the door and pounded violently upon it.

"Let me in, you little runt!" he howled. "You ain't dead, you know. Let me in!"

There was no answer. Three times he repeated his command before finally there came a low moan. With his teeth chattering under the bite of the north wind, Medoci crouched close to the door, his ear pressed to it. Again he called, and at last there came a pain-wracked reply.

"I can't let you in—can't even move. You've busted my leg!"

The Strangler spent the next ten minutes seated upon a stump near the door. It was fully dark, now; somewhere in the black woods hemming the valley sounded the quavering cry of a night bird. The big man didn't know it was a bird, however; and his scalp tingled with sudden fear. He leaped to his feet and began to circle the cabin in search of an entrance. There was only one window; and he saw he wouldn't be able even to stick his head through. Moreover, it was so high in the wall that he couldn't reach it without standing on something, and he perceived that it was barred from inside. A groan escaped his writhing lips. Medoci told himself that unless he found something heavy with which to batter the door in he would never again enter that cabin.

At last The Strangler desisted from his fruitless endeavors and turned away. He had just remembered the mine buildings in the valley below him. It had occurred to him that he might there find tools, or at the very least, shelter from the north wind. So he went stumbling down through the sticky blackness to where the main works were located. And here again disappointment awaited him; for one after another he found the doors securely padlocked and the windows barred. Apparently the big man was due to spend the night in the open.

But the last building he came to was more promising. As he examined the door by the flickering light of a match, he saw that the hasp through which the padlock was fastened had corroded until it was a slender thread of rusty iron.

The Strangler drew back a few feet, gathered himself, and lunged forward. There sounded a dull snap; the panel banged open before him, and he landed inside on his hands and knees. He got to his feet and hastily closed the door. The air, he noticed, was heavy and musty with the smell of paper. He fumbled for another match, found, and scratched it. By its yellow flare he perceived he was in the mine office. Half a dozen desks stood about, reminding him of huge spiders; there were several filing cabinets and a few chairs. Nevertheless its very emptiness oppressed him. Strangely enough, he felt watched, spied upon. It was almost as if the absence of any other living being made him glance up at the desks, half expecting to find some one there.

Philip Medoci spent that night on the floor in the office. He was sheltered from the wind; but the cold came at him nevertheless. Morning found him so chilled that he could scarcely stand up; and he was incredibly hungry. In the uncertain light of daybreak the killer inspected the building. He saw that it was the smallest of the lot, and he searched in vain for something with which to break down the heavy door of the cabin. There was absolutely nothing that could be used as a battering-ram, and at last he made his way out into the chilly dawn. He traversed the hundred yards separating the office from Kerrigan's cabin and reseated himself on the stump near the door.

The Strangler's thoughts were in a hopeless jumble, and his mind refused to work as it should. He realized that he was much weaker than he had been even

the night before; his whole body ached dully. The cabin was silent with a silence that was ominous and menacing. More and more he found himself wondering what lay behind the barred door.

And then the big man stiffened. Had he imagined it, he asked himself—or had he really heard a muffled groan from within? He got to his feet and made his way unsteadily across to the panel. Sinking to his knees before it he pressed his ear to the rough wood. If he had really heard something it didn't repeat itself; and at last, with an uneasy shake of the head, Medoci got to his feet. He regarded the cabin with growing dread.

A little later Medoci eyed the length of stovepipe protruding from the wall just under the rafters with a speculative regard. There was a faint haze of smoke whipping from it, and he asked himself whether the fire had kept going without additional fuel all night. If not, the smoke meant that it had been replenished.

He presently went back to his stump and dropped wearily upon it. A red sun had come above the eastern horizon —a sun that gave out light but no heat. The killer had long since ceased to feel the cold, and he was aware of it now only as a numbing pain that enveloped him.

And then Medoci had an idea. Why not find something to stand on and take a look through the window? He could at least see how things were inside the cabin, and it might be that he could rig up some way of pulling the latchstring from outside. It was worth trying, he told himself. So The Strangler hunted about until he had found an empty barrel. With considerable labor he brought this and up-ended it under the window. He climbed upon it——

Before he could raise his head to the level of the sill the silence was broken in a dramatic manner. It started as a low moan, not six feet away from him; rising swiftly to a babbling laugh, it ended with an inhuman scream. For an instant all was silent; then there sounded a heavy thud.

Without waiting to see what was inside the cabin, Medoci leaped from the barrel and ran stumblingly away. His flesh was still quivering with the cold fear that had assailed him; his mind, twisted and warped by hunger and exposure, was beginning to trick him. He told himself that he had killed the man in the cabin—that the other was dead. And this babbling thing was what was left. He tripped and landed on his hands and knees when he had gone some sixty yards from the building. Here The Strangler remained for a time, while his heart thudded at his ribs, and the earth revolved slowly about him. But later he again caught the muttering of that inhuman voice; he got to his feet and ran until he could no longer hear the thing that frightened him.

And so evening found Philip Medoci hovering like a gaunt-eyed specter about the cabin from which he had barred himself, afraid to come close, and afraid to leave the place. His movements were noticeably weaker than they had been that morning; he started convulsively at the least noise, and often he glanced behind him.

Seated a hundred yards or so up the side of the valley from the cabin the big man watched the sun drop into a bed of crimson fire. After it was gone he got to his feet and began to approach the building. He was trying to decide where to spend the night. He couldn't sleep in the open; and he did not want to go back to the office. He glanced unseeingly about him.

Next moment The Strangler remembered something. There was a deserted shaft seventy-five yards back of the cabin; a twisted live oak grew before it, and it was sheltered from the north wind. He had discovered it some time earlier in the day; it seemed to him now

that the mouth of this passage would be just the place to sleep.

So he stumbled up to the entrance to the mine and made his way in. It was very chilly here, but the wind was barred from him, and Medoci found a thick bed of leaves already prepared for him. He dropped wearily down and sat with his back to the side of the shaft, staring out into the thickening twilight. Temporarily, hunger was overruled by the need of sleep, and a little later the big man stretched out at full length and closed his eyes.

He awoke to find himself sitting bolt upright, staring out of dilated eyes into the night. It was late, he told himself; through the snaky branches of the live oak he perceived the glowing disk of the three-quarters moon. The yellow moonlight lay in penciled traceries upon the floor of his retreat.

But it wasn't this that had brought Philip Medoci, feared even by notorious gunmen and gangsters, out of a sound sleep with his scalp quivering. As he gripped his automatic he told himself that there had come a sound—a quavering, unearthly laugh—from somewhere close at hand. He turned his head and peered back into the mine. Although he could see nothing he had a queer feeling that he was being watched. Precipitately he got to his feet and advanced from the mouth of the shaft.

Next instant he shrank back. Below him was the cabin, and again that awful laughter was on the air of the valley. Medoci clenched his teeth to keep from crying out and glared about him like a wolf in the bite of a trap. Finally the killer seated himself on a low rock with his back to the trunk of the tree. Another of those laughs, he told himself, and he would go crazy.

But the sound wasn't repeated. All the rest of the night Medoci crouched on his rock, his teeth chattering; and morning found him mumbling to himself. The flare of delirium burned in his hollow eyes. He got to his feet, finally, and turned slowly toward the cabin. He took one faltering step, and another. Then his legs gave way beneath him, and he landed in a limp heap.

But at last, drawn by some urge deep within him, The Strangler dragged himself around in front of the little building. The red sunlight of early morning played about him; it tinged the walls of the structure with pale fire and cast blue-black shadows behind everything. Medoci stared unseeingly about him, then licked his lips.

Twice he awakened from a sort of stupor before the sun began to sink into the west. He realized that he was lying at full length, twenty or thirty paces from the barred door. His whole body was tingling in a curious manner; and, when he tried to sit up, he couldn't. So Medoci lay there; and presently his own voice broke the silence—babbling, now, like that tongue he had heard within the cabin. He could feel black things hovering about him that shunned the light of day and sanity.

It was along toward sunset when, momentarily, his delirium deserted him and he could think clearly. Philip Medoci managed to turn his head toward the door of the cabin. Upon the utter silence of the valley had come the sound of stealthy movements from within the building. At that, all his fears returned anew. The Strangler shrieked and cursed; he tried to turn his head from the cabin or to look some other way. But his eyes were drawn almost hypnotically to the panel.

Something was approaching the door—something inside. He heard the fumbling footsteps come to a halt; through a red haze saw the panel begin to swing inward. The door opened. But before Medoci saw what stood in it—before he caught the rumbling, sardonic laugh that broke the stillness—merciful oblivion

relieved him. He shuddered and went limp.

The Strangler came to a long time later. He realized in a dull sort of way that he was lying between blankets in a bunk, and that a stove crackled cheerily near at hand. Heavy voices reached his ears.

"——but y'see, sheriff, my leg wasn't busted at all!" came one voice. "I sprained my ankle, all right; and I knowed he'd kill me when he found I was still alive. So when he went out I managed to give the door a kick; it banged shut, and he was locked out.

"After that it was a cinch. A' course I could have got the drop on him with a gun, but I figured this way was easier. I knowed you'd be along when Zeke Stubbins phoned me Medoci was somewhere hereabouts. I just left him out there by hisself until my ankle got so's I could walk.

"It was easy as pie. The only thing that bothered me was the show I had to put up. I could see he was gettin' kinda scary—the hills ain't partic'larly pleasant to be in alone, even when a feller's well fed an' has a good conscience. But I'm plumb hoarse from having to holler an' take on so much!"

STATE FLOWERS OF THE WEST

Bitterroot—Montana

FROM the simple friend of the Indians, the ornament of the primeval wilderness, the bitterroot has risen to the position of chosen flower of Montana, and has given its name to a mountain range, a river, and the famous Bitterroot Valley.

The latter, a great depression separating the Bitterroot Mountains from the Rockies, was a favored spot long before the coming of the white men. Within its sheltered heart the snows melted early, and against its walls the great storms beat less fiercely. Spring smiled more gently here, and answering smiles seemed to gladden the slopes when the bitterroot held up its brilliant chalice to catch the sunshine.

To the Indians the plant was more than an object of beauty. Their brown outer covering removed, the fleshy roots could be dried for food. Dissolved in water and heated, these roots became a nutritious starchy paste. For this they were highly valued by the savages.

Somewhat like the cactus blossom in appearance, the bitterroot has a large, showy flower of an exquisite rose-red shade. Botanists have been at a loss to classify the plant. It resembles most closely the garden portulaca, a native of the hot plains of Brazil.

Growing best in a dry sandy soil, the plant may be found without the limits of Montana, though nowhere else does it flourish so well. It is most plentiful along the Lewis and Bitterroot Rivers.

The lovely flower was closely associated with the history of the Treasure State. Its beauty was a glad welcome to the early settlers, and in 1895 the legislature of Montana elected the eager-faced blossom to the place of supreme honor as floral queen of the State.

The Iron Trail

By Max Brand

Author of "The Border Bandit's Prize," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

SHERIFF CLIFF MATTHEWS is a very lenient officer, but when Eddie Clewes, debonair and attractive confidence man, comes to town and begins to practice his game on a reputable lawyer in the community, the sheriff takes action. Eddie is led off to jail. There he bets the sheriff that he will escape despite all precautions. He makes good the boast and hops a freight train that is passing through the town.

Leaving the train in the morning, Eddie strikes out through the woods and comes upon the camp of a dangerous criminal named McKenzie. Eddie ingratiates himself with this murderer and stays in his camp. A third crook joins the party, and, as this chap is unfriendly to McKenzie, Eddie is able, by the use of his wits, to provoke a quarrel between the two. The fight ends with the death of the two, and Eddie is left in posession of the loot of the latest comer, which proves to be two hundred thousand dollars in cash, which has been stolen from the bank of a near-by town.

As Eddie is examining the plunder he is interrupted by an armed posse, which acclaims him a hero, believing him to have vanquished the two crooks single-handed. The posse takes Eddie—who gives his name as Larned—into the town, where he is received with ovations and accepted into the heart and home of Colonel Exeter, the president of the bank. The colonel's son has been murdered by McKenzie, so the old man is particularly pleased at the death of the latter.

In his new quarters comes to Eddie, "Dandy" Dick Pritchard, who is after the Exeter jewels, valued at half a million dollars. He enlists Eddie in his nefarious cause, and they agree to try for the gems together—or rather Eddie is to do the work and split with Pritchard for his information.

Dolly, the colonel's daughter, distrusts the charming "Larned" from the first, and determines to betray him by engaging his affections and making him talk for love of her. This plan she has already begun to carry out when you begin the story this week.

CHAPTER XV.

ARCHIE M'KENZIE TAKES THE TRAIL.

THERE were no more sentimentalities to be extracted from Mr. Clewes on this occasion. His attitude had changed as suddenly and as decisively as that of a sleeping wolf, when up the wind comes the scent of "bear." He was awakened now, and it was all that clever Dolly Exeter could do to maintain her own dreamy attitude, or to slip slowly from it back to a normal wide-awakeness by the time the canoe touched the shore. For Mr. Clewes had suddenly recalled something that made it necessary for him to return to the house.

And it seemed that a premonition had been working in him, for when he reached the house it was to find none

other than Sheriff "Boots" Askew waiting impatiently for him.

Dolly Exeter left them together, and five minutes later her horse was flicking her over fences as she took the straightest cut across country toward the house of Oliver Portman.

She found him supervising the building of the skeleton of a barn, and he walked along beside her toward the house.

"It worked better than I could have hoped—better than I dreamed, Oliver!" she told him. "But, oh, it was a dangerous business!"

"Dolly," said the big man with a touch of sadness, "this is the worst thing I've ever heard from you. I wouldn't believe it from any other person. You don't mean, though, that you've been really—er—sentimental with Larned?"

"Don't I mean it, though?" she flashed back at him, and then with a sigh: "I was trembling in my boots! There's nobody else like him! He's just as sharp and as keen as a wolf's tooth. And I could only keep up the play-acting by sort of pretending, Oliver, that I was on a stage—you understand?—and that there was an audience out there to watch—and to applaud if I did the thing well! But all the while I could feel his mind working at me, puzzling over me, trying to understand why I had been one thing last night and another thing to-day. And sometimes it seemed that he came perilously close to guessing!"

Oliver stared at the ground and kicked a stone viciously from his path.

"Well?" he said curtly at the last.

"Well, my dear, big, furious Oliver, there was no real harm done. If you have the courage to put your hand between the bars of the cage and pat the head of the tiger—why, it's a reward for courage when you hear the big brute begin to purr and close its eyes, and thrust out its claws into the wooden floor."

"Will you tell me what actually happened?"

"I don't know what did it. Partly because I was playing the game my level best. And partly, I think, because the air was soft and warm, and lazy, and luxurious, and—he began to soften! I didn't have very long. But the instant that I saw the mood working in him, I tried to flatter him into talking about himself. It wasn't easy—but finally he *did!*"

"And said that he was a liar, a thief, a gambler, a robber—all the things that you suspect him of being?" asked Oliver critically.

"Heavens, no! Not a word of that. But I made him talk about himself when he was a boy—and he fell into the trap far enough, finally, to let me learn these little items about him:

"That he was born and raised in Maryland.

"That he was so dreadfully poor that often there was not even bread in the home.

"That he lived in a town on the banks of a river that froze in the middle of the winter.

"That he left that town and never went back to it when he was fifteen years old.

"That, finally, the name of that town began with Comp—C-o-m-p. He pronounced it perfectly — distinctly. I couldn't be wrong. But just in the middle of pronouncing it—why, it was a wonderful thing to see how he recovered himself. They say that a rolling wheel can touch the side of a sleeping wolf—and yet the wolf will waken in time to jump out of harm's way. Well, it was like that. His teeth clicked over the last part of the word. And then he sat there quite out of his dream, glaring at me with dreadful, glittering eyes. It made me positively sick with fear. Positively sick!"

She paused and laid a hand upon the sleeve of Oliver Portman. Then she

went on: "But I managed to stand the strain, and though I presume that he *suspects* that I was pumping him for information, still, I think that he cannot be quite sure. And yet, whatever rascality there may be in his mind, he's apt to rush it through quickly, now, so that we haven't much time to act! We must hurry, Oliver!"

"Hurry to do what? Accuse him of having been poor—and living in a Maryland town which begins with Comp?"

"Oliver, Oliver, Oliver, how can you be such a stupid silly? *Dear* Oliver, don't you see what we must do? We must start to work instantly to find out if there is any little town in Maryland whose name begins with C-o-m-p. And when we find it, then we must send telegrams, instantly, describing Mr. Larned from top to toe and asking if such a young man was raised in a poor family in that town—and what his reputation was in that place."

"Nasty work! Nasty work!" said Mr. Portman. "I don't know that I care to take a hand in this sort of thing—eavesdropping on the secrets of a man's past!"

"If there was nothing to be hidden—if there was nothing worth running down, then tell me why it was that Ned Larned was so shocked when he caught himself giving the name of his native village? And why was it, that all the way to the house he kept probing me with his eyes. Such eyes, Oliver! I have never seen anything like them! Like cold fire—as they say in books. It—it makes me shudder even now, just thinking about it! But—I want you to tell me that you'll go to town and send the telegrams as soon as you've located the place."

"I'd rather cut off an arm," sighed Oliver Portman. "But if you could twist such a person as Larned around your finger, how can *I* possibly hope to hold out against you?"

You may be sure that Mr. "Larned" was no more in the mind of Dolly Exeter than she was in the mind of Mr. "Larned." For, all the way to the house he had been weighing the possibilities of the thing. And he told himself that it really could not be that such a slip of a girl had dared to try to work her wits against his own. He writhed in an agony of doubt and cursed himself for a sleepy daydreamer, for having allowed his tongue so much liberty at such a crisis in his life!

But before his thoughts could dwell too long upon this point, they reached the house and there was the sheriff with such news for him that he could not afford to speculate longer on the wiles of Dolly Exeter.

For the sheriff took him to one side and gave him the whole tidings in a breath.

"Ned, there's bad news for you. The younger brother of Murdoch McKenzie is coming this way for your scalp!"

Eddie Clewes raised his sensitive brows.

"Now?" he asked.

"Just when, I don't know. All I know is that I had a long wire from an old partner of mine, Sheriff Cliff Matthews, over the mountains. And he tells me that the news has come to him that a gent has killed Delehanty and Murdoch McKenzie in a fight, hand to hand, and that he hardly can believe it, and that he wants me to shake hands for him with the winner. But he says that young Archie McKenzie, when he heard about the death of his brother, went raging on the warpath, and put a pint of whiskey under his belt, and polished up his guns, and grabbed his best and toughest horse, and swore that he'd never stop long enough to shave before he had killed Ned Larned! There's the whole packet of news. And here's the telegram that it come in!"

He handed it to Eddie Clewes, and the latter ran his eye through it care-

fully. It merely reiterated what Askew had already told him, and he asked:

"What do you know about young McKenzie?"

"Ah," said the sheriff, "I knew that you'd take it this way. Some of the boys swore that it would only make you laugh, because if you was able to handle two like Delehanty and Murdoch McKenzie at a crack, you'd never bother your head about one like young Archie! But I guessed different. You got a head on your shoulders, old son, and it's a safe bet that you'll think everything over and throw away no chances!"

"Askew," said Eddie Clewes with a heartfelt solemnity, "let me tell you that there's nothing that I hate worse than the mere thought of a gun fight!"

"I knew it," nodded the sheriff with much sympathy. "It takes a brute or a fool to figure the game any other way than that. A brute or a fool or a rattle-headed kid that wants to make himself famous! Now, Ned, what'll we do about this McKenzie?"

"Tell me first what sort of a fellow he is?"

"I don't know him. But you see in the telegram that Cliff Matthews takes it pretty serious. And Cliff is one that knows men. He's got a head on his shoulders. Slow but sure, is old Cliff, I can tell you! Well, sir, I don't know Archie, as I was saying, but I know the McKenzies, and they're a rough lot. There never was a one of them that didn't know how to ride and shoot extra prime. And there was never a one of them that didn't have a sort of a relish for a fight on foot or on horseback, with knife, fist, club, or gun. And so I take it for granted that Archie is one of the same kind, big and strong-handed —though not so strong-handed that he could master a gent that could handle Delehanty and Murdoch at the same minute!"

"Do you know what I wish?" said Eddie Clewes gently.

"Tell me, son, and I'll try my best to help you out."

"Well, this fellow Archie McKenzie has been heard on the far side of the mountains to swear that he would have my scalp."

"Yes."

"And now he's headed for us, ridin' hard and meaning business, no doubt?"

"That's clear."

"Why then, Askew, what's to keep you from putting him under arrest if you can block his way—arrest him and put him in jail for a day or two to cool him off, and then bind him over to keep the peace, you know. But sometimes a sight of the inside of a jail will do a great deal to take the bad humor out of a fighting man!"

The sheriff scratched his chin.

"It seems queer—but there ain't any reason why it can't be done," he said thoughtfully. "You don't mind what folks might be tempted to say when they hear? But no, nobody in this neck of the woods would be fool enough to think that you wanted to dodge Archie McKenzie except because you pitied the poor kid!"

And Sheriff Askew straightaway mounted to return to Culloden, for he was anxious to lay his plans as thoroughly as possible for the interception of young McKenzie.

CHAPTER XVI.

SWEET FORTUNE.

FROM the viewpoint of Eddie Clewes, it was a day thronging full of important events, beginning with that odd talk with Dolly Exeter, and continuing through the warning which Sheriff Askew brought to him, and the next step in his history was when the colonel, returning early from the bank, walked up and down the orchard paths with Eddie and unburdened himself of some novel ideas, which were to the effect that he, the colonel, growing old apace,

had no one near and dear to him whom he could take into his business. And therefore, why should not Ned Larned be the man?

"For, if you consider," said the colonel, "that I have known you only a short time, on the other hand, it is perfectly true that I have known you through extremely important events. If you wish to know a race horse, it's no good walking him in the pasture. And if you wish to know a man, it's no good seeing him for a thousand humdrum days, one after the other. One critical test is worth more than a hundred thousand years of walks and talks. I have the proof of how you were tested, Ned. Besides that, we like one another, don't we? So what more can I ask? Nothing, my boy! So tell me what you think of the plan."

What did Eddie Clewes think of going into a bank and starting in the proverbial way at the bottom, and working his way up, even with help from above to raise him?

But he swallowed his smile. He thanked the colonel with a quiet warmth. He was very tired of wandering, he said. And now a chance to settle down, and with such a friend as the colonel——

As for Colonel Exeter, he was as delighted as a boy. He ran up the stairs and rapped eagerly at the door of Dolly, and when she came he caught both her hands.

"Dolly, my dear," said the colonel, "I've caught him! I've landed him!"

"Landed who?" said Dolly, her heart suddenly falling with a quick premonition.

"Why, Ned, of course. I've talked to him about the bank and banking in general. He's interested. He's tired of wandering about. He only wants to settle down steadily. To-morrow morning we go down the hill together, and I introduce him to his work! Start him at the bottom—that's my scheme, my dear. And now, what do you think of it? You've always accused me of putting mollycoddles and old hens into my bank. Will you call Larned a mollycoddle, my child?"

And he laughed with an extravagant happiness, for in spite of his years and his real dignity, the colonel was a man with a great deal of the child in him. But it was a sharp alarm to Dolly. She drew her father into the room and closed the door and put her back against it, as though she were afraid that he would try to break out again.

"Now, Dolly," he frowned at her. "What's wrong? What's wrong with this scheme of mine?"

"I can't give you any facts, yet," she said, but "you've always trusted a great deal in the instinct of women?"

"Perhaps I have. Well?"

"I can only say this—and I know that it will make you furious—don't trust Ned Larned!"

The colonel stared at her, to make sure it was really his daughter who had said such a thing.

"And not a scruple of taint attaching to him?"

"Nothing real enough to point out, but——"

"Then I don't want to hear you. Slander is a devilish engine, Dolly. Once planted, it works like a disease in the blood. I'm sorry that you've spoken like this to me. I'm mightily sorry. Because now, in spite of myself, I shall not be able to look at Ned without a question. I'll begin to doubt him and question everything that he does. And for nothing! Dolly, tell me frankly—are you saying this because I've made such a fuss over Ned so soon? Are you jealous of him, child?"

Something which might have served for a reasonable base for her suspicions, even in the colonel's mind, had been upon the very lips of Dolly, but he could not have found a surer way of silencing her. She threw up her head, very crimson in the face, and she si-

lently stepped aside for her father to pass out when he would.

And out he went, down-headed, and in silence, as though his fine dream for the future of his bank and his family had already been pricked like a bubble and dissolved away to nothing!

Dinner that night was not a great success, for though both the colonel and his daughter strove to be cheerful, there were shadowy times of quiet when each looked down, and Dolly, with a frown, turned to an emerald bracelet on her wrist.

That bracelet fascinated Mr. Clewes. He knew something about precious stones, because every one in his general profession had to acquire a knowledge of such things early, or else miss many delightful business opportunities. There were ten square-faced stones, all of a size, in the circle that ringed the wrist of Miss Exeter, and though it was a reasonably small wrist, still each of those stones was a great beauty and the sheen of them lured the eyes of Eddie Clewes to that side of the table again and again. If this were a sample of the treasures in the jewel casket, then it was likely that the clever Dick Pritchard had not made an underestimate! There might well be half a million dollars of treasure, at the rate of this sample!

Those little gloomy stretches of quiet interested Mr. Clewes, also, because he suspected that they had something to do with him, and when he noticed that the colonel could not meet his eye with any steadiness, then he was sure of it.

It was alarming to Eddie, though not a change appeared in his face. For it meant either that the first suspicious news had arrived, or else that something in his conduct had mysteriously and suddenly displeased the banker.

At any rate, he resolved on a counterstroke, which, if there were any chance whatever, would balance matters on his behalf, once more. And the chance was offered to him almost at once by Dolly herself, saying: "If you're staying on in Culloden, Ned, you'll be wanting to invest your fifteen thousand in the valley, then?"

He thought that it was a bit pointed, this remark, and he could not help glancing quickly aside at her, to see if there were any additional meaning in her expression, but she met him with a perfectly serene smile. And he had come to know that, no matter what he did, he could not deprive her of her poise.

"As a matter of fact," said Eddie Clewes, "I'm not the owner of fifteen thousand dollars."

"I mean the reward money, of course," said Dolly.

"That," said Eddie Clewes, "is to be invested in a hospital."

"A hospital!" cried the colonel, "Gad, Ned, you interested in a hospital somewhere?"

"Yes," said Eddie, "almost anywhere a hospital interests me. Because I can't take the fifteen thousand, you know."

"You can't take it? You can't take it?" echoed the colonel. "Hey, bless me! Ned, what do you mean by that?"

"You understand," said Eddie Clewes with a little gesture of abhorrence, "that it's blood money. And I can't take it! I've thought it over. No matter what Murdoch McKenzie and Delehanty may have done, I don't want to feel that their deaths have been mixed into my own life. I'd rather have clean hands!"

It was a great sensation. It was the very thing that Mr. Pritchard had advised him to cast about for—some startling achievement which would bring the colonel and family completely into his camp!

And now the thing was done!

As for Dolly, she sat with her hands clasped, and her eyes big and bright, and the colonel gripped the edge of the table and leaned forward a little.

"You paid for that money by endan-

gering your life, my lad," said he. "You should be very careful before you decide on such a thing as this—fifteen thousand dollars is a neat little fortune, at your time in life, and you can invest it at ten per cent in Culloden Valley as easily as not. I could *guarantee* you such a rate. Remember, my boy, you're not simply throwing away fifteen thousand dollars, but you're tossing aside an income of a hundred and twenty-five dollars every month of life that remains you!"

"I've thought of it from every angle," said Eddie modestly. "I like money very well—but not that sort of money, sir!"

"But——" began the colonel.

"Don't!" cried Dolly. "Don't try to persuade him from such a fine thing. Ned, what a fine, clean heart it takes to have such a thought."

And she leaned towards Eddie Clewes with such joy in her throat and beauty in her face that he knew, suddenly, that she *had* been merely playing a part with him that same morning.

Yonder was a very alluring girl, but this was Dolly Exeter when her heart of hearts ran over.

It unsteadied him, and he looked down to the table with a sudden hotness of the face. I think it was the first time in Eddie's life that he had ever been shamed!

"I won't!" the colonel was hastening to say, triumph in his face as he nodded to Dolly. "I won't try to persuade him. Because I *couldn't* persuade him. When a man has founded his integrity on bedrock, he cannot be altered by every wind that blows. It simply cannot be, my dear. However, I won't talk like a banker any more, but as a friend, and I tell you, Ned, that this decision of yours means more to me than you would guess. And if you'll let me say so, in addition, I don't think that you'll lose by it! Not in the long run. Because courage is golden, but a clean soul is a shining diamond, by the eternal heavens!"

The colonel was prone to these rather rhetorical flights, but there was so much real emotion in him that it was hard to tell where feeling ended and words took command.

And Eddie Clewes was not entirely interested in this. What he knew was that he had gained the point for which he had been willing to make this sacrifice. Fifteen thousand was a greater stake than he had ever handled before. But what was it compared with the sweet fortune which lay in his hopes at the present moment? So, like a good gambler, he sweetened the pot with a smile on his lips, and shrugged away the thought of what it had cost him.

But after dinner, the colonel could not help taking a moment aside with Dolly in the library.

"Now, my dear," he began, "I want to say——"

"You don't have to say a thing," said Dolly. "You're right, and I'm wrong. You're an old dear, and I'm a dusty, earthy, sooty creature, all filled with unworthy suspicions of everything. But now I see the truth about Ned, and what a thoroughly fine fellow he is—and no matter what I was thinking before, I'll *unthink* it. I will, Dad. And I would *fight* any man who dared to suggest a thing against Ned Larned!"

CHAPTER XVII.

NEW SUSPICION.

REWARDS came quickly to Eddie Clewes, and the first test of Dolly Exeter's new enthusiasm arrived almost at once, for big Oliver Portman dropped in a little later in the evening. He had been so long a friend of the family and so long an open suitor of Dolly, that he was accepted without an invitation, always.

And now he took his first chance to talk apart to the girl.

"I searched through the atlas. There was no town beginning with C-o-m-p. None that answered the rest of the description. But after a time I started the telegraph working and finally I landed what I think will be the right trail."

"Do you think so?" said Dolly. "But I tell you, Oliver, that since I talked to you before, I've changed my mind entirely about Ned. I doubted him. And I'm ashamed of my doubts—and I'll tell you why——"

And she launched with shining enthusiasm into the story of the renunciation of the reward.

Oliver Portman listened, with his fine large head bent forward, studying every word with an attentive frown, and that frown did not disappear when the tale ended.

"So you see, Oliver, that father and you were right, and I was simply silly, because, of course, a man who can do such a thing has nothing wrong with him—nothing important, of course! Why are you still frowning?"

"Because," said Oliver, "it seems just a little too good to be true!"

"Stuff!" said the girl. "Are *you* getting silly ideas in your turn?"

"With all my heart I *hope* that they're silly," he answered her. "But I like to see a normal man doing normal things —and fifteen thousand dollars is an extraordinary lot to throw out the window even for a rich man, and this Larned has always been poor!"

"It's not that. You have a starved imagination, Oliver, if you can't picture to yourself how such a person as Ned Larned thinks and feels. You see—he's all fire, under that quiet outside. That's his hidden strength that enabled him to master two giants like Delehanty and Murdoch McKenzie."

"I hope," said Oliver Portman, "that it will enable him to master Archie McKenzie, also!"

"Archie McKenzie? Who is he?"

"Haven't you heard? I thought that it was all through the town—I mean the news that Archie McKenzie has started across the mountains to revenge his brother Murdoch and kill Larned, if he can!"

She looked wildly at Oliver.

"Why, he himself hasn't heard this terrible thing, Oliver!"

"Ah, but he has! The sheriff came up here to-day to tell him about it——"

"*That* was what brought Boots Askew to our house—at the very time when I was riding helter skelter away to let you know my ridiculous suspicions—and Ned hasn't parted his lips about that dreadful news! One of the murdering McKenzies—Oliver, what will be done?"

"I don't think," said Oliver Portman, "that a man who killed both Murdoch McKenzie and Delehanty will be worried when a single gun fighter comes on his trail. But in the meantime, I want to tell you what I've learned, which is that the little town of Marstonville, in Maryland, was formerly called Compton, until the name was changed——"

"I don't care a whit about Marstonville and Compton, Oliver!"

"And," he went on, "I am opening up telegraphic communication with Marstonville to learn——"

"Telegraphic communication! You sound like a mine disaster, Oliver! But don't you see? No matter what can be found out, it won't shake my faith in our Ned——"

"Our Ned?" said Portman slowly. "Has he—well, let it go! And so you're through investigating?"

"Absolutely, and I want you to drop it."

"I would have liked to," said Mr. Portman. "But the fact is, I've changed my opinion about all this."

"And this morning you were so eager to avoid eavesdropping on any man's past!"

"It's not logical. I'm sorry for that. But you see, the very thing that makes

you so sure of Larned is what makes me a bit suspicious—fifteen thousand dollars thrown out the window—suppose that one of the farmers should touch a match to his ranch and send it up in smoke—because he found out that his grandfather had done something wrong—why, Dolly, that would be on a par with what Larned is doing, now!"

She snapped her fingers and merely laughed.

"What could his purpose be? I defy you to find a wicked purpose in such a thing, Oliver!"

"I'm a simple fellow," said he, as gravely as ever. "I don't pretend to have wits enough to follow the twists and the windings of these clever fellows like Ned Larned. But I do know that I'll have to stick with this little investigation until I learn what is happening at the farther end of the wire—and all that they can tell me about Mr. Larned, of their town!"

"I think that you'll change your mind again, about it," she told him.

"I'm reasonably sure that I shall not, however."

"Oliver, you make me angry—you really do!"

"I should be sorry to do that, but will——"

"Oh, be a little less like granite—be human, Oliver, and tell me that you're not going to try to stir up mud in the river!"

"Ah, you are afraid that I *might* learn something?"

"I don't know—I really don't care. Except that I know he's not a common fellow. And being what he is, he *may* have done something a little wrong. But that doesn't matter. Not what he was in the past. That doesn't count. But it's the present and the future that really tells what he is, and we know what he is—a hero—with a soul as pure as snow! A man so fine, Oliver, that I feel ashamed of being what I am—so silly, and so weak, and so girlish! He makes me want to be older and bigger and stronger and better—and—it brought the tears to my eyes when he said at the table, so quietly, that he was going to give that great sum of money away to a hospital!"

Oliver Portman hung his head, as he listened.

And then he muttered, with a sigh: "I wish that once in my life I had been able to get a tenth of this enthusiasm out of you about me! But there's nothing rare about me, Dolly. Well, what I am can't be changed!"

"But this last silly idea of yours *can* be changed! You're not going ahead with the thing?"

He hesitated, as though he knew that the matter had become a grave one between him and her.

"I'd like to please you, Dolly. But now that I've started on it——"

"You'll finish it! I can almost hear you say that!"

"I like to finish what I've put my hand to!"

"Will you let me say one thing to you?"

"Yes, of course, if you wish."

"It will almost make me hate you, Oliver, if you keep on mining in poor Ned's past to find out something wrong about him!"

He looked steadily into her face.

"Very well," said he, "then it will have to make you hate me. I'm not a spectacular fellow, Dolly. I don't throw fifteen thousand dollars out the window with a fine gesture—but you know that you mean more to me than anything else in the world I can think of. And still, I'm not going to be bought off by the fear of your anger!"

She stepped back from him, standing stiff and straight.

"Then perhaps you'll pay attention to the anger of some one else!"

"You mean what?"

"What if Ned Larned comes to know that you're playing the spy on him?"

"Ah? Well, Dolly, I never expected to hear you threaten me. But I'll really be glad if you *do* go straight to Larned and tell him everything. You can leave yourself out of it entirely—for starting me on the trail, I mean. The important thing is that I suspect him and that I'm investigating him. And it's best that he should know, and not be struck in the dark unexpectedly."

"Would you *dare* to let him know?"

"Gad, Dolly," said the big man quietly, "you mustn't take me for a welcher and a coward, you know!"

"Then you'll do it?"

"I shall, most certainly!"

She turned sharply away from him, paused at the door with a word on her lips which remained unspoken, and left the room. And Oliver Portman knew that he had sunk his ship beneath him. However, he took up his hat without manifest excitement and left the house with his square jaw set. He was not one who was easily beaten, even by his own sentiments. And he went out to complete his appointed task as resolutely as though he had received nothing but encouragement from Dolly Exeter.

She, for her part, went to find her father and Eddie Clewes, and she discovered them making a brief tour of the house, her father with a jingling bunch of keys in his hand.

"I've been giving Ned his set of keys," said the colonel. "The same one which Tom carried! And we've about finished with everything. Except the safe. That's this little key, Ned. I showed you the safe, you remember and——"

"I remember," said Eddie Clewes.

It gave Dolly Exeter a strange thrill to think that the fortunes of their house had been committed so resolutely to the hand of this man, so nearly a stranger to them. And yet she agreed with the colonel, in her heart of hearts. With such a man, it was impossible that they should go too far!

"And what's up now, Dolly?" said her father. "You look worried!"

She stood before them with her hands clenched at her sides. She was rather ridiculously like a small schoolgirl, about to speak a piece and by no means assured of her audience.

"I want to say that this morning, Ned, I was playing a very bad part—because I suspected you, and I was trying to draw you out. And when I stumbled on part of the name of your home town—why, I went to Oliver Portman and asked him to investigate you—and just now I've seen him——"

She paused an instant for breath. The colonel, very red, was watching Eddie Clewes with a guilty side glance, as though he himself were responsible for his daughter's behavior. But Eddie Clewes was as calm as stone, to all appearance.

"And I've asked Oliver to stop his investigation—no matter what he might find out—but he's refused to stop—and I wanted to tell you and confess, though you'll despise me for having suspected you, Ned!"

He had a rare smile, had this Eddie Clewes, and he turned the full brightness of it on her.

"I don't despise you, Dolly," said he. "I respect you—as a good housekeeper, you know!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LEAVEN WORKS.

EDDIE CLEWES, confidence man extraordinary, as he advanced to his room that night felt that nearly all had happened that well could happen in a single day. But one more thing remained. For as he opened the door of his room he was aware of a faint scent of cigarette smoke.

And so, stepping in, he glided deftly to one side as he jerked the door shut—as a man would do who half expects a bullet to meet him.

He had not forgotten the warning

from Sheriff Boots Askew. And though the younger McKenzie could never have arrived by this time on a horse, still he might readily have changed his horse for the first train, and that would have eaten up the distance easily enough.

However, it was not the voice of a stranger that addressed him from the darkness, but the familiar tones of Mr. Pritchard.

"It's no good, Eddie. I can see you against that white wall, and if I wanted to plug you, I could do it out of hand!"

Eddie Clewes, thus reassured, snapped on the electric light, and yonder he saw Pritchard, lolling in the most comfortable chair in the room, looking bigger, stuffier about the shoulders, fatter about the belt than usual. But Eddie Clewes knew that the seeming fat was in reality the hardest and most efficient muscle.

He respected Pritchard, in a way. It was into that man's hands that he had fallen when he was making his first acquaintance with the shadier side of the world, and much, much had he learned. If, in a good many ways, he had far surpassed his master, that was rather a credit to him than a criticism of his teacher. For he knew that Pritchard was a criminal so thorough going that, in many of his paces he could never be equaled by himself. For what Pritchard lacked in wit he more than made up in a certain ruthlessness.

He admired his old companion, therefore, as he turned on the light and regarded him.

"All right, kid," said Dandy Dick, growing a little uneasy beneath that pale, steady eye. "What're you trying to do? Stare me down?"

"I'm only looking you over," said Eddie.

"And——"

"And an odd idea came to me. Have we ever been really at outs?"

"Not exactly, since the day when you decided that you knew so much that you didn't need me for a side-kicker. But that wasn't a fight. It was just a decision."

Mr. Clewes felt somewhat expansive. And now he settled down into a chair, lighted a cigarette of his own, and crossed his lean legs.

"Just a decision, Dick," he agreed. "Between you and me, I've always rather liked you. Admired you, Dick, d'you understand?"

"Hello, hello! Soft-soaping the old man?" asked Pritchard.

But nevertheless he grinned, very well pleased.

"It was the blood that I never liked."

"Ay," said Pritchard. "You always wanted to stop before your hands got dirty. Until you ran into Delehanty and McKenzie, eh? Then you seen the need of being thorough. And I hand it to you, kid—that thorough you was, and done the job proper! That was my old schooling speaking!"

"Perhaps it was," smiled Eddie. "But speaking of quarrels, Dick——"

"Well, what of them?"

"If you and I were ever to fall out really, what a grand, hundred per cent, thorough-going, hair-raising, uprooting fight it would be!"

And he shook his head a little.

"Now, d'you think so?" said Pritchard, lifting his big chin and looking down a little at the smaller man.

"Yes, I think so, decidedly."

"Fighting with what?" asked Pritchard.

"Whatever was handiest, I suppose."

"With guns," said Dandy Dick, "you know what I can do, and there ain't many outside of you that *do* know how good I am. Because them that could tell about it are dead, kid! But I don't think that I'd have much trouble with you at the guns!"

Eddie Clewes shrugged his lean shoulders.

"Or with bare hands," said Mr. Pritchard, "I wonder how far I *could*

send a fist through you, kid! So I don't think that I would have much trouble with you so far as the fists go!"

"Perhaps not," agreed Eddie Clewes again.

"And what's left?" asked the older man. "What's left, kid? What other ways of fighting?"

"When you ask it that way," said Eddie, "there isn't much for me to say. But if you look at it in a different manner, you'll see what I mean."

"I dunno that I follow you," declared the yegg.

"Consider, Pritchard, that in your life you've worked with some rough fellows."

"As hard as they come—that's the kind that I've roughed it with."

"And right now, Dandy, you could name a few hard ones!"

"Oh, I could do that. I'm a traveling directory of the hard nuts, lad, and you ought to know it! No matter where I land, I hit right on my feet, because I know where the tough mugs are, and which ones I can team with. That's my policy. But where does all of this drift to?"

"Why, Dandy, if you look over that same directory that you are speaking about, and if you run your eye back on the list through living men and through dead ones, can you find a single one of the lot who you wouldn't much rather tackle in any sort of a brawl than to have me after your scalp?"

Mr. Pritchard began with a snarling and sneering response. But, after a moment, he dropped his head forward and scowled up through the thick brows at the youth.

"You got your head turned by the luck that you've had with a couple of the thugs out this way," he declared. "You forget what I *am*, kid!"

"You're a bad one," admitted Eddie Clewes readily enough. "Murder is nothing to you. And you're well up on the ways of doing it. But think it over, Pritchard. Of the entire list, is there a single one you wouldn't rather tackle than to stand up to me?"

Dandy Dick's eyes wavered to the side. He ran the point of his tongue across his lips, and then lolled back in the chair, his eyes closed in thought. Or was it to shut out the keen, quiet, penetrating stare of Eddie Clewes?

"I dunno—I dunno!" said Pritchard. "I see what you mean, though. No, I wouldn't especially remember your number if I was out looking for trouble. I'd pick up something easier. But what started you on this line to-night? What got you going on this gag, Eddie?"

"I'll tell you, frankly. I simpy want to let you know that there may be the worst kind of trouble ahead for us two!"

"Hit me, kid. I'm steadied for it. What's the news?"

"Nothing clear, up to the present. But what would you think, old-timer, if I chucked this entire deal?"

"What would I think? I wouldn't think nothing. What would I *do* is what you mean?"

"Put it that way, if you wish to."

"I'd—lemme see—I'd croak you, kid, I suppose," said Pritchard with much thoughtfulness. "It would have to be that! Because I stand to clean up something worth while in this little job that we have on hand—though it's nothing compared to what *you'd* make! But tell me, are you figuring on something that freezes me out?"

"There's no use talking about that," said Eddie. "It's something else. A thing that you wouldn't understand!"

"You try me. You've always put me down for dumb, kid. I dunno how you get that way. What's the gag?"

"You want to see my cards?"

"You've seen mine. I've held nothing up."

"No, you're frank enough. But what would you say to this, Dick? Suppose that I decide to go straight?"

Dandy Dick raised his heavy brows —he raised his head—and he sank back into the chair, smiling at his ease.

"Is this stringing, or have you gone batty?"

"I'm not batty," said Mr. Clewes.

"Straight?" Mr. Pritchard indulged himself in a luxurious though silent laughter. "You couldn't keep as straight as a snake's track. It ain't in you. But even if it was, how you gonna amputate the things that you've been from the things that you want to be?"

"You mean that somebody would run me down, sooner or later?"

"I mean that, of course."

"They couldn't put me away for more than five years—because I *have* kept my hands clean."

"You mean that you'd stand for a fiver—you mean——"

Dandy Dick pointed a forefinger like a gun at his companion.

"I see what it is!" said he. "But go on! You'd stand for a trial and take a sentence. What for? To dodge this here McKenzie? Lord, boy, while you're with me, you don't need to fear him. I'd eat six or seven of these Westerns on toast like quail. You dunno me, Eddie. You dunno me!"

Eddie Clewes smiled.

And he help up a bunch of keys.

"The little one opens the safe, Dick," said he.

"Lemme see, will you?".

But Clewes dropped the bunch back into his pocket and smiled again.

"Hungry, aren't you, Dick? Red-eyed, eh? Those are the keyes, old fellow. And they're not stolen. They're given. Now, old fellow, I want you to think it over. Am I to rob a man who would *give* me the keys to his house?"

"Rob? Rob? Hey, Eddie—for Pete's sake—this here ain't any low-down common robbery. This is the sort of a thing that books is wrote about. This here—why, Eddie, it's a sort of financial manipulation. It ain't robbery. It's for a cold half million, at the bottom figure. Why, kid, there ain't any time for you to get a conscience in a deal like this! This here is art—it's science—it's—boy, are you really getting soft?"

"Perhaps," said Eddie. "Mind you, though, I haven't made up my mind. I'm just thinking things over. I know it's half a million. And that means peace for me. And if I try to go straight, it means that the law swallows me up, even if you don't kill me first —but still, I'm thinking——"

"You ain't!" snarled Mr. Pritchard. "You're turning woozy and worse than batty, and I'll tell you what it is—it's the girl that's done it! She's knocked you dippy! Blast a picture face like that! It always raises the devil with the best men!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT.

HONEST indignation is always a little infectious, and Mr. Clewes looked back into his mind towards the image of the girl in question with a flushed brow. And then, suddenly, he remembered that the viewpoint of Pritchard and his own outlook might not be the same.

Mr. Pritchard, in the meantime, expanded upon his inmost thoughts with a swift and dynamic tongue.

"I'll tell you how it is, old-timer," said he. "I want to do the right thing. You know what you've always meant to me—why you was like a son to me, kid, when we first met."

"I know," said Eddie Clewes, "those good old days when you first showed me how to pick a pocket and work sleight of hand—and the little arts of blowing a safe."

Mr. Pritchard closed his eyes with the sad, sweet memory.

"Ah, kid," said he, "in those days,

when I seen the real talent that was in you, I used to tell myself that my working days was soon to be over, because when you began to get going, you would open up the Bank of England and ask me to help myself. Because it looked like nothing would be past you! And then——"

"And here we are, down to considering half-million-dollar lots!" murmured Mr. Clewes.

Dandy Dick opened his eyes more fully.

"Now about this fool talk of going straight—now lemme ask you if you ain't ashamed for having turned loose such talk as that, kid?"

"Perhaps," nodded Clewes.

"And something is sticking in your craw—the girl, eh? Or else, Eddie, it's because you want to close the door on this here job and close me out of it, and after I fade, then you'll turn the trick by yourself and not have to make even the measley split that you planned to do with me!"

Again Eddie Clewes nodded.

"I thought of that, too," he admitted.

"You did! Why—but you're kidding! You're gonna get murdered one day for that kidding habit of yours, Eddie. But you tell me straight, now—you're gonna go through with the deal?"

"Otherwise, you go to the sheriff and tell him that I'm Eddie Clewes, the confidence man, that has just broken away from Cliff Matthews. And Boots Askew puts me in jail. That's your game, isn't it?"

"That's my game," growled Mr. Pritchard. "You know me, kid. Soft as a woman to a bird that plays straight with me, but harder than steel when it comes to taking a double-cross."

"I know you," said Eddie Clewes. "And now I want to be alone. Trot along, Dandy. And if you let any one see you coming to this house or leaving it, I'll take a bad job out of the hands of the law and kill you, you hear me?" Dandy Dick leaned back in his chair again, nodding with something like sympathy toward the younger man.

"I remember how I was taken, about the same way, when I got my first case on a girl. She was a snappy blonde that done a turn on the 'small time.' She had me faded and I walked around in a haze for a couple of months, taking her all the profits that I made on every deal that I pulled off in all that time. And then she handed me over to an elbow when she got tired of me! Love is that way, Eddie. You think that you're walking straight toward Heaven, and then you wake up bumping your head against jail bars. Love is a sort of a dope. So I don't hold you responsible for what you're saying and doing."

"You've settled it, Dandy. I'm in love, am I?"

"You am, kid. You're deep as any that I ever seen. No, you ain't noisy about it, and you ain't gay, and you ain't foolish on the surface. But love is like booze. It effects fellows different ways. Mostly, it makes a man cut loose with a lot of high-stepping and wild talking, and noise, and such. But the worst booze hound that I ever knew was a bo that used to stand up and drink by himself at one end of the bar, and never say a word to nobody, and keep his eyes turned down, and keep getting paler and paler, but inside of him, he was filling with fire. And finally, he *would* look up. And then he'd start for the door, and before the morning came, you could be sure that there would be a first class horror crime for the papers to write about. And it's the same way with you, kid. You deceive yourself because you're so quiet, and all that. But there's a lot of misery piling up in you all of the time, and pretty soon it'll bust loose and swamp you! You take my word for it. This pretty girl, the colonel's daughter, will make

you wish that you'd handled fire sooner than the thought of her."

Dandy Dick, having finished this speech, gathered up his hat from the floor and lighted another cigarette. And then he leaned a hand upon the table and looked firmly into the face of his former pupil.

"What's the result, kid?" said he.

There was no answer. The eyes of Eddie Clewes were far away.

"You go to jail by yourself, or you get rich with me. Which will you choose?"

"Jail without you is a temptation," said Eddie Clewes coldly. "However—I suppose that I'll sell out. Except that I want you to understand that there's nothing in this 'love' idea of yours. I never heard such sappy talk!"

"Didn't you?" grinned Dandy Dick. "All right. I'll lay off that line. But when does the job come?"

"When do you suggest?"

"As soon as you got the lay of the land at the bank."

"The bank? What do you know about that?"

"Nearly everything, old boy. This whole town here is watching you close, and they know that the colonel is taking you into the bank with him. He's given you the keys to his house. And then how long will it take before he gives you the keys to the bank?"

"You want me to clean him out entirely?" smiled Mr. Clewes.

"Why not? You think that he's gonna keep right on loving you after you slide away with his jewels? No, kid. And the best thing to do is to clean him out so complete that he'll have a sort of an awe and a respect for you. A little crime gets you into the jail. A big one gets you into the newspapers. The bird that kills only one poor sap, he's sure to get strung up. But the guy that runs amuck and drops a dozen or so, he's made a hero of, and the reporters worship him and all the little boys wish that they could grow up to be terrible and grand like that! Same way with you. Smash the colonel as flat as a pancake, and he'll know that he had his dealings with a real man!"

This advice he delivered in a soothing tone, with inviting gestures, and a smile like a light to show his great wisdom.

"Keep your profession out of your Bible," advised Eddie Clewes. "Sometimes you give me the creeps, Dandy. You've killed your dozen and more, and still you're not in the newspapers, except a police report, now and then. When they get on your trail, though, what a lot of bones are going to be turned up!"

"They can't hang me more than once," said Dandy Dick, shrugging his shoulders. "But now tell me what's up?"

"You think that I ought to wait until I have the colonel right inside my rope?"

"Of course, if you ain't a fool."

Eddie shook his head.

"You wouldn't understand," he declared, "and so I won't try to give you any reasons, but I'll just have to tell you that I'm not cleaning out the bank. Only his private safe, old fellow. I stick at that."

"Nothing budge you?"

"Nothing!"

Mr. Pritchard sighed.

"Then clean the safe out to-night—the cleaner and the sooner the quicker. Clean it out and make the get-away. I'll have two horses ready in an hour, out there beyond the trees. Two real horses, kid, that will take us kiting through the hills, and away to good luck as long as we live!"

"Not to-night," declared Mr. Clewes with finality.

"And why the hell not?"

"Because you've made me curious, old fellow. You're so positive that you've made me very curious. And now I'll never rest happy until I've found out whether or not I'm really in love with the colonel's daughter."

"You don't even know your own mind?"

"Not a bit."

"Then don't get curious. Let the wasps sleep. Grab the stuff and come away, lad."

"I might," nodded Mr. Clewes. "I'll try to see her on the balcony in a few minutes, and then I'll have a talk with her. I ought to be able to decide then if she's what's the matter with me."

"You want to wait till you find out, and when you learn that I'm right, then you won't have the nerve to leave, and you'll start thinking about wedding rings, Eddie——"

"Do you think that I'd stay on after I knew that I loved her?" asked Eddie Clewes.

"Why not?"

"You wouldn't understand this, either, so I won't explain. Now I'm tired to death of you, Dandy. Slide out of here. Get the horses and bring them over there behind the trees, as you suggest. The great probability is that I'll be out there to join you in a couple of hours, and if I do, we want to be ready to cut loose. So long, Dandy!"

Dandy Dick, at the window, paused to give a little more advice, but he changed his mind again and slouched suddenly away into the night beyond, lowering himself over the outer balcony with the agility of an ape. For the strength in his arms was proverbial through the whole underworld.

Eddie Clewes, however, watching him depart, was not particularly eased, except that he felt it was now more possible for him to concentrate upon the problem before him. As for the technicalities and the moral questions, he could not spare any energy for them. All that was of importance was to find out whether or no he really was deeply entangled with Dolly Exeter as Dandy Dick himself had so confidently suggested.

From the window, he watched Dandy glide like a beast across the garden and reach the trees, then he turned away. And consequently he had not the slightest idea that the Dandy, having reached the trees, had doubled back again, and was approaching the house from a different angle. In two minutes he was crouching again beneath the balcony!

CHAPTER XX.

UNKNOWN UNDER THE BALCONY.

ALL the evils which philosophy had attributed to money, Dandy Dick Pritchard laid to the levity of woman. It was for that reason that he had cast about to find some source of feminine influence through which to explain the unaccountable behavior of that ordinarily level-headed young man—Eddie Clewes. And when he learned that Eddie Clewes now insisted upon a final interview with the girl, all his fears for the future of their plans were awakened. He determined straightway to overhear as much of that interview as possible, and for that reason he had stopped his arguments and had consented to leave the room.

Now, waiting beneath the balcony, he listened for the first telltale sound on the balcony above him.

The balcony extended across the side of the house as far as the veranda ran, and the climbing vines which twisted their strong, brown spots around the pillars of the porch, spread above into long green arms which wound on wires and trellises toward the eaves above, and even spilled across them, and washed a scattering green spray up the roof of the house. So that the balcony, and its railing, composed a pleasant arbor, all over-starred with blossoms. Their color was gone now, but their fragrance was all the richer. Even Dandy Dick Pritchard, kneeling in the garden sod beneath, breathed of it, and felt a little of the grimness of his humor depart from him.

At the same time, a step crunched ever so lightly on the balcony above him, and Dandy Dick at once put to use the apelike power of his arms and swung himself as silently as a shadow hand over hand up the first post of the veranda, until he reached the broad arms which curved out from it, holding up the roof. In that position he came to rest, one leg hooked through the forking of the beams, and one leg dangling free. Swayed out as he was from the perpendicular, it would have been more than another man could have endured for five minutes. But Dandy Dick held himself tirelessly in place.

For he guessed that if his old pupil wished to talk with the girl, this was the time for him to be at it!

In fact, he had not waited there for half a minute when there was a little creak as of a door opening, and a dim shaft of light passed out into the darkness just above the head of Pritchard.

He heard Eddie Clewes saying: "I hoped that you'd come out."

"I saw you wandering up and down and wondered what was wrong," answered the voice of the girl. "Because you look romantic, Ned, straying around this way, with the wind in your hair—*very* Byronic!"

"You're comforting in spite of what you say," he told her. "Sit down here."

"It's too chilly for sitting."

"I'll get you a wrap."

"Something has been in my mind about you for the last few hours."

"Tell me, then."

"When you were a youngster, Ned, according to your report, you did nothing but break windows and steal apples, and such. What else?"

"Nothing very much besides!"

"You must have, though."

"And why?"

"You've picked up an education."

"A shoddy one."

"But you know books, I mean—and the things in books."

"Why, perhaps a few. I've read a little."

"But if you were so busy getting into scrapes, when did you find time?"

"I just filled in the nooks and the corners, and that was all. But about my real education—I can't tell you, I'm afraid."

"That sounds mysterious."

"It's more mysterious than you guess."

"Something that no one can ever know?"

"Except my wife-to-be."

A little silence fell between them.

"It is a serious thing, then."

"Yes," said Eddie Clewes, "and there's no one to whom I'd rather talk about it than to you, Dolly."

She made another pause before she said, thoughtfully: "I think that I ought to let that remark slip. I shouldn't ask you to explain it."

"Why shouldn't you?"

"Very well then, tell me what you mean."

"I'm glad to. I mean, Dolly, that I'd like to regard you as the girl who'll marry me, one day."

"That's a very small new moon, yonder, but you don't need a great deal of moonshine, I see, in order to be romantic."

"I have learned the art of becoming serious since I reached Culloden," answered the voice of Eddie Clewes. "But, if you wish, we'll suppose that I have been only joking. Does it embarrass you?"

"I'll tell you the truth," said Dolly, "which is that I'm never quite sure about you. Because most of the time it seems to me that you're the last man in the world to lose his head about any one."

"Do you think that I was very steady this morning?"

She was silent.

"Before I go on, I want to tell you more about myself," said Eddie

Clewes. "But the fact is that I'm a bit giddy to-night. And though there isn't much moonshine, as you say, it's addling my wits, and confusing you with these flowers around us, Dolly, and the sweetness of them—and in another minute I shall be talking about stars, and such rot. You see, Dolly, that there isn't much question about it. I've lost my head, and lost it permanently, I'm afraid."

Now, almost any other person in the world would have held that the quiet and almost matter-of-fact tone in which Eddie Clewes made these remarks, indicated that he was not more than a quarter in earnest, but Dandy Dick had known him through long years, and he detected a most vital ring of sincerity that made him scowl. If Clewes had wished to remain until he knew whether or not he was in love with the girl, this single glimpse of her seemed to have decided him. And even Pritchard, soul of steel that he was, was tempted to lift his face above the edge of the rail and steal a look at her. But he controlled that impulse.

"*Are* you serious?" asked Dolly Exeter with a suddenly changed voice.

"I am."

"Then I think——" she began, and paused.

Mr. Pritchard waited for Eddie to speak, but he waited in vain.

"I think," went on the girl, more unsteadily, "that the best thing will be for all three of us to sit around in a circle, and talk things over."

It seemed to Dandy Dick a complete surrender, and he expected rather tensely an ardent outburst from his ex-pupil. But in some things Mr. Clewes forever failed to come up to the expectations of his old tutor, and now he answered gravely: "Of course that would be the best way. Because the colonel should hear what I have to say to him about myself, before I talk to either of you again."

"I have an idea, Ned," she said, "that you're going to tell some unpleasant things about yourself. Have I guessed right?"

"You have," he answered. "I am going to make a full confession of things that will probably sink the colonel's friendship in deep water. Now I suppose that I should let you go to bed!"

"Good night, Ned."

"Good night."

Mr. Pritchard could hardly believe that the matter had ended in this fashion. Was there to be *no* concession to romance? No panting voices? No echoes of poetry? No, there was not a one, except that as the door creaked again, the footfall of Dolly Exeter paused.

"After all," she said, "if Dad is flurried a bit—you have to remember that he's not the final judge, in this!"

And the door closed!

Another moment, and Pritchard heard the soft whistling of his former pupil, as the latter strolled up and down the balcony with a hardly distinguishable. catlike step.

No, nothing in the world could be farther from Romeo and Juliet, and yet Mr. Pritchard felt that he had overheard a love scene just as convincing and just as decisive as more famous and more wordy ones—some of his own included! There was no doubt about anything. Eddie Clewes was in love. An by that last speech of Dolly Exeter, she had confessed her love for Eddie as clearly as though she had promised to marry in definite words.

CHAPTER XXI.

ONE OF THE CHOSEN.

WHAT became of the celebrated jewels of Exeter, then?

Why, they remained safe and snug in the safe of the colonel, for why should Eddie Clewes rob a house which

contained a treasure that he would eventually inherit?

When these ideas had been firmly lodged in the mind of Mr. Pritchard —and they flashed home to him instantly—he lowered himself softly to the ground and sneaked away behind the same trees through which Eddie Clewes had watched him disappear earlier in the evening.

Then he went to the livery stable.

He had chosen his horse long before. It was a big dapple with black points, and it had a depth of chest that promised a true heart and plenty of staying powers, even though it might not have speed. And strength and patience were what Pritchard, with his bulk, wanted in a horse. He would leave speed to men of less bulk and they could mount such an animal as he had picked out from the lot for Eddie Clewes, at the time when he had sincerely hoped that the younger man would be his partner in crime and in flight. It was a leggy bay, with a head like a deer, and Mr. Pritchard looked upon it with an eye of longing. He hired the gray for the whole night, and then rode it back to the shelter of the trees which looked out upon the house and the garden of the colonel.

He had consumed a half hour in this, and as he looked at his watch, squinting at the dial by the dim moon, he estimated that it would be necessary to wait for another hour, at least, before making his attempt on the house.

Dandy Dick was impatient as a man could be, but he knew the times when he should control his desires, and this was one of them. So he steeled himself, and sat down in the mellow gloom beneath a tree and watched the dial of the watch, with the second hand ticking its way around its little circle, and the minute hand crawling behind with imperceptible motion, and the hour hand with less movement, it seemed, than a fixed star.

Every ticking second might take a life or give a life, thought Dandy Dick. And every minute might be an ample frame inside of which to construct the picture of a great conception—such as this one of his for the looting of the colonel's safe! And every hour could contain such a conception carried into execution, and finished, or ruined, with the executor dead or escaped past pursuit.

Something whispered through the trees. And Mr. Pritchard slowly raised and turned his leonine head. Not with fear, but with keenest attention. The big dapple had lifted its head, also, with pricking ears, but then, its animal wits piercing the mystery before the man's, it lowered its head once more and went on cropping the rich grass which grew there. Dew was beginning to form on it. It was icy-cold, luscious beyond telling to the dapple, and the bit clinked softly against its teeth as it ate with greediness.

Apparently that whisper was only the wind in the trees. So Dandy Dick turned his attention back to the watch which he held in his hand.

Only five minutes had passed!

He recalled the happy night when he had gained this watch. There had been a moon in the sky, no larger than this and in the same quarter, but not like this one washing a naked sky with its light; instead, it sailed upwards like a boat, cleaving a way through piled clouds which puffed away into vast masses of bow spray, and then rolled off into the eternal darkness of the outer spaces of the heavens.

Such a moon had ruled the world on that other night, and there had been a winding road that twisted down a hillside and into a clump of trees in the hollow at its foot, where a pool left by the afternoon's rain gleamed like a dim, dark diamond through the shadow.

And when the man for whom Pritchard waited approached he was singing

a soft song between his teeth—half singing and half humming. Pritchard had waited until he was past and then used a slungshot. He was fond of a slungshot, and more than once he had heard bone crunch and felt it spring away beneath the shock of that little weapon.

He had struck just a little harder than he intended, and the man was dead. But Pritchard had not been greatly bothered. It gave him more time to go through the pockets of the deceased. And his disappointment was intense. Instead of the well-filled wallet upon which he had so carefully planned, there was only a scattering of small change to be had. And you may be sure that no matter how scattering and small, Pritchard had it! That bit of money and this fine Swiss watch were his prizes.

It had seemed to Pritchard at the time a beggarly small prize. But now he felt that it had certainly not been time wasted. And he looked down upon the little time-piece with a certain awe. Just as a pagan might have looked to the oracle which had regulated many of his actions. So it was with the watch. He knew what great events had been measured and molded according to the seconds which it spelled out. None other could know, saving he!

For two hours and a half, by the never-failing hand of this watch, he had worked in the basement of a Rochester bank, drilling at the safe with his electric drill. For six terrible hours by this same regulator of his fortunes, he had sat at roulette and gathered a great fortune, and tossed it back again. And again, in five sweet minutes, as related by the same reliable watch, he had entered a certain Brooklyn house by night and taken from a bedroom a string of pearls which had afterward paid for a frolicsome journey around half of the world!

Full of these thoughts, the time passed for Mr. Pritchard. And as he looked at the little watch and thought of his greatness, he felt a sort of melancholy pity that others in the world should not have brains, great like his, for huge conceptions, and strong like his, to persist in their careers of lonely glory. He was troubled with a sense of vague regret. Something should really be done to tell humanity what it was missing.

And then he laughed softly to himself.

Because, after all, the world cannot well be peopled with tigers. There must be sheep and silly lambs that the creatures of tooth and claw may have a prey. He who created this world, how wisely He planned and made it, electing for some the great rôle of conqueror and destroyer, and for the rest the parts of slaves, laborers, nameless creatures.

Once, happening into an old museum filled with Egyptian relics, Mr. Pritchard had run his eyes over the translations of various inscriptions, in which the monarchs related, one after another, how they had gone forth to battle, and made the Ethiopians or the Asiatics as dust under the wheels of their chariots, and how they had gathered them after the battle like sheaves after the reaper, and how they had struck off hands and ears, to mark them, and how they had brought them by tens and by hundreds and by thousands and by tens of thousands to show them to their people, and to set them cruel labors all the days of their lives for the glory of their conquerors!

Mr. Pritchard had read, and he had understood, as brother understands brother! And his very heart yearned with envy of that lucky man of another day. All that Mr. Pritchard needed was an ampler field and a little more in the way of tools for the performance of similar glories. For he was one of the chosen.

Dandy Dick, raising his head again, looked up past the dark and slowly moving plumes of the trees to the quiet stars of the sky, and beyond them he comprehended the universal spirit, the transcendent mind!

He was at rest!

When he looked at the watch again, behold, the hour had elapsed. And Dandy Dick arose, and looked to his guns.

He carried two, always. A good, long-barreled Colt of forty-five calibre, which shot almost as true and as far as a rifle, and the spat of whose heavy slug would knock down a strong man like the blow of a fist. He had also, for quick work and at close quarters, a little snub-nosed weapon which looked like an abbreviation of a toy. But in the handle of that toy were seven cartridges, and one brief pressure upon the trigger launched the whole seven in a closely compacted spray of death. It was a neat little gun, and Mr. Pritchard had a special affection for it. Particularly in a crowded room!

Then he took off his shoes, and tying them together, he draped them over the pommel of the saddle. That done, he arranged the reins of the horse, tying them in a slip-knot to a branch, so that they could be freed with the slightest pull. After that, he regarded intently his means for flight.

There were two courses open to him. One was to break down towards the river, and then to wind along its banks. The other was to canter straight across the open fields and jump the fence beyond to the higher valley road.

He decided that if he were pressed he would head for the river. But if he had plenty of time, he would go for the higher road, because he could make far better mileage along it.

Next, as he advanced towards the house, he examined the way across the garden, because when he returned, he might be running in his stockinged feet and aiming to make the best possible time.

It took the great Mr. Pritchard a full half hour to complete all of the necessary investigations, and if you ask why he did not make these surveys before, it may be answered that this was because Dandy Dick always left the last calculations until the last minute, because he was a free-handed genius, a sort of inspired improviser, so to speak.

In the meantime, he reached the side of the house and, as he laid his grasp upon the veranda pillar, he gave mute thanks for his stockinged feet. For his own part, he would have been very happy if the tyrant fashion had permitted men to go always with bared feet.

That was the style of the Egyptian kings and see what results they had obtained!

So he worked his way softly, softly up the pillar until he reached the edge of the balcony railing, and there he paused, crouched low, his heart thundering. For he remembered that, great as Dandy Dick was, he was about to move against a greater than himself!

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE DARK.

WHEN he raised his head above the railing, all was mild darkness along the row of opened windows and doors which gave upon the balcony, but though that blackness surely meant a great deal, insofar as the rooms of the members of the family were concerned, it might mean nothing at all for young Eddie Clewes.

Going back over his own actions of the evening and the words which he had used to Eddie, he found that he had much to regret. And certainly he had said enough to put Clewes on his guard. On the other hand, he felt that two great forces worked to dull all suspicion in the mind of the great Eddie.

The first was that for his old teacher, the confidence man felt nothing but contempt which he rarely cared to so much as casually veil. The second was that Eddie had certainly fallen in love, and love, as Mr. Pritchard knew, was a great stupefier.

"Almost like beer," said Dandy Dick in his philosophical moments.

Now the secret fear of Mr. Pritchard was, that when he entered that darkened chamber of his disciple, he would be walking upon a dreadful danger—Eddie Clewes lying in the dark with his eyes opened and his ears listening. What Eddie could do, unarmed as he was, was not the point. Mr. Pritchard did not analyze. He only knew that, as Eddie himself had said, there was nothing in the whole world which he feared with such thorough-going intensity as his young scholar.

The corresponding secret hope of Mr. Pritchard was that Eddie, excited, delirious with happiness after his interview with the girl, would have completely forgotten the ring of keys which the colonel had given to him earlier in the day.

From the balcony and through the door went Mr. Pritchard.

There he paused like a great squat spider, its claws upon the nerve-threads of the web. So did Mr. Pritchard pause, and with his raw soul open to every whisper of sound, every hint of movement, he probed the blackness before him.

The glimmer of the stars and the radiance of the moon at length no longer left their images in his eyes, and he could see what was before him with as much distinctness as he could hope.

There was the bed, a faint outline against the wall. Yonder was a chair, here a table—here another chair, and there the closet door, its polished knob shining with the single ray of a star like an infinitely distant eye.

Mr. Pritchard gripped his Colt. But he changed his mind. For yonder wild devil of a boy, he would not trust the slow action of a Colt. He took the automatic.

And then he remembered that an automatic will jam.

With nerves that prickled up and down his spine, he sneaked to the closet door, opened it a fraction of an inch at a time, and felt for the coat that was hanging inside.

He found it at once. His great hand became more delicate in touch than the fingers of a great musician. So he explored the pockets and almost instantly he reached the thing that he wanted—the ring of keys!

In the keen relief of that discovery, he leaned for a moment against the jamb of the door, breathing heavily.

For he could realize, now, on how small a chance he had been depending. It was a ten-thousand-to-one-shot that Eddie Clewes would be guilty of a carelessness so criminal as this! And yet here was the thing accomplished! Another catastrophe that could be attributed to the malign influence of love!

The confidence of Mr. Pritchard increased enormously after this first success.

To be sure, Eddie Clewes was drugged with love and sleep, at the present time, and his regular breathing could be distinguished from the bed in the room, but when Eddie wakened and learned what had happened, that would be a different matter. Oh, very different, indeed!

And Mr. Pritchard had no intention of being trailed across the country by this sinister, smiling young man!

He changed his mind, therefore, and crept with tigerish caution toward the bed. He would not use the gun. Guns might fail, and besides, the noise of the explosion would spoil everything that remained to be done. Instead, there was the slungshot.

A quick flexion of his hand threw

it down from its rubber band that held it close to his wrist. He held it with the tip of his thumb against his flattened fingers, a small weight to do such great things as it had accomplished in the past. Now he planned, with one blow, to crush the intellectual forehead of Eddie Clewes.

But as he came closer and closer, he could eventually see the silhouette of the sleeper quite clearly, and it happened that Eddie lay upon his side, with his face turned straight toward the advancing enemy!

A small thing, surely, to stop such a person as Dandy Dick Pritchard, but then, he knew more about Eddie Clewes than has been related. And when he was sure that the face of the sleeper was turned toward him, it seemed certain to him that Eddie had not been sleeping any of the time, but that he had been lying there wide awake, listening, and smiling to himself.

That was typical of Eddie, to smile and nod his head, with secret knowledge of which Mr. Pritchard could not even conceive. There was a mysterious invincibility about that young man, and now a flood of fear poured out upon Dandy Dick and made him shrink away toward the door of the room as fast as he could go.

He knew that the knob turned softly, because he had tried it before, earlier in the evening. Yet he spent a whole quarter of an hour of sweating anguish opening that door without a sound.

Eventually he was in the hall, beyond, but even there he hardly dared permit himself to breathe. For behind there was stalking the image of Clewes slipping from bed, picking up a weapon and walking with the silent step which Pritchard had so often admired, so often striven to imitate, and always in vain!

He shook this phantasm out of his brain and was about to turn down the hall when he heard the crash and the trill of an electric bell.

It seemed to him that every soul in the place must instantly be on his feet, shouting "Burglars!"

Certainly it was an alarm which had entrapped him.

He waited, his shoulders flattened against the wall, murder in his hand and in his heart. The bell rang again, and now with a more ordered wit, he could understand. It was the telephone ringing in the lower hall and who would go to answer it? Why, young Eddie Clewes, of course, anxious to be of service to this new family into which the scoundrel was insinuating himself! Eddie Clewes, of course, awakened by his hair-trigger nerves the instant that the bell rang!

Mr. Pritchard glided down the stairs to the lower hall. He thought of attempting to get on down to the cellar where the safe was kept, but he hesitated as he heard a door open above him. That meant that his time might be very short for investigating the safe with any security. And there were all of those keys to be tried on the lock of it!

So thought Pritchard, and he slipped into the dark mouth of the next doorway and shook his fist at the clangor of the telephone, which was ringing for the third time.

A light snapped on in the upper hall and crossed the lower floor with bars of shadow from the railings of the stairway, and a moving shadow floated swiftly down across those bars and turned, a white-robed figure, into the hallway.

It was Dolly Exeter, first in all that sleepy house to waken. And Pritchard wondered again, and heaved a sigh of relief. If it were she, so much the better—so infinitely much the better!

She was at the telephone, now, while he shrunk deeper into the shadows of his doorway and listened.

"Hello! Hello!

"Well, Oliver, at such a late hour!

"Oh, yes, I've forgiven you, of course. I was rude to you, and I'm sorry—but just now I'm shivering in my nightgown. It's dreadfully c-c-cold! Of course I forgive you. Is that all?"

The telephone's snarling, metallic murmur answered through a long moment.

"You want to see the colonel? So late—so very late?

"Well—of course. If you really have to, but you know when his sleep is once broken, it's gone for the entire night, he's so high-strung."

Another pause, and another murmur of the phone.

"Very well," she answered. Then, in the act of turning away, she whirled suddenly back: "It's about Ned! You've found out something about Ned!"

She waited, her ear pressed hard against the receiver.

"Ah, well, I'm glad of that! You promise?

"Yes. Good night, Oliver. It isn't about Ned, then? Good night, good night. I'll call father at once!

"No, not a bit.

"Yes, you *must* come. I haven't any bad feelings about it. I'm only ashamed that I was so rude to you, I should have known that you wouldn't do anything except what your best conscience told you to do! Good night again!"

She placed the telephone carefully on the stand, and then turned away, and into the arms and the coat which Mr. Pritchard held in waiting for her.

She had no chance for movement or sound.

One long, apelike arm had crushed the breath from her body, and the folds of the coat closed at the same time across her face.

That accomplished, all that Mr. Pritchard had to do was to wait until the struggling inside that coat ceased, and he minded the kickings and the beatings of the hands no more than rock minds the flurrying wings of a moth.

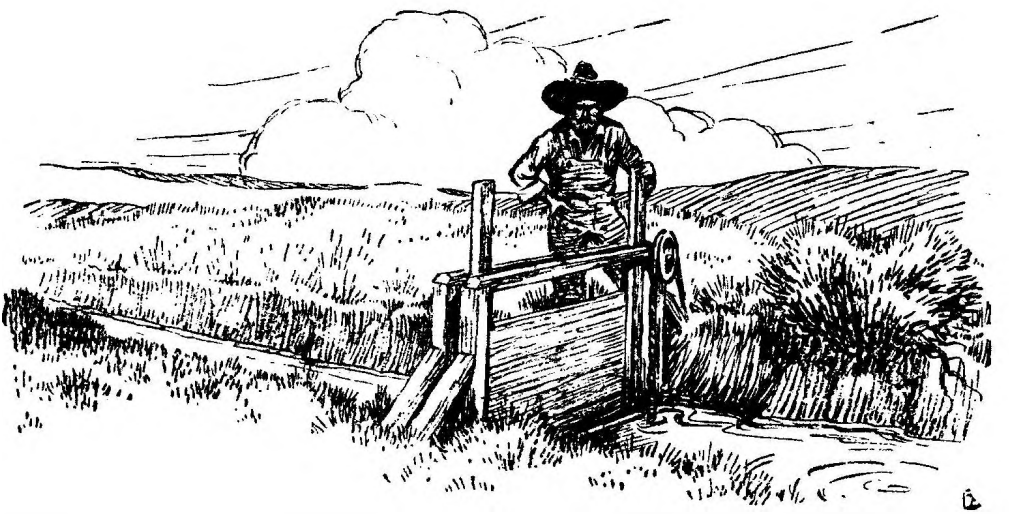
When she struggled no more, he carried her back into the dining room, which was the nearest door, and laid his ear to her heart. It was still beating. And he rather regretted it. It made him take more time, and time was precious to Mr. Pritchard just now.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

BIG BEND GAME PRESERVE

DOWN in the Big Bend section of Texas, a large tract of five hundred thousand acres, in Brewster, Jeff Davis, and Pecos Counties, has been set aside as a game preserve by Game Commissioner T. E. Hubby. The preserve includes some choice range land and has ample timber and water supply. The region is one where the wild game is making its last stand. Bear, antelope, deer, mountain lions, panthers, black lobo wolves, and other species of wild animals are to be found there.

The boundary of the preserve begins about forty miles from Alpine, Texas, on the south and runs about fifteen miles east and west extending to the county line, ten miles north of Alpine. In Brewster County, the preserve occupies a tract fifteen miles long and ten miles wide, while Jeff Davis and Pecos Counties contribute one hundred thousand acres to the wild life refuge. This is said to be the most extensive game preserve in the United States.



Pioneer Towns of the West

Nampa, Idaho

By A. V. Strope

Author of "Hot Springs, Ark.," etc.

SO close is southwestern Idaho to the day of the rugged pioneer that many a man living in Nampa now can remember the time when the site of his city was only an unfertile plain dotted here and there with the silver-gray sagebrush. Those first white men who, in 1811, under the leadership of Wilson P. Hunt, crossed the Far West to the Columbia River, passing through the Boise Valley and discovering the Boise River in their route, are dead long since. Of course, in one sense they were the pioneers, but they were more truly explorers, as they did not linger to develop the country through which they journeyed. That task fell to the lot of those who followed in the trails they blazed. To the trappers and fur buyers who plied their trades along the rivers and among the mountains of Idaho, and to the miners who came after them belong the credit for the founding of the first settlements.

Although Nampa is in every sense of the term a pioneer city, it was not incorporated as a town until 1890. When the Union Pacific Railroad crossed southern Idaho on its way to the West Coast, Nampa was only a name on a white signpost beside the tracks. Nothing but a section house and a water tank broke the monotony of the sagebrush plain. This lonely siding took its name from that of a chief of the Shoshone tribe of redskins—Nampah, or Bigfoot.

As recently as 1885 Alexander Duffes filed on the one hundred and sixty acres which became the original town site of Nampa. In those days the settlers in the Boise Valley were few; and their homes were separated by wide stretches of rough, broken country, from which, at times, hostile Indians sallied forth to ravage the holdings of the white men and take their toll of innocent victims.

Many are the tales told by old-timers in Nampa of the perilous early days. From the lips of Charles E. Carter, who was first a "squatter" and then a home-

steader in the Boise Valley, we have the following story of his own experience with the redskins:

"We had one Indian scare after I took up a homestead beside the river, six miles north of Nampa. About 1878 a small band of renegade Bannocks from Fort Hall Reservation went on the war path and started for Oregon to persuade the Umatilla tribe to join them on a raiding expedition. They were led by War Eagle, a tribal chief; and, on their way through Owyhee County they killed a freighting party and devastated several ranches in the Bruneau country. In a battle south of Silver City, War Eagle was killed by a company of volunteers. The other Indians continued to Oregon, where they were joined by a few Umatilla renegades, and started back toward Idaho on a campaign of pillage and murder.

"Learning of the Indians' rampage, the settlers along the Boise River immediately began the construction of a log stockade, a mile east of my place, and the following day we all moved in, where we stayed about ten days. Then we heard that the Indians had returned to the reservation and were again peaceable. With the loss of their leader, the redskins disbanded. There were about one hundred and fifty of us in the stockade."

Albin Hollberg is another resident of Nampa who did pioneer work in the Boise Valley and who faced the horrors of a possible Indian uprising. Mr. Hollberg hauled lumber and freight from Nampa before there was a railroad building there; the freight was thrown from the train to the embankment.

"That was in 1886," Mr. Hollberg related recently. "The railroad had just been built, and I was employed as a 'mule skinner' from Nampa to the mines at Silver City. It was a long, dusty road. The only building along the route was Charles Peters' cabin, which was built on the homestead he 'squatted' on in 1886. I had no idea Nampa would ever be a town, and the village was not really assured until the branch line was built to Boise in 1887.

"In that year a band of braves from the Duck Valley reserve secured some whisky at Bruneau. After drinking it, the Indians decided to go on the war path. They donned feathers and war paint and started a war dance. News of the possible uprising spread to the ranch where I worked then, and that morning I was to drive a team of mules to the Bruneau country. I was cautioned about the Indians, but said I wasn't afraid of them as I knew them. So I started. When I reached a rough part of the country I noticed that the mules sensed the presence of Indians. The mules had been in Indian raids and were afraid of the redskins; they could always be depended upon to give warning when the Indians were near. Although I felt nervous, I continued on my way; and, in a few minutes, a small band of braves appeared on horseback over the brow of the hill. When they approached I recognized them as friends, and I sure felt relieved. They said there was no danger from the Indians at Bruneau, as they would be peaceful when they had sobered up, which proved to be the truth."

Incidents such as these were the ordinary hazards of life in Idaho only forty or fifty years ago. Mr. Carter and Mr. Hollberg were fortunate in that tragedy came no nearer to them. There are other pioneers in Idaho to-day who were more vitally affected by the Indian menace. Such a one is Mrs. Charles E. Share, who, in 1864, at the age of thirteen years, crossed the plains from Missouri to the Boise River is a covered wagon drawn by oxen. She knew well Henry Robie, who, only a few days before his death, visited her at her ranch beside the Boise River. Robie was pursued for two hundred miles by a band

of Indians and died of exhaustion soon after reaching the safety of Boise. Mrs. Robie, to avenge her husband's death, offered one thousand dollars for the head or body of Chief Egan, who had led the pursuit. The reward was paid to two other Indian chiefs, who joined Egan's band, waited until they were alone with the leader, and then killed him and brought his head into Boise.

During the Camas Prairie outrages in 1878 tragedy struck right home to Mrs. Share, for her brother-in-law, William S. Heminway, was shot down by Indians as he was driving a stage from Boise to Silver City. Usually United States soldiers accompanied the stage through the most dangerous section of the country, but that day the vehicle was already too heavily loaded to carry any guards.

Nothing illustrates better the sturdy courage of the pioneer men and women of Idaho than Mrs. Share's own account of what she and her husband did when news was brought them that Indians on the war path had shot her brother-in-law. "My husband told me to get the children ready and take them to Silver City on the stage, but that he would have to go and get Billy," Mrs. Share says simply. "He thought that Billy might still be alive; and, if that were so, the savages would torture him. So with five other men he rode into the hostile's country, found Billy's body, and buried it. In the meantime, the children and I had gone by stage to Silver City. There we were met by all the women and children from neighboring ranches, some friendly Piute Indians, and some white men with rifles to guard against the savages.

"After a company of volunteers had fought a battle with the redskins and had killed the leader, Buffalo Horn, I went back to our stage house on Reynolds Creek. Those were trying times. We didn't know at what hour the Indians might descend upon us, and we were afraid to sleep at night. Guards were kept on the watch at all times. I never quite overcame my fear of the redskins. Often peaceful Indians came to the stage house on their fishing trips to Reynolds Creek; if my husband was away at such times, I felt nervous. I believe the women suffered more from anxiety and suspense than the men, as the latter would often be away for long periods of time, and the women would have to wait in constant anxiety, not knowing the danger that might come to them or the unforeseen misfortune which might befall their husbands."

These early settlers, before the coming of the railroad, had only slow means of communication with the outside world. Pack trains with supplies for the first homesteaders in the Boise Valley were a long time in reaching them, for the traders' starting place on the long trek was Walla Walla, Washington. Later a stage line, one hundred and eighty-five miles long, was established between Umatilla and Placerville, in the Boise basin. The "Overland Stage Line" from Salt Lake to Boise followed; but regular mail service did not come into Cañon County until the Oregon Short Line Railroad—Union Pacific—was built between Salt Lake and Boise in 1883.

So remote were the early settlers from the centers of civilization that for a time sagebrush wood was legal tender at Nampa. There were no trees in the vicinity of the village, so the homesteader would cut some of the sagebrush on his property and, transporting it to town, exchange it for articles freighted in by the railroad.

Of paramount importance in the development of this pioneer town were the railroads, the irrigation canals, and the few men and women of vision who early took up land in the desert. In 1883, when the Oregon Short Line ran its first train past the site of Nampa, there were but two homesteads in the

vicinity, those of Charles Stewart and Stephan A. Keyser. Seven years later there were enough people at Nampa to justify its incorporation as a town. During the intervening period a branch line of the railroad had been opened from Nampa to Boise, and in 1890 the first irrigation canal in the section was constructed.

The Phyllis Canal, however, did not give the settlers a sufficient supply of water. Men who owned one hundred and sixty acres of land got only enough water to irrigate about forty. In order to obtain water for drinking purposes they were forced either to sink deep wells or to freight the precious fluid many miles behind plodding mules. Hordes of rabbits devastated their first crops, but with splendid perseverance the homesteaders set themselves to exterminate the rodent pest and to plan new irrigation projects. In 1891, by completing the Ridenbaugh Canal, they greatly increased the productivity of their fields and brought water to the very eastern limits of the town site.

Nampa's growth was assured. Alex Duffes, whom I have already mentioned, built the first store, and Ben Haines established a lumber yard. Ira M. Taylor opened a restaurant, and Mr. Duffes built the first hotel. The town was expanding rapidly.

An added impetus was given to its progress when, in 1896, Colonel William H. Dewey built a railroad south from Nampa across the Snake River to Murphy, near which town there were important gold mines. He was responsible also for the linking of Nampa and Emmett by rail; later the tracks were continued to McCall to tap the vast lumber industry of the Payette Lake region of Idaho.

Believing in the future of Nampa, Colonel Dewey bought the original town site together with some other land; and, in 1900, he broke ground there for the erection of a $250,000 hotel. This, The Dewey Hotel, was, for some time, the most modernly equipped hostelry in Idaho and attracted many people to Nampa.

Now the "Pride of the Cañon County" has a population of 8,200. The city, nine hundred miles from Portland, Oregon, and Salt Lake City, Utah, stands midway between them. Set in the heart of the Boise Valley, it is 2,492 feet above sea level. Adjacent to, and surrounding it, are fertile farm lands; to the southeast lies fine cattle country; southwest are gold and silver mines and good grazing lands; heavy timber forests stretch to the north and east, in which regions, gold, silver and copper are also found.

The interests of Nampa, however, center in the industries located in the city and on the near-by farm lands. Throughout the Boise Valley the soil is uniformly a mixture of rich mountain loam with volcanic ash and decayed basaltic rock. Ages ago this section was the scene of active volcanoes that deposited over the surrounding country a soil that is adapted to the production of practically every kind of fruit, grain, or grass, potatoes, melons and all the standard garden vegetables.

Southern Idaho, however, outside of the timbered areas, has an average rainfall of less than ten inches, although at Nampa it is thirteen and eighty-one hundredths inches. Most of the precipitation occurs during the winter months. Thunderstorms and lightning are extremely rare, and no farmer ever insures his crops against hail. For three hundred and twenty days of the year, the sun shines brightly upon the plains.

No matter how fertile the land, under such conditions irrigation is essential if the fields are not to remain arid. The early settlers built canals to bring water to them; now the Government stores an ample supply in reservoirs constructed at great expense. The irrigation plant of the Boise project pro-

vides for storage of water in the Arrowrock Reservoir. Arrowrock Dam is the highest in the world, being three hundred and forty-eight and one-half feet from the lowest point of the foundation to the top of the parapets. Completed in 1915, it converts the channel of the Boise River into a reservoir with a capacity of 244,300 feet of water, for the irrigation of 234,000 acres of land. This, with the Deer Flat Reservoir and land under private water rights, irrigates 411,000 acres of highly productive land in the Boise Valley. Nampa is the center of this wealthy empire.

Foremost among the agricultural products of the region is the potato, which has won wide recognition for the farmers of the State. In the country about Nampa this vegetable matures earlier than in other sections, so that high prices are assured. The yield per acre is heavy, and the same land may be planted with head lettuce. Within the last few years the head lettuce has proved to be one of the most profitable crops raised in this locality. One acre of ground that has already yielded potatoes, will produce in the same year about three hundred crates of head lettuce of exceptional quality. This commodity is marketed during October and November, when nearly every other section of the United States has none to offer.

The ever-bearing varieties of strawberries and raspberries are coming into strong favor, as they assure a succession of these delicious fruits during the entire season. Grapes flourish, and in some parts of the valley the Thompson Seedless and the Flaming Tokay are a big success. Cantaloupes and melons of all kinds grow well. Sweet corn, beets, beans, celery, asparagus, onions, peas, tomatoes, pickles and, in fact every variety of vegetable found in the temperate zone can be produced abundantly. The exceptional crops, of course, are attributed to the remarkably rich soil, ideal climatic conditions, and the control, through irrigation, of the water supply.

Apples and pears first were raised in the Boise Valley because miners in the gold and silver camps of Orofino, Silver City, and Florence were willing to pay high prices for them. Large orchards were set out and thrived. While apples and prunes are to-day the leading fruit crops of the country around Nampa; pears, cherries, peaches, and apricots are all produced successfully. Occasionally, it must be admitted, late frosts in the springs catch these less hardy fruits. Idaho apples and prunes are in excellent repute throughout the land; many of the latter are packed green and sold on the Eastern market as extra-fancy plums. Fruits are now shipped in vast quantities from Nampa to the East and even to Europe. Evaporating plants handle a large portion of the prune crop.

Alfalfa, the first forage plant to be sown on the plain, produces from five to eight tons per acre in three cuttings a season. Oats, barley, wheat, corn, rye, buckwheat, red clover, and various grasses are grown successfully. The seed industry is a very profitable one in southern Idaho. As high as two hundred and eighty-eight bushels of alfalfa seed and twenty-two bushels of red clover have been garnered from a single acre of land.

Since there is a plenitude of fodder, one is not surprised to learn that the Boise Valley is a live-stock center. Herds of cattle and flocks of sheep from the forest reserves and other parts of the State are driven to pasture in the Nampa fields during the winter months. Sheep raised on the farms there feed upon the famed blue grass of the region. Hogs are brought to market condition economically on alfalfa. Many kinds of poultry thrive. Of course the lowly hen receives much attention. Ducks and geese revel in the irrigation ditches; turkeys—the little

ones—are given a few weeks' care, and then turned into the alfalfa to rustle for themselves till fall. These last-named birds, in many localities so difficult to raise, thrive in the equable climate of southern Idaho. A novelty to Easterners are the many flocks of Chinese pheasants, thousands of which are to be found in the Boise Valley.

Beef cattle are secondary in importance to the dairy herds. Three cows can be pastured for an entire season on an acre of the luxuriant blue grass. For abundance of cheap, palatable feed, the big element in the dairy business, the Boise Valley is unsurpassed. Alfalfa alone, with its high protein content, is almost a balanced ration and an ideal feed for the dairy cow. With moderate summer and winter seasons, the country is particularly adapted to dairying. The absence of severe storms or extremely low temperatures makes expensive housing for the cows unnecessary.

In Nampa is the second largest milk condensary in the United States, that of the Carnation Milk Company, which buys almost 100,000 pounds of milk daily. Two other large creameries, making butter, cheese, and ice cream, have an annual business of over a million dollars. Butter and cheese from Nampa are in great demand and are sold not only in near-by markets but also in such places as the distant Philippine Islands.

The Pacific Fruit Express Company recently completed at Nampa a large car-repairing shop. In addition to its ice-making factory, which has been in operation for several years, the company now has nineteen buildings to house its various departments. Under normal conditions 18,000 to 20,000 cars are iced annually at the Nampa plant. Refrigerator cars are repaired there, lumber stored and all waste incinerated.

There are also in the city two flour mills, three big grain elevators, an apiary supply factory—honey is shipped to many States from this center—a cannery, a dehydrating plant, railroad repair shops, an iron foundry, machine works, et cetra.

A daily newspaper, a semiweekly one, and a weekly keep the citizens in touch with local, national, and foreign affairs.

The children of Nampa are adequately instructed in the public grade schools and the Nampa High School. A private school in the city furnishes business courses to those who desire them. The Nazarene College, which was begun as a grammer school about thirteen years ago, to-day includes elementary, grammar, high-school grades, and courses required for the Bachelor of Arts degree. Distant a twenty minutes drive from the city, is the College of Idaho, founded in 1893. This institution of learning offers courses leading to the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science.

Two modern hospitals—the Mercy, and the Nazarene Missionary Sanitarium and Institute—are well equipped to care for the ill.

Residents in Nampa, however, are rarely in need of such attention, for they live in a very healthful locality under sanitary conditions. The municipal water supply is drawn from deep artesian wells, free from bacteria or harmful chemicals. Graded streets and cement-paved sidewalks make strolling or driving through the city a pleasure. Beautiful parks and playgrounds add to the attractiveness and healthfulness of Nampa.

Electric lamps illuminate twenty-five miles of the city streets. Indeed, for light, cooking, and power, electricity is used generally; it is supplied by water-power plants along the Snake, Boise and Payette Rivers.

Beside the exceptional railroad accommodation that is Nampa's, and which I have mentioned earlier in this

article, the city has the good fortune of being on three highways. The Evergreen, the Idaho Pacific, and the Idaho State highways pass through it.

By them you may go into the big game country of the Thunder Mountain region of Idaho. There you may find not only game birds in abundance, but also moose, elk, deer, caribou, mountain sheep and goats, bears, and cougars. The streams teem with fish.

In this section, which may be reached only through Nampa, there are many historic and picturesque spots. Ten miles north of Thunder Mountain, for instance, there is a pretty lake, below whose waters lies what was, prior to 1910, the prosperous mining camp of Roosevelt. In that year, a slight earthquake caused part of a mountain to slide into the cañon and dam Monumental Creek. Roosevelt lay in the path of the dammed waters and was inundated.

Idaho still, as in the early days, is a field of opportunity for those who seek adventure and will brave the hazards of the wild. The pioneers of Nampa, who have so energetically developed the city and the resources of the land, are an inspiration to the venturesome. One might give a long list of Nampa's worthy citizens. I have space to mention only a few in addition to those whose experiences are recounted in these pages. The Hon. George Meffan is the mayor of this busy metropolis; T. W. Poole is president of its Chamber of Commerce; Jefferson Waterhouse, George King, William H. Craven, T. J. Mahoney, L. F. Yoder, and C. C. Anderson are prominent in the business and social life of the pioneer town and progressive city.

AMERICAN RIVER CANYON TRAGEDY

THE Westlake mine, in the American River Cañon, in California, was recently the scene of a tragic accident. Thomas Bartlett Crawford, a young man who was working to obtain money to go to the Colorado School of Mines, at Golden, Colorado, was employed by Montgomery Westlake, owner of the mine, and the two men were timbering one of the tunnels of the mine. They were just finishing this task, and Westlake suggested quitting for the noon-hour luncheon, when Crawford swung the heavy sledge he was holding against one of the uprights of the tunnel, and this displaced a cap and precipitated a slide. In a few seconds, Crawford was covered with tons of earth, and Westlake barely succeeded in scrambling out of the tunnel.

Immediately, Westlake went back to try to rescue his unfortunate companion. He attacked the slide of earth with his bare hands, digging away frantically until he fainted. When he recovered consciousness, he went at his task again, until he finally dug out Crawford's body, with only his hands as implements.

The nearest person in the cañon was four miles away, and although he heard the four blasts of dynamite which Westlake set off as a distress signal, he did not recognize it as such. Westlake was therefore obliged to journey alone to the camp and then to Auburn to report the fatality.

The Five Reddened Spears

By Howard Matteson

ALONE white man, hundreds of miles from any possible aid, with a hundred hostile natives arrayed against him, is justified in feeling a trifle shaky. "Shag" Gifford's iron nerves were beginning to get a bit ragged. He was putting in his days, his wakeful nights, wondering when the fatal blow would fall. That the death sentence had been pronounced against him, there could be no possible doubt. Grimly he set about looking to his meager defenses. He was resolved that if he did go down, it would be in the smoke. And he would take with him, on the long journey, as many flat-faced Aleuts as possible. In especial, at the final show-down, he would settle affairs for good and all with the half-breed whom they called Annaiyu Lewis.

Shag Gifford, working on the fish traps and in the canneries of southeastern Alaska, had saved up seventeen hundred dollars. There are prosperous fox farms in the Ketchikan country. Shag got the fox fever. An acquaintance told Shag the way to play the fox-farming game was to go away out on the Aleutian archipelago and pick him an island. The Aleuts, Shag was told, would supply him with native foxes cheap, and furnish him fish for fox feed.

The United States coast-guard ship *Wolf* chanced to be in port. Shag sought and obtained permission to take passage on the *Wolf*. Hundreds of miles off the Alaskan coast, the *Wolf* put Shag over the side and rowed him to the island of Un-nak in the work boat.

One piece of advice the captain of the *Wolf* gave to Shag Gifford. "You must respect Aleut manners and customs. They are murderous devils when their superstitions are questioned and their ceremonies derided. This ship won't visit these waters again for a year.

Remember this above all: never, never show fear, even if you feel it. Accept every challenge they make you; win if you can. Good luck!"

The work boat of the *Wolf* was no more than swung back to its davits, when, through the press of flat-faced Aleuts who had surrounded Shag on the beach, an important-acting fellow thrust his way. "I am Annaiyu Lewis," said the fellow, obviously a half-breed. "My name, 'Annaiyu,' it means, 'one everybody listens to.' What do you want here? They's more islands than this. You better go away. I send a man in a umiak to take you to some other island."

Shag let those steady, gray eyes of his rest upon the fellow for some moments. "I'll just stick here a while." said Shag, evenly. "When I get ready to leave, if I ever do, I'll let you know."

Shag proceeded to stare the half-breed down. When the fellow, muttering something under his breath, had turned away, Shag summoned a squat, powerfully built native and bade him carry his luggage to some vacant igloo.

That night, the roof of the igloo fell in. One of the whale-rib rafters, as thick as a man's thigh, missed Shag's head by inches. Shag moved his camp into the open and spread his blankets in a space surrounded by gray beach boulders.

Returning from a walk along the shore, he dipped a tin cup in the canvas bucket. Something about the taste of the water seemed off. Shag set the cup down, looked at it for a moment. He opened a blade of his knife, dipped it in the water, and dried it by waving it gently to and fro in the air. Upon the blade, as upon the brim of the cup was a faint, greenish deposit.

Some one, during his absence, had emptied the bucket that Shag had filled at a little stream and had filled it from a spring at the farther end of the island. The water of that spring, Shag learned, was so thoroughly impregnated with copper salts, that a generous draught was as deadly as a dose of strychnine.

All about him, Shag met hostile looks, heard muttered threats. Shag, keeping eyes and ears open, discovered what he thought was the reason. Annaiyu Lewis was a dealer in the contraband seal and seal-otter skins that the United States says must not be taken. Also, Annaiyu dealt in vodka and Russian bitters, and lured the simple natives into games of black jack, and poker, and the native game called "nu-pug-u-zhuk." Lewis, believing Shag to be a government agent, was trying to drive him away. The given name of Lewis, Shag was discovering, meant really and truly, "one to whom all listen."

More threatening grew the looks, the mutterings of the natives. A ten-year-old Aleut boy, springing from behind a boulder, drew the string of his bird bow and let fly an arrow that pierced Shag's arm like a hot needle. In half a dozen leaps, Shag captured the boy, laid him across his knee, and administered several earnest, old-fashioned spanks. The boy, more terrified than hurt by this unexpected reprisal, went squalling to his igloo.

During the afternoon, Shag's ear was arrested by the sound of the thudding of a war drum. Curious, Shag followed in the direction of the sound. Two or three-score Aleuts had gathered before the igloo of crimson spears, the sanctuary wherein resided Iser Kyner, witch doctor, sayer of black-devil prayers. No native approached nearer than a few paces of the igloo sanctuary; for it was taboo, a place forbidden to all save the witch doctor himself.

Presently the witch doctor came forth, a tremendous figure in a long mantlelike garment made of the feathered skins of ptarmigan. Upon his face, Iser Kyner wore a hideous, gargoyle sort of mask, made of willow wood, adorned with patches of feathers and

tabs of fur. Iser Kyner waved his arms and muttered his incantations to the accompaniment of the thudding war drum and wailing responses of the Aleuts. Smiling indulgently at this childish hocus-pocus, Shag withdrew to his camp.

An hour later Annaiyu Lewis, the half-breed, paid Shag a visit. "Iser Kyner have a strong dream," said Lewis, his ratlike eyes shifting. "The dream tells Iser Kyner that we have a white man here who must go away, or the fish will fail, and the seals; and we will all die of the spot sickness. You must go away. I get a umiak. Take you to some other island."

"Thanks," said Shag, dryly. "I'm wise to you, Lewis. You bribed old fur and feathers to have that dream. You're gathering contraband seal and otter pelts, running a crooked gambling game, selling Russian voda and bitters. You're afraid I'll squawk on you to the coast guard. I'm wise to you. But you're not going to run me off. When I get ready to leave, I'll let you know. Get that, Lewis?"

The half-caste shrugged his shoulders, spread his hands, and turned away.

Passing the igloo of Annaiyu Lewis a little later, Shag heard his name called. He went to the door and looked in. Two half-drunken Aleuts lounged in a corner. Seated behind a rough deal table, was the half-breed.

"Come on in," invited Lewis, shoving a bottle and a dirty glass toward Shag.

"Never use it," said Shag curtly, entering the room and looking about.

"You ever play black jack, take a hand at poker?" inquired Lewis, scanning the visitor sharply.

Annaiyu Lewis was shuffling a deck of cards. With a sort of fascination, Shag watched the fellow for a moment. Marvelously deft were those slim, yellow hands of the half-breed. He was shooting the cards from one hand to the other with the skill of a magician. Several times Shag had seen Lewis showing off on the beach, demonstrating his ambidextrous skill. Lewis was a man who could hurl a seal spear or shoot a bow or a rifle with either hand. Also, he could deal a deck of cards with either hand.

"Ever take a hand?" repeated Lewis. "I got some money loose you might win if you got the nerve."

Remembering the advice of the skipper never to pass up a challenge, curious to know just what the fellow was up to, Shag drew from his pocket a walrus-hide poke wherein rested his seventeen hundred hard-earned dollars. At sight of the fat roll of bills and the sound of the chink of gold, the rat eyes of Lewis glittered. Shag peeled off a bill, flung it upon the table. Deftly Lewis dealt the two hands of black jack. With the last face-up card to Shag, Lewis, announcing that Shag had busted—got over twenty-one—gathered in the bill and made ready to deal a second hand.

"I'd be a fool to monkey with your game, Lewis," announced Shag, returning the walrus-hide poke to his pocket. "You're too plumb familiar with the little flock of kings and queens you got snugged away on the bottom of that deck. I got my money's worth, though, learning you're a crook and a sharper."

Lewis scowled and laughed.

Still later, Shag, walking about the island, every sense alert, on the watch for the next hostile move, very plainly saw Annaiyu Lewis and the witch doctor, Iser Kyner, in earnest talk in a clump of stunted larch. When, presently, the war drum began to thud, Shag could not escape the feeling that another hocus-pocus was about to be celebrated in his honor. From a discreetly chosen hiding place in the rocks, Shag looked on at the ceremony of the red dipping of the seal spears, an ancient rite indulged in whenever the tribe was to go to war, or any other portentous event impended.

Iser Kyner, clad in his feathers and his willow mask, marched forth from the sanctuary, five spears in his grasp. At a respectful distance from the holy igloo, an escort of natives fell in before him and marched to the beach. A freshly slain walrus lay upon the sands. To the accompaniment of the frenzied leapings and howlings of the Aleuts, Iser Kyner again and again plunged the spears into the body of the walrus. Formerly, this horrid and dreadful rite was performed upon the body of a hapless captive. After a good bit of chanting, and leaping, the company escorted Iser Kyner back to the sanctuary, the witch doctor waving the reddened spears and shouting his unholy benedictions upon the Aleuts.

Some time during the night, Shag felt a gentle tugging at the bundle of his clothing that he folded up for a pillow. He twisted in his blankets, shot out a hand and grasped a human wrist that tore itself free, leaving in his clutch what felt like a bunch of feathers. For an instant, silhouetted against the feeble glow of the camp fire, Shag made out a tall figure with a flapping, mantlelike garment clothing it, a mask covering its face.

Shag leaped to his feet, tore after the feather-clad thief. Straight toward the igloo of reddened spears ran the marauder, entered, and slammed the door. Shag came to a pause. To enter that igloo in pursuit would be sheer madness, suicide, self-murder. One cry of alarm from the witch doctor, and the fanatical natives would make a pincushion of Shag Gifford with their seal spears.

Slowly Shag retraced his steps to his camp. He tumbled about the bundle of clothes that had served him as pillow, searched every pocket. The walrus-poke, containing seventeen hundred hard-earned dollars was gone. What a fool he had been to display his roll in the gaming igloo of Annaiyu Lewis. He stirred up the fire and sat hugging his knees, cussing himself for being an idiot.

As soon as the smoke began to spiral from the smoke hole in the igloo of Annaiyu Lewis, Shag ascended the hill, gave the door a vigorous kick, yanked it open, and walked in. Shag walked to the table, behind which the half-breed was seated. Shag rested his hands upon the table, thrust his face fairly into the countenance of the gambler.

"Lewis," said Shag, his tones crisp and incisive, "I want my money back, seventeen hundred dollars stole from me last night. You know about it."

The rat eyes of Lewis never faltered, but his hands began a nervous drumming upon the table.

Shag withdrew one hand, flirted aside the canvas coat that he was wearing, popped in under the nose of Lewis a big, old six-shooter of the siege-gun type.

"Take a slant at that smoke wagon, Lewis. Oh, I know. If I start anything your people will fill me so full of seal spears I'll look like a porcupine. But before they get me, I'll sure ventilate you a lot. This is an old-timer, this gun is. She throws a hunk like a brickbat, tears a dirty hole. I want my money."

"Set down," said Lewis, wetting his lips. "We'll talk about it. You ain't in no hurry to collect them seal spears you mentioned. Set down."

Shag drew up a cracker box and seated himself, the black barrel of the old gun resting upon the edge of the table.

"If you was to turn loose on me with that," said Lewis, pointing to the gun, "you wouldn't last long enough to get any good out of mucking me off. In a way, you would last quite a while at that. You got it wrong about the seal spears. My folks wouldn't take it out on you with seal spears. You'd be luckier if they did."

"Listen, Lewis," returned Shag, tapping the gun barrel down upon the barrel. "I aim to have back my seventeen hundred dollars. I'm going to have it. You ain't caring how I die, if I die; you're trying to talk me out of treating your liver with one of these big lead pills."

"No, I ain't caring how you die. I thought it was fair to let you know, though. I'm what my people call the 'mal-u-hjuk' in this village, the second one, next to the witch doctor himself. If you was to kill me, my people would take you out, tie you down on the beach naked, let the sand crabs pick your meat a day and a night. Then they'd spread-eagle you on the beach, build a fire at your back, in front, one at your feet, and pile on fresh wood on your sides of the fires. Fair enough to let you know what would happen."

"My seventeen hundred dollars——"

"I'm getting to that. If you have the nerve, you can win it back, maybe, or die quick and painless, like a fighting man if you lose. Lots of all-white men don't pack the sand ballast to go against the game I mean. We call it muck-muck, death if you lose, everything, anything on this island you want if you win."

"Since I saw you peel a queen off the bottom of the deck, I don't think much of your games, Lewis."

"But you don't play this game with me," answered the half-breed. "It ain't a game with cards, or dice, or white and black sticks. You don't buck my game when you play muck-muck, you play against the shaman himself, the witch doctor, Iser Kyner."

"What is the game? How do you play it?"

"The witch doctor will show you. It's a square game. I swear it by the shade of De-aub." Annaiyu Lewis lifted his left hand and swore by the black-devil god of his belief.

"I'd get my seventeen hundred back if I win?" said Shag, recalling the advice of the skipper to never pass up a challenge.

"Yes, and anything else on the island you wanted."

"How do you set in on this muck-muck game?"

"Watch the igloo of reddened spears. When you see the door standing open, go to the door, call out 'muck-muck.' Iser Kyner will know that you have come for the ordeal of the five spears. It's a square game. Since De-aub fell into the sea a thousand years ago, my people have played the game when there was something big at stake. Some lose, some win. It takes a lot of nerve."

"I'll go you on this muck-muck game," said Shag, suddenly springing to his feet. "It had better be a square game, Lewis. Better be!" Shag balanced the gun under Lewis' nose.

"You can't pack that gun along," said the half-breed. "A man that plays muck-muck goes into the igloo bare handed. The game is square, I swear."

Shag took a turn about the igloo. Through an open door he caught sight of three Aleuts crouched behind a tree. An ancient rifle rested against the bole, in the midst of the hafts of a dozen seal spears. Shag sauntered by a narrow window. On that side of the igloo, partially hidden in the shelter of some rocks, were at least a dozen armed Aleuts.

Shag, though his attitude was carelessness itself, was doing some fast thinking. The igloo was well guarded. He might bend the gun over Lewis' head, shoot his way to the beach, seize a kiak or a umiak, and flee. But it was a thousand chances to one that he wouldn't get a hundred yards before the spears, arrows, and rifle balls would bear him down. This muck-muck game, while it probably was crooked, might offer a chance.

"I'll go you a whirl on this muck-muck," said Shag, coming to a pause,

looking Lewis squarely in the eye. "How about the flock of Aleuts hanging around? Call that a square game, one man against a hundred?"

"If you play the muck-muck game, I swear, I promise there won't be an Aleut within five hundred yards of the igloo. It is a square game. You'll see."

"All right. The sooner the quicker. Can I go now?"

Lewis shook his head. "Go back to your camp. No one will bother you. After a while, walk to the hilltop. Stay there. When you see the door of the sacred igloo open, you walk up, call out 'muck-muck.' Iser Kyner will let you in. The taboo lifts when a man challenges a witch doctor to the muck-muck. It's a square game. I swear it."

Lewis stepped to the door, called a guttural word. Instantly the watchful Aleuts disappeared from behind the rocks, the shelter of the trees. Not a native was in sight while Shag walked from the igloo of the half-breed to his camp among the boulders.

An hour later when he mounted the hill, no one was in sight. But the door of the sanctuary igloo stood closed. For another hour it remained shut. Suddenly it opened. Shag stooped, hid the siege-gun six-shooter beneath a rock, marched boldly to the door, and called out: "Muck-muck!"

As he stood with a hand braced against either side of the door frame, he looked about, over his shoulder, into the interior of the igloo. Not a native was in sight anywhere in the open. It was no great distance to the rock where he had hidden the six-shooter. Inside the sanctuary the witch doctor clothed in the ptarmigan-feather robe, wearing the willow-wood mask, sat upon a bench. A pair of beady eyes regarded Shag through the slits in the mask. Shag repeated the words, "muck-muck," as he had been bidden to do by Annaiyu Lewis.

The witch doctor arose. From the wall behind him he took down the five reddened spears and stood holding them forth toward Shag while, in a strange, unnatural voice that boomed hollowly from behind the mask he spoke a gibberish of Aleutian words.

The witch doctor spoke on, turning as he delivered his oration, took down from the wall a second object, a hardwood stick two feet in length, as thick as a broom handle, but widened into a spoonlike shape at one end. In the hollow of the spoon were set two walrus-ivory pegs. This was a throwing stick. By resting the end of a spear haft against the ivory pegs, an Aleut, his arm amplified to the length of two arms, is enabled to hurl a spear with tremendous force.

No word of the witch doctor's muttered speech could Shag understand. But the fellow's pantomime, his waving and pointing he finally understood. Nice, square little game, this muck-muck! All that Shag was expected to do was to take the throwing stick in his grasp, stand at one end of the igloo, and allow the witch doctor to hurl the spears at him, one after the other. If Shag could fend off the spears with the throwing stick, he won. If he failed to so fend them off, he would assuredly get himself pinned to the wall like a monster bug or beetle in a scientist's collection. Nice little game!

Shag glanced over his shoulder to where he had cached the six-shooter. Shag didn't understand the rules of muck-muck so very well, but he was of the opinion that if he made a run for the gun, the witch doctor would nail him in his tracks with one of the spears. He looked down at the slender, though tough and weighty throwing stick in his hand. He looked up at the witch doctor.

"All right, old fur and feathers, I'll just go you a whirl at this muck-muck, seeing as how I've got to, anyway. Go

ahead with your square little game." Shag grasped the throwing stick and backed up against the wall, taking a position that brought the light over his shoulder and directly into the masked face of the witch doctor.

The witch doctor grunted, selected one of the five reddened spears, took it in his right hand while he held the remaining four in his left. To torture the victim, break his nerve, the witch doctor poised the spear, aimed it at Shag's breast, lowered it, poised it again.

"Shoot!" shouted Shag, his voice almost a nervous scream. "Shoot!"

With a motion lightning fast, the witch doctor drew back the spear. It sang through the air. It buried its flinty point in a larch log, its haft quivering like a reed in the wind. The witch doctor had missed. Shag had ducked, sidestepped, making an awkward dab at the slithering weapon with the throwing stick. He could feel the wind from the spear's flight upon his neck.

With heart-breaking deliberation the witch doctor made ready to launch the second spear. With maddening care he looked over the four remaining spears, hefted them, balanced them, and carefully felt of the keen flint points with his thumb.

Shag held the throwing stick before him, his fingers tensed about it until they ached.

"Z-z-z!"

A rifle ball could not have been aimed more accurately against the very center of the white man's breastbone. Nor traveled with much greater speed! But Shag had got his nerves under control. In mid-air he whacked the throwing stick against the haft of the spear just back of the point, turning it aside; and the spear went crashing into a corner of the igloo.

Again the torture of delay, of balancing, testing, poising the spear for aim, lowering it again!

"Come on, old fur and feathers!" taunted Shag. "Get busy. Let's get our little game over. Come on!"

The third spear almost got him. Unexpectedly, while Shag was mouthing defiance, the witch doctor, almost without poising the thing, let fly. It nicked the corduroy collar of his canvas jacket. An inch to the left, and that spear would have split his throat and nailed him to the wall.

Two spears remained. The witch doctor weighed one in either hand, looking first to the right, then to the left, as if seeking to determine which would be the deadlier missile.

"Come on! Get it over with!"

The witch doctor's right arm drew back. In the same instant his left drew back. With only inches separating them, both spears came whining at the white man who stood with back against the igloo wall. Zing! And zing!

With his right hand wielding the throwing stick, Shag struck one spear aside. With his naked hand he plucked the other from the air, the razor-edged flint point cutting thumb and palm to the bone.

This was treachery. It wasn't a square game, heaving both spears at the same time. With a mad howl Shag was upon the witch doctor. The throwing stick fell with a thud upon the native's head, shattered to bits. Shag drew back a hamlike fist, sent it crashing into the very mask of willow wood and feathers. The mask split under the terrific impact of the blow, and the medicine man went banging into a corner where he lay in a huddled heap.

Shag stood over him, stirring him in the ribs with his foot. Shag put a bit more steam into the stirring, promoted it to be a lusty kick in the ribs. The witch doctor groaned, turned over. The shattered mask fell away, disclosing a bloody, pulpy face, the face of Annaiyu Lewis, the ambidextrous gambler. Shag leaned over and, fastening a

hand on the fellow's shoulder, hauled him to his feet.

"Shut that door," muttered Lewis through bloated lips. "I—there'd be trouble if the Aleuts found I was playing witch doctor. Shut the door. You win."

"I'll say I win," said Shag, quick to seize the advantage. "If these natives found you were wearing this outfit of fur, playing a hand for old Iser Kyner, I guess there would be trouble. You said something about the sand crabs whittling away a man's toes, or fires built around a man, and moved up closer, closer until he was fried well done. I got an idea, too, that I win, Lewis."

Shag, his hand still clutched into the ptarmigan-feather-clad shoulder, stood regarding the cringing gambler. "Where's my seventeen hundred dollars? Come on, blow back with the money."

"The money is in my igloo."

"We'll go there right away," said Shag promptly.

Annaiyu Lewis cast aside the shattered mask and, taking down another from the wall, covered his face with it. By the rear door, through a winding trail that showed a good bit of travel, Shag and the fake witch doctor gained the igloo of Lewis.

In a back room, a half-empty vodka bottle in his hand, the real witch doctor lay snoring against the wall. Lewis produced the walrus-hide poke. Shag counted the money, returned it to the poke, and quickly thrust the poke in his pocket.

"I am to get busy right away with my fox farm," said Shag, grinning at Lewis who was getting the drunken Iser Kyner back into his regalia. "You're going to help me, Lewis. For the trouble you've been to me, you and your playmates are going to catch me twenty-five foxes, fetch me a ton of salmon, and build me five pens. Understand? I won that muck-muck game, fair and square; and I get anything on this island I want. You said so yourself. How about it?"

"I keep my word," growled Lewis. "I said so, and I stand by it. Just so you don't mention to no one that I—I wore the feather robe, took the place of the shaman, Iser Kyner."

"Right there I got you by the short hair," exulted Shag. "But I won't never say a word, so long as you're a good dog."

And Annaiyu Lewis proved himself to be a good dog.

A BOY'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE

THE experience of being lost for three days in the forest wilderness along the slopes of Mount Hood, in Oregon, befell Jackie Strong, a seven-year-old boy during the summer. From all appearances, Jackie enjoyed the adventure and was disappointed rather than pleased when he encountered a party of three searchers who had come to find him. As a matter of fact, it was he who discovered the rescue party, for he caught sight of them from a rocky eminence a thousand feet above the bed of the Sandy River and shouted to them, thus directing their attention to his presence on the rock.

The boy fared well on his excursion into the wilds, living in true primitive style on raw fish and huckleberries, and was not in the least afraid, but seemed to regret the ending of his sojourn in the mountain fastness.

Your Dog

By David Post

Author of "The Dingo and Australian Terrier," etc.

THE OWTCHAR AND THE BOXER

THE home of the owtchar is Russia. As might be expected, this sheep dog that faces the blizzards of the Russian steppes, has a long, thick coat. Indeed, its shaggy, matted hair is its outstanding characteristic; of such texture is it that it gives ample protection against cold and snow. The owtchar's size also marks it off from other sheep dogs; it is the largest of them all, being frequently more than thirty inches in height at the shoulder. If you have seen an Old English sheep dog, you will have no difficulty in visualizing the Russian owtchar; for the two breeds are much alike. They both have large heads and very sturdy frames; however, while the English dog has a bobbed tail, the Russian's usually is not docked.

As shepherds, the owtchars are of exceptional merit. They tend their flocks well and can put to rout wolves and other animals that prey upon sheep. Some Russian sheep dogs have been imported into England; I question if any are in the United States.

The boxer, on the other hand, has already gained a foothold at American dog shows. It is a medium-sized dog; originated in Germany where it is very popular. The bulldog and the smooth-coated terriers were crossbred to produce this breed. While not so handsome as some of the terriers, the boxer is a good-looking dog, strong, fearless, and companionable.

If you should see one, compare it with the following standard:

Head—Clean cut, with a broad, blunt muzzle, well-padded cheeks, wrinkled brow, well-marked stop between the eyes, and—usually—undershot jaws.

Ears—Set high on the head and cropped.

Shoulders—Long, muscular, and sloping.

Chest—Deep, but not broad, with well-rounded ribs.

Back—Short and straight. The belly should be tucked up.

Legs—Straight.

Tail—Set high. It should be docked.

Color—Yellow or brindle. There may be black markings on the face. Patches of white hairs in the coat do not disqualify a dog.

Coat—Short, hard, and glossy.

Height—For dogs, 21½ inches at the shoulder; for bitches, 20 inches.

In next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE I shall describe one of nature's strange adaptations to climate, the Mexican hairless dog; and, though this may seem an odd companion article, I shall present as well that erstwhile favorite, the Spitz.

The Rodeo Quitter

by Ray Humphreys

Author of "Six-mule Ride," etc.

IT was the finals in the bucking contest for the championship of the San Luis Valley at the Monte Vista rodeo. Three aspiring champions stood in the meager shade of the wild-horse corrals and waited impatiently for the judges to draw their names and the names of the outlaws that they would fork in their final rides.

If the trio of busters fidgeted, it was due to eagerness and not to fear. Each secretively hoped to draw the worst horse in the corral. There were twenty fuzz-tails in the corral, many of them renowned buckers, others unknown quantities. The judge had twenty tiny slips of paper, each designating a horse, in one hat. In another hat they had three slips, each with a rider's name on it.

"I hopes I rides fust, an' that I draws that sorrel, Sure Fire," spoke up Tom Egan, the tallest of the three waiting riders. "He's the best bet I knows of to cop off the winnin' ride on—an' gents, I'm sure enough hep to his curves and outshoots!"

One of the other riders snorted at Tom's remark.

"I, señor, trusts to ride *last!*" said this man, who was lithe and swarthy, and who had come to Monte Vista as a stranger this year, "an' I shall take any hoss an' make heem a devil—ah, wit' the spur an' the hat an' the loud curse I make heem go plenty. Yuh wait to see José Quinalla ride—ha!"

The third rider, Floyd Penney, merely grunted at José Quinalla's boast. That was all José had been doing for the three days of the rodeo—boasting and riding. He certainly could boast, and, Penney had to grudgingly admit, he certainly could ride. The very fact that he had battled his way to the finals along with Egan and Penney was evidence that the stranger knew his stuff in broncho busting, and knew it well.

The announcer, sitting on a horse near the group of judges, raised his megaphone and the three riders stiffened.

"Judges announce that the fust rider in the finals for the bucking championship of the San Luis Valley will be Floyd Penney!" sang the leather-lunged man, "an' he has drawn that ol' reliable performer, Sixty-nine Brownie!"

"Ouch!" said Penney, but he smiled happily. "That ol' brown fuzz can sure pivot, likes to spin, the ol' devil. Waal, I'll show him a thing or two this time!"

"Good luck!" said Tom Egan, "wish I had yuhr chance to ride fust. Do a good job o' it, Floyd!"

"Adios," said José Quinalla, simply, "eet is too bad!"

Floyd, starting for the saddling chutes, turned in his tracks at the Mexican's remark.

"What's too bad, hombre?" he demanded.

The Mexican buster shrugged, started to explain and then changed his mind with swift cunning.

"That yuh must ride fust," he said, "eet is too bad. I, señor, I wish to make the las' ride!"

"Yuh probably will," snorted Penney, "make the last ride yuh'll ever make—which will surely be all fine with me!"

When Floyd had departed, the Mexican turned to Egan.

"That Penney," said José, "is too much stuck up, señor, an' he will get the grand fall. He think he some peeler—bah! Now, señor, as fer me—José Quinalla——"

"Aw, shut up," growled Egan, "this ain't no elocution contest. Ef talkin' was ridin' I'd withdraw right now an' let yuh have the championship. Yuh better save yuhr breath!"

Quinalla glared at Egan.

"The second man to ride," sang out the announcer, suddenly, "will be Tom Egan. He has drawn Badland Jim!"

"Good," said Egan, "he's a good bucker!"

"Too bad!" said José, "now, señor——"

"The third man to ride will be Señor José Quinalla," went on the announcer, "an' he has drawed Lady Killer!"

"Lady Killer?"

The cry was an anguishing one, and every one around the corrals turned to look at José curiously.

"Lady Killer!" repeated the Mexican, his eyes popping and his face twisted into an expression of combined awe and fear, "fer me? Ah, no—it shall not—it shall not! No—no!"

It was Egan's turn to laugh.

"Yaller?" asked Egan, casually. "Seems yuh know that hoss, señor—seems to me yuh tremble——"

But the Mexican's reply, if he made one, was lost in the uproar of applause that roared out as Floyd Penney came out of chute No. 2 on Sixty-nine Brownie. The brown outlaw came out in short, jerky bobs that set the saddle and Floyd apparently well up on the broncho's neck. Shreds of turf went flying in all directions and so did Penney's hat. Straight out into the center of the arena went old Sixty-nine, never losing cadence in his strange dance of the prairies, but Penney stuck. He was yipping and slapping the outlaw's flank with his free hand.

Tom Egan, watching grimly from the shade of the horse corrals, saw Penney lose a stirrup. That might not matter if the horse failed to take advantage of the opportunity, but old Sixty-nine Brownie had weathered too many rodeos and too many finals not to know when the time was ripe to whirl. He whirled like a pinwheel, went up on his hind hoofs, came down, switched ends with lightninglike rapidity—and a groan went up from the the grand stands as Penney, his in-

secure anchorage gone, sailed out over Sixty-nine's right shoulder, clung there a minute, and then rolled to the earth. Sixty-nine lifted his head and his tail and sailed off.

"Waal," said Egan, as Floyd's fall broke the spell, "that leaves just yuh an' me, Quinalla."

But Quinalla didn't answer. Egan turned to look and saw that Quinalla was not present. Quinalla had not waited to see the outcome of Penney's wild ride on Sixty-nine Brownie. Quinalla had dashed across to the three judges and had begun to harangue them, but the judges had refused to heed him until they had watched Penney ride to a fall. That formality over they looked down at Quinalla.

"I cannot ride that hoss," cried Quinalla excitedly. "Eet is 'No,' my answer. I cannot ride heem, please——"

"Confession is good for the soul," said Eddie Owens, one of the judges. "Eef yuh can't ride him it ain't our fault!"

The Mexican's eyes flashed.

"Eet is not the hoss!" he flared back, "no—but the name—Lady Killer. I do not like eet! I must have another hoss——"

"What?" asked Ralph Fairley, "yuh demandin' another hoss, are yuh, José? Waal, that stuff don't go here in Monte Vista. We ain't used to playin' favorites—yuh ain't in Mexico now!"

The Mexican fairly bubbled over with rage.

"Ha! I will not ride that Lady Killer. No—no—I shall not. It is me, José Quinalla, who refuses——"

"Then yuh can withdraw," said "Smoke" Salter, the third judge, "but ef yuh does, señor, we'll sure enough explain to the crowd why yuh withdraws—just sort o' scared like, I reckon!"

Quinalla seemed speechless. He glared at the judge and then staggered off, reeling. Smoke Salter and Eddie Owens and Ralph Fairley looked after him in ill-concealed contempt.

"Frightened to death," said Owens, briefly. "He must know that Lady Killer hoss fer a bad hoss!"

"Couldn't," said Salter, "fer Lady Killer is a new hoss in these parts—come in with that Luke Parslow string from Box Creek. Luke says he's a humdinger, though!"

"Funny," said Fairley, "that Mex weathered the fust two days—an' now the sap is all gone out o' him!"

But the judges promptly forgot Quinalla as the gates of saddling chute No. 3 were flung open and Tom Egan and Badland Jim came out as one hurtling, bursting bomb of horseflesh and humanity. Badland Jim was a dapple gray, big and powerful, with an eye that was small and crafty. Egan knew him and knew his reputation as well, so Egan was taking no chances. He let the big horse plow violently to the right and tear along the corral fence, bucking furiously, but without goading from Egan. Then, as the outlaw began to squeal and twist his long back into convolutions designed to unseat him, Egan woke up.

"Better scratch!" he muttered to himself, "I got the chance o' a lifetime now—Floyd out an' Quinalla scared. Pick up them hoofs, hoss, an' lay 'em down again!"

And with that Egan scratched. Rather, he raked. He lifted his left heel well up toward the gray outlaw's neck and brought it down over the gray's shoulder. The searing steel was like a challenge to the gray. He began his fancy figures then, and cracked out, away from the fence, where he would have more room. But still Egan scratched. It was a significant thing that no one at the corrals or in the grand stands was shouting for the rider "to burn him." Egan was making a superb ride of it, and the judges in the field realized it. So did a dozen unoffi-

cial judges in Box A, next to the press box in the lower tier of the grand stand, realize it.

These dozen, grizzled men, with wide hats and tanned faces, were getting a kick out of Egan's performance. They knew riding when they saw it. They were sheriffs, all of them, from a dozen Southern Colorado counties, who were the special guests that afternoon at the rodeo, by courtesy of the rodeo committee.

"Thar's the winner o' the championship!" yelled old Pete Carr, sheriff of San Miguel. "He ain't got no competition so far, an' he won't have none, either. Nobody can beat that ride——"

"Thar's another rider, a Mexican," said Sheriff "Chuck" Johnson of Conejos County, peering down at the printed program he held in his hand, "yep—a feller name o' José Quinalla!"

"He can't outride this lad," said Carr, "no sirree!"

The pistol shot sounded, ending Egan's ride, and Egan did not wait for the pick-up men to come to his rescue. He just disentangled himself from Badland Jim and slid off to the ground. He ran a few steps, to get out of the way of the outlaw, and then halted and bowed to the storm of applause that came rolling down out of the grand stand. When he looked he saw the occupants of Box A beckoning to him, and he went on, climbing the infield fence and going up to the box where the twelve John Laws of the lower part of the State were waiting to thump him on the back.

"Splendid ride!" said Sheriff Carr, "an' I made the prediction that it wins yuh the championship, feller!"

"Hope so," said Egan.

"That Mexican," asked Carr, "who is to ride—is he any good—that what's-his-name guy?"

Egan grinned.

"He is good," said Egan, "or was, rather, yesterday. He didn't seem to have no fear at all at fust, but to-day he's all nerves. He doesn't like the hoss he drawed, apparently, an' las' I saw o' him he was plumb excited."

"Temperamental," said Carr. "I've seen 'em that way!"

But had Egan and Carr been over at the saddling chute that moment they would have gasped at the great transformation that had taken place in Quinalla He had been busy, during Egan's top notch ride, and he had held low conversation with the two Mexican wranglers who were helping saddle. That conversation had been reassuring to José. When Egan had finished his ride José was calm again. He walked back to the judges.

"I'll ride," he said, simply. "I ain't yaller!"

The judges were pleased, and said so, but after José had waddled back to the chutes, Smoke Salter spoke his mind.

"Must have had a drink o' tequila," said Salter, "to steady his nerves. He sure was all upset a few moments ago!"

"He'll need something to steady hisself, alright," remarked Eddie Owens. "Luke Parslow says that sorrel, Lady Killer, is a mean brute. I don't believe José can fork him."

The sorrel was in the chute, now, being saddled. In another minute José climbed up over the chute and let himself down on the sorrel. He sat there and braced himself for the plunge.

"José Quinalla on Lady Killer!" bawled the announcer, and the chute gates were flung back. The sorrel stood still, bewildered, and José grinned and jabbed the beast with a spur. The judges—Owens, Salter and Fairley—rode closer so that they might see the whole performance. The grand stand crowds watched with drawn breath, and Tom Egan, still in Box A with the visiting sheriffs, was most interested of all. José's ride meant five hundred dollars in cash to him and a five-hundred-dollar, silver-mounted saddle as

well. If José should fail to make a good ride——

Then the sorrel came out on the run. For a second only did Egan hold his breath. Then he laughed strangely.

"A saddle hoss!" he chuckled. But in the middle of the arena the sorrel did make a couple of weak attempts to dislodge Quinalla. He bucked half-heartedly this way and that, and then gave up the attempt in good-natured indifference. José raked him, fore and aft, and the sorrel started to run again. He ran straight for the grand stand, and skidded to a halt just before he reached the fence. He stood there, right in front of Box A, with the Mexican on his back. The grand stand was already hissing and jeering—but two men in the crowd were roaring strange things. One was Sheriff Pete Carr of San Miguel County, and the other was Luke Parslow of Box Creek. But the yells of the two men were lost in the booing from the stands. The pick-up men arrived and José dismounted from the sorrel and started back across the arena. He was trembling again.

"Bad!" he was telling himself, "very bad, indeed—but what is the loss of a championship to playin' with Destino—with Fate. No, José did the right thing——"

Meanwhile Sheriff Carr, assisted by Tom Egan, had climbed out of Box A and started for the arena. So also had Luke Parslow. Carr, however, had the start. He and Egan overtook the Mexican before José could reach the corrals, and Carr exploded:

"José Quinalla, eh?" he cried. "Waal, waal—yuh look to me like José Garcia from Conejos. I'd know yuh in a million, hombre—hold out yuhr wrists right now, señor!"

The Mexican crouched as though he meant to run for it, but at sight of the sheriff's gun he wilted. He held out his wrists and Carr snapped the bracelets on them. Meanwhile the three judges had witnessed the play and they came galloping over.

"What's the matter here?" demanded Owens.

It was Egan who spoke first.

"This feller wouldn't ride Lady Killer fer a good reason," exclaimed Egan, who had listened to Carr's explanations as they had run across the arena after José, "so Sheriff Carr here——"

"Huh!" cried Eddie, "it ain't no crime to refuse to ride a hoss, is it? An' he did ride him, anyhow—a dang pore ride, which I can't understand, seein' Luke Parslow recommended this Lady Killer hoss——"

"Sure I did!" whooped Parslow, arriving just in time to hear Eddie's words, but *that* sorrel the Mex just rode wasn't Lady Killer—not by a jugful. Looks somethin' like him, but Lady Killer has four white socks; this hoss had only two. I claims——"

The Mexican threw back his head.

"I refused to ride Lady Killer," he said, "and I didn't. I protested an' should have been allowed another hoss——"

Sheriff Carr grinned up at the mystified judges.

"I'm arrestin' José here fer killin' a woman an' a man in Conejos," said Carr, "a jealous shootin'. I recognized him the minnit he rode up in front o' the stand on that fake bucker. Seein' he's wanted fer murder no wonder he wouldn't ride a hoss by the name o' Lady Killer. That would be temptin' Fate, wouldn't it—but it turned out bad fer yuh all the same, José!"

The judges sat spellbound for a moment.

"Guess it was Fate," said Eddie finally, "seein' yuh got a saddler that rolled yuh right up to whar the sheriff could identify yuh, José. Ef yuh had played fair that real Lady Killer would have been too fast an' furious to give

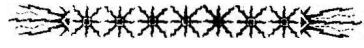
anybody a chance to recognize yuh. However——"

Owens waved to Egan.

"I guess it's the duty o' the judges now to proclaim yuh champion o' this rodeo," went on Owens, "an' let me say, Tom, that yuh made a mighty fine ride; an' I reckon it's also the duty of the judges to fire two Mexican saddle chute wranglers higher'n a kite. Sheriff Carr, yuh'll take care o'—yuhr man?"

"I sure will," said Carr.

A moment later the crowds burst into a wild fanfare of applause for Tom Egan, the new bucking champion of the San Luis Valley, but Señor José Garcia, alias Quinalla, was too sick to care. His rodeo days were over for all time.



AN EARLY DESERT TRAGEDY

FROM earliest times. the deserts of the West have taken their toll of human life. Even to-day, occasional tales of a wanderer caught out on the desert without water are brought to the outside world. The perils of desert travel cannot be ignored.

One of the earliest victims of a desert tragedy was Lieutenant Colonel L. S. Craig, of the United States Army. This officer was crossing the desert from Alamo Mocho to Yuma, Arizona, in June, 1852, when he came up with two deserters from Fort Yuma. In an attempt to conciliate the two men, the colonel laid aside his weapons and approached them alone, offering to try to have them attached to his command. The deserters, however, refused to go back, and threatened to shoot any one who should attempt to arrest them.

At this point in the proceedings, the colonel's mule started to wander away, and he directed one of his two companions to follow it up. When the deserters saw the colonel separated from his escort, they opened fire on him and he fell, mortally wounded. One of his companions, Sergeant Bale, discharged his revolver at the murderers, and they turned their weapons on him, and presently he too fell wounded. With the odds against him, the third member of the military party, Sergeant Quin, rode as fast as his horse could carry him to the camp, thirty miles away.

It was not until ten o'clock the next night that the body of Colonel Craig was found. The searchers also came upon Sergeant Bale, who had been wounded by the deserters.

A curious aftermath of this desert tragedy was the manner in which the perpetrators of the cowardly crime were brought to justice. This was accomplished chiefly through the instrumentality of a friendly Indian chief, who had been put on the trail of the slayers. This Indian, on coming up with the deserters, professed a desire to trade with them and offered to buy their muskets. They were willing to sell these and turned them over to the Indian. He then said he would like to see a revolver, and, as his manner was so guileless, their suspicions were not aroused, and the possessor of the revolver passed over the weapon. Immediately he got it safely in his hands, the crafty Indian made a quick step back and covered the outlaws with it, at the same time giving a signal cry to summon his followers, who were hidden close at hand. In this way the arrest of the murderers of Colonel Craig was accomplished, and the miscreants were taken to San Diego, where they were tried and hanged for their crime.

Metals of the West

A Glance at the History of Copper

By Thomas R. Best

Author of "Notable Events of the West," etc.

A BRASS mine sounds akin to the famous but elusive left-hand monkey wrench, but brass and bronze mines actually existed and supplied ancient man with tools and weapons. In time he learned to combine copper and zinc, and copper and tin, thus making his own brass and bronze.

Little copper was mined in the United States in early days, a district in Tennessee being the only one with any great production. A deposit in upper Michigan was known to Indians centuries before white men found it, and about 1850 mining began in this region, then so remote. For thirty years this district on the shore of Lake Superior was the world's chief source of copper, and to this day the mile-deep workings are yielding metal. Lake copper is noted for its natural purity, and the Indians of one hundred years ago obtained metal in the same manner as the semicivilized man of thousands of years earlier—building a fire and melting it out of the rock.

Copper mining in the West began slowly. Indications were found in many States, and small amounts were obtained from time to time, the gold districts of California supplying perhaps the first. In 1880, when Arizona had become safe for partial exploration, several copper deposits were discovered, and mining on a small scale was conducted.

About this time a few mines at Butte, Montana, were being worked for silver, but in 1883, at a depth of several hundred feet, rich copper ore was uncovered. Almost at once Butte leaped into first place in all the world, to hold it for nearly forty years. So great was the increase in output that it disorganized the world's copper market, causing the price to fall all of a sudden from twenty-four cents to less than ten cents a pound.

But telephones were just coming into

popular use, and the telegraph was being extended; so the demand soon caught up with the output. From a few thousand pounds in early days, production has risen to hundreds of thousands of tons yearly. From a restricted use copper has become indispensable to scores of industries, and new work for it to perform is being discovered every year. Long ago it became the big money metal of the West, and the value of the output has twice almost touched five hundred million dollars.

In 1910 Arizona went into the lead and is now far ahead, with more than a third of each year's production to her credit.

The war created a ravenous copper market. Gun mountings, cartridge cases, shells, and so forth, required brass and bronze, and every mine jumped into intense activity. Copper brought as high as thirty-two cents a pound; but after the armistice the price fell to twelve cents, or less than the cost of production—and many mines were closed for a time.

Copper mining has revived during the last three years, as the world gradually took itself back to industry, and the present production is not far below that of the war years.

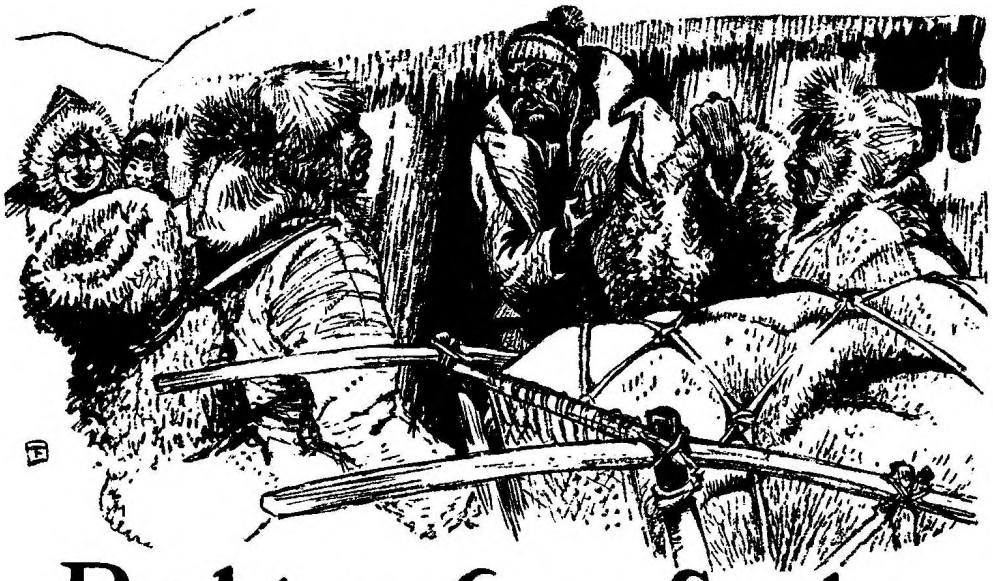
The telegraph, telephone, street railways, and other industries using electricity, consume hundreds of millions of pounds of copper yearly, and thousands of tons more go into brass and bronze. Few of us lead lives so simple these days that copper does not serve us almost hourly, entering into a thousand articles of our daily life, such as automobiles, chandeliers, keys, bedsteads, radios, coins, elevators, magazines, trains, door knobs, wash boilers, watches, and even the buttons of police uniforms.

KING OF SHEEP KILLERS TRAPPED

FOR the past three or four years, a huge cinnamon bear has been killing sheep in the country along the south side of Rainier National Park at the rate of about three hundred a year. This bear weighed about fifteen hundred pounds and for a long time defied traps, poisons, and guns. He finally fell a victim last summer to a trap set by State Hunter Charles McMillen. With the capture of this bear, it is said that only five sheep-killing bruins remained to raid stock on the ranges in that part of southern Washington and Oregon.

Bears, as a rule, are not killers of sheep and other livestock. The cinnamon bear of the Northwest usually prefers a vegetarian diet, and it is only through peculiar circumstances that he will become a killer. Very often, the bears are blamed for killings done by wolves, cougars, lynxes, bobcats and other predatory animals, because the bear has happened to be caught feasting on a carcass that these ravagers have left, or else his tracks have been found around the remains of the meal.

Most of the bears found in the West are harmless. In the national parks, they are a great attraction to tourists, and will feed from their hands in the friendliest fashion.



Pelts for Sale

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Wooden Money," etc.

SOME one opened the door of the New Deal Café, and most of the diners at Cold Deck's leading restaurant, gasped. Several hundred snowflakes and "Dad" Simms entered. For an old man who had spent several months dreaming close to the café stove, Dad was stepping high, wide, and handsome. Instead of his ancient cob pipe, Dad was smoking a cigarette, tucked to a holder made of mastodon ivory. With a quick snap of his finger he removed the ashes and climbed up to the lunch counter. For the better part of a lifetime Dad had eaten his meals from either a lunch counter or a tin can; and it is difficult to teach an old dog new tricks, so Dad rarely dined at a table.

The waitress hurried up. "What will it be, Dad?"

"Well, I'm getting ready to go prospecting, or something to get a stake; so in order to get ready to get a stake you need a steak. Mine'll be a T-bone and plenty of fried spuds with it. I'll work on the soup while the steak is frying."

"Do you like your steak rare or medium?"

"Make it rare, sister," the old-timer insisted.

Several men, strangers to Cold Deck, looked at the ancient sour dough with interest. "Who's the ruin?" queried one.

"Not so loud," a Cold Deck citizen whispered; "he's been resting up for another start I guess, and we figured he was slowly dying. Went out and found a lost kid, and that pepped him up. 'Flapjack' Meehan and 'Tubby' Willows gave him a grubstake and slipped him a thousand dollars besides. The lad expects to clear out in a day or two and pick up a mining claim or maybe a trap line."

"They sure last a long time in this country," a stranger said with real admiration; "when I'm that old I'll probably be occupying a wheel chair or a grave."

Two men, sitting at a table near by, exchanged quick glances when the thousand-dollar stake was mentioned. "Did you get that, Bonner? There's your chance to cash in on that trap line of yours. I'd give him the whole of Moose Valley, trap lines, traps, cabin, and shelters for a thousand dollars. You can move to another country," he said quietly.

Bonner was thoughtful for several moments. "I was wondering just how to get that thousand. The old man's no fool; and he knows both the mining and trapping game, which go together more or less in this country. He'll want to go over the trap line with me and see just how much fur I take out. When he finds the valley is full of wolverines that follow the trap line behind you, take the bait, and kill whatever's in the trap; he's going to shy away from Moose Valley in a hurry. If we could get around that angle, Chapman, it would be easy. The traps are new, and the cabin is well built."

Chapman considered for some time. "You go ahead, Bonner," he said at last. "Make your dicker with the old man, and, when it comes to going over the line, you'll find fur in most of the traps. I'll see to that."

"How?"

"Easy enough! I know the location of every trap on your line. It's cold, and I can load up a sled with mink and marten, and, with a good snow storm to cover my tracks, put something in most of your traps. I might even slip in a live fox or two to make it interesting." Chapman grinned at his own cleverness. "Then, with your thousand you can come in with me, and we'll go at this trapping business right. It was just a bit of hard luck that you hit Moose Valley. It should be called Wolverine Valley by all rights."

The pair waited until Dad Simms was alone before approaching him, then Bonner did the talking while Chapman kept an alert eye on Flapjack Meehan who watched out for the old man's interests more or less.

"Ever consider trapping, Mr. Simms?"

Dad turned an innocent gaze upon the speaker. "Yep. Trapping goes along with prospecting. Fur's kept many a miner in grub while he panned bars with not much more than a color a pan. I figure on running a trap line, why?"

"Ever hear of Moose Valley?"

"Can't say that I have," Dad admitted after several moments of careful thought.

Bonner regarded this as encouraging. If Dad had heard of Moose Valley the deal was off before it was on. "I've got a trap line, cabin, and plenty of shelters. We're ready to start trapping in another week. Mr. Chapman, here, is trapping now. I cleaned up big last year. If I can sell my layout I'm going Outside for the winter. I've a wife and kids that I'd like to see." Bonner managed to let a sad note creep into his voice, and Dad's natural sympathy responded instantly. "I've a good dog team, Mr. Simms, and will be glad to run you out any time."

"I'll think about it," promised Dad. "Let you know in the morning. How much did you say you wanted?"

"A thousand dollars!"

"Well, I'll pay it if it's worth it. If you can show me fur, I'll show you cash. Got it in my poke in Flapjack's safe."

Dad was thoughtful the remainder of the day, so much so that Flapjack put a question or two. "Saw you talking to Chapman and Bonner, Dad. I don't know much about 'em, but be careful they don't do you out of your thousand."

"It's pretty easy to get my own money away from me," Dad admitted, "but, when I've got borrowed money, then I'm a tightwad. I don't part with a cent until I know what I'm getting. If those cusses are up to some crooked work they'll have to get up early in the morning."

Chapman and Bonner were both up early the following morning—the former to take the trail for his trap line, the latter to work on Dad and spar for time in case the old man desired to look Moose Valley over too soon.

Two days after Dad agreed to look into the matter, snow was flying, and then it was Bonner loaded the old man onto his sled and hit the trail. There followed three days' hard mushing, then Bonner entered a small pass and an hour later stopped before a cabin almost buried in the snow. "Here we are, Mr. Simms. I've a half-breed boy out setting traps, and he should be in soon."

The cabin was still warm, though the fire had gone out. Dad examined the cabin with a critical eye. It was just the thing he had in mind. Enthusiastic over the coming venture he busied himself with the evening meal while Bonner cared for the dogs. Of Chapman there was no sign, of course. He was not supposed to be in the country. That night the native boy returned, was paid off, and departed, carrying his belongings on the backs of his dogs, which were anxious to be off.

Two days passed, then they set forth. "She's a sweet valley," Bonner said again and again; "and I hate to let it go."

"If you can't show me any fur, Bonner, you won't have to let it go," Dad replied. He was studying things closely.

"I'll show you some fur," Bonner promised, then headed for the stream that ran through the center of the valley and disappeared between two sharp peaks miles away. The first trap was empty, but the second yielded a mink, so did the third and fourth. Before the run was completed Bonner had taken a respectable catch from the traps. By what seemed to be a rare bit of luck a silver fox was caught in one of the traps. "There, how's that, Mr. Simms? That old boy's pelt is worth a couple of hundred dollars. It don't happen often, I'll admit, but it does happen now and then."

Dad Simms looked the fox over with interest and blinked his eyes. "By the way, Bonner, do you ever have any trouble with wolverines?"

"Oh, once in a while, but not often. Last year I didn't get enough wolverine fur to make a parka facing. You can see for yourself how things are. I didn't see any signs, did you?"

Dad did not answer. He studied the catch, then the man, and finally the valley. It was a beautiful spot, lying there with a great range on either side. It was peaceful and still, so typical of the North he loved. Dad stretched his arms over his head and breathed deeply. "You go back to Cold Deck and tell Flapjack Meehan to give you that thousand dollars I have in the poke. Fix up the papers and leave 'em with him. Then send the dog team that he was going to loan me. I don't plan to use 'em much, but a man needs a good team to get him out of the country if he breaks a leg or gets sick. Here's my hand on the deal."

Bonner stifled a deep sigh of relief, looked Dad Simms in the eye, and shook hands. A week later when the team Flapjack Meehan loaned Dad Simms arrived, Bonner was not driving it. He had not the slightest desire to face the old-timer. A native, hired for the purpose, drove up the team, grunted several times, ate a big meal, and headed back for Cold Deck. Dad Simms found himself alone.

The following day he set out to cover his trap line. "Wolverines, eh?" he mused after a number of traps had been visited. "And there's plenty of 'em in this valley from the looks of things." Several traps had contained fur, but this hated of northern creatures had been there first. In many places he found the bait gone, cleverly removed from the trap, in some cases without the trap having been sprung. "Wolverines!" he muttered as he plodded homeward late that day. The catch consisted of one marten of very poor grade. "Wolverines!" he said for the third time as he entered the cabin, fed his dogs, and prepared a meal for himself. "Bonner knew the valley was full of 'em when he sold me this line, and I kinda suspected it myself. Well, it ain't the first time I've been lied to."

As long as there is a wolverine running a trapper's line, there is but one thing for the trapper to do. Either trap the marauder or move out of the district. Not only does he kill anything that may be in the traps, but he will raid caches of man and beast alike and leave them in such condition that neither has any further use for them. Like most trappers Dad hated the creatures. He knew a trick or two, and in the days that followed Dad trapped many of them. Sometimes he set the trap in open places; again he carefully concealed them. The surest way was to conceal the trap in a bag and hang it from a tree. Sooner or later the wolverine would surely investigate the bag and be caught.

Now and again the old-timer caught some real fur. Once it was a silver fox, and quite often he added a marten or two. It was a great day when he caught a fisher. But it was wolverine pelts that accumulated in the cabin, and finally he had quite a respectable bale.

Dad might have continued his work indefinitely but for the chance remark of a passing miner. With a partner he stopped at the cabin one night. He examined the pelts, then exchanged glances with his companion. Though he spoke in a whisper, Dad's keen ears caught the remark. "Meehan should know this."

And Meehan was informed the moment the men reached Cold Deck. "That old boy has missed too many boats, Flapjack. He shouldn't be up there alone. He tells me he paid a thousand dollars for that trap line, and about all he has to show for it is a bale of wolverine pelts. He has a good silver fox and some marten, but he seems more interested in wolverines than he does real fur. We figured you should know."

"How was his health?" Flapjack inquired.

"Fine! He seemed happy enough, too."

With this information Flapjack and Tubby did some tall thinking. A week passed, and another miner came in for supplies, which were freighted over the snow with less effort than at other times of the year. "Did you stop at the Moose Valley cabin?" Flapjack inquired.

"Yep, but there wasn't anybody there. Hadn't been for a whole week, I should say."

"How's that?" Flapjack demanded. "Didn't you see Dad Simms anywhere in that valley?"

"Not a sign, and I came right through the valley, too. It hadn't snowed in four days, either, and I didn't see a track."

Then it was Flapjack ceased to talk and began to act. "Tubby, I've got to investigate this. Bonner cheated the old man, and it's probably broken him up. No telling what he'll do if he broods over it."

"You light out, Flapjack; I'll keep things going here," Tubby answered.

"It looks to me like the best place for us to keep Dad Simms is in that chair behind the stove. We know where he is, then."

"I wish I knew where he was now," Flapjack growled.

Two and a half days later, thanks to a fast run, Flapjack was at the cabin. He searched about for some possible message and was finally rewarded by finding a note in a tin can containing matches—the most logical place to conceal it. "Flapjack," it ran, "if you come out, as you probably will, don't worry about me. I'm old enough to take care of myself. I'll pay you back that thousand and be on my way Outside before the ice goes out." It was signed, "Dad."

"That certainly doesn't look like suicide." Flapjack growled; "well, I can move faster than he can, so I am going to follow. My dogs need exercise anyway."

In that country of vast distances it was a week before Flapjack Meehan found the slightest clew, except for a single camp fire. A single human in the distance caught his eye. Flapjack turned toward the lone musher and exchanged greetings. The other proved to be a native. Flapjack described Dad, and the native touched his forehead and pointed north. "Missed too many boats," he grunted, which is the Alaskan way of hinting at insanity; "good team, drive very fast. Buy two dogs from me!"

"Oh, he bought two dogs from you, eh? He must be pushing things to beat the deuce while the weather is good."

To Flapjack's surprise, when he checked up he found that Dad had gained a half day on him. He followed the river course that Dad was following, and each night his dogs found a camp that Dad had recently occupied.

It was another week before Flapjack found actual signs of sled runners. Then he came upon a stretch of scarred snow that ran for miles. Occasionally the driver had run beside the sled, but for mile after mile he had ridden on the runners. Occasionally he met natives and whites who told of a crazy old white man who was taking furs into the country instead of sledding them out. Flapjack thereupon ran his dogs to the limit, turned off the trail ten miles to a settlement, picked up a new team, and continued the pursuit. "What's he taking furs into a fur country for?" he asked himself again and again; "it's almost worse than taking coal to Newcastle."

One afternoon the trail was so fresh that Flapjack traveled all night, and at dawn the following day he looked ahead and saw a strange scene. He recalled most of the cabins as they spread out below him. This place had once marked the end of a stampede. Men had come by the hundreds, built cabins, worked their hearts out, and found not a cent. Some of them had left their bones in the graveyard above the river bank. Now the camp was dead except for three or four cabins from which smoke drifted lazily. As Flapjack looked down he caught sight of a sled and four dogs. It was approaching rapidly, and the driver wore the mukluks of the Eskimo rather than the moccasins of the natives farther south. His face was round, the expression genial.

"Hello!" said Flapjack.

"Hello," the native answered in mission English, "how's things?"

"Great," Flapjack admitted, "what's going on down below?"

"An old trapper named Simms has just arrived. He's been on the trail over a month," the native explained, "or else he is a liar."

"Better not call him one," Flapjack warned. "Well, don't mention me. I'm going to make camp here, and, after a while, I'll drop in on the old boy."

The native eyed Flapjack curiously. He once recalled seeing his picture in

an Alaskan newspaper, with the words underneath, "Flapjack Meehan, United States Marshal for the Cold Deck District." Probably the old man was crazy or a thief. "Is it safe to trade with him?" he inquired.

"Safe enough," Flapjack answered, "he's honest, but he can drive a bargain they tell me."

Flapjack made his way to a cabin overlooking the dead camp and established himself. Suddenly he straightened up and chuckled. "I'm dead from the neck up," he growled; "why didn't I think of it before? Why, it's as clear as mud now, after I've mushed for nearly a month. Gosh I wish there was some way of sneaking back without Dad catching me." But Flapjack was game. Instead of sneaking back he walked down into the village. "Hello, Dad!" he shouted.

Dad was very busy with a ring of Eskimos about him. He glanced up, but did not seem surprised. "Dang it," he growled, "you don't seem to think I can take care of myself. Maybe I can't, but I'm making a stab at it. What do you think of them pelts over there?"

"They look good. If they are prime, Dad, they're worth five thousand dollars. Who do they belong to?"

"A young trapper from Cold Deck named Simms. Heh! Heh! Flapjack, that fellow Bonner figured he was hooking me, planting fur in his traps so I'd think I was getting a bargain. Why, the minute I looked at that valley I saw it was plumb full of wolverines, and I said to myself, 'Dad, old sport, here's a chance to clean up, plenty.' Why, Bonner even put a hand-raised fox into a trap to fool me. But I could tell by its fur that fox was never wild." He chuckled.

While Flapjack watched, an Eskimo dumped a number of white fox pelts at the old man's feet. From the pile Dad took the best of the furs and made an offer. The Eskimo nodded, answered in dialect and picked up a number of Dad's wolverine pelts. Each smiled broadly and shook hands. "Honest people this tribe of Eskimos," Dad commented; "I traded wolverine pelts to 'em forty years ago and got good white fox pelts, every one of 'em prime. Some of the old men were glad to see me again. Do you suppose we can start back to Cold Deck to-night, Flapjack?"

"We sure can, Dad, and, with two sleds each pulled by strong dogs, we can make as fast time back as we did coming. People there are mighty anxious about you."

Dad's eyes narrowed. "Say, Flapjack, is Bonner hanging around the camp? I'm anxious to meet up with him."

"What are you going to do?" Flapjack demanded sharply.

"Wait and see," Dad countered. And that is the only answer Flapjack got, though he put the question many times while they were on the trail.

The quiet hum of conversation died down as Flapjack Meehan entered the New Deal Café. He was evidently tired, but the trip had done him good. Then, as Dad Simms followed him into the room, a cheer all but lifted the roof off. Dad blinked uncomfortably. It was difficult to believe he occupied such an affectionate place in the rough hearts about him. One man alone hurried toward the door, but Dad nailed him. "Just a minute, Bonner," piped the old sour dough, "I want to——"

"To what?" Bonner faltered.

"To thank you. That valley was full of wolverines. I'm pretty good at keeping cheap crooks from burning my fingers, but I'm better at trapping wolverines. You'd forgotten that a wolverine's fur is the only kind that you can put on a parka. It don't collect frost, and the moisture from your breath don't freeze on it, then freeze to your face. The Eskimos are crazy to

get it; they don't have wolverines that far North to speak of. I took a load of wolverine pelts North, and I brought back over five thousand dollars' worth of prime furs. I'm going South in a day or so, and I'll be glad to carry a word of love to that family you mentioned so feelingly when you was selling me your trap line." Then with a wave of his hand Dad Simms headed for the barber shop for a bath, hair cut, and shave. Later he allowed he would eat a whale of a big meal and buy a ticket for the States.

STRANGE INDIAN CUSTOM

UNDER the old tribal religion of the Indians of E-lah-to-mah, a tepee village of Yakimas near Goldendale, Washington, human beings and rattlesnakes live in peace together.

Only once, within the memory of any person in the village has a rattlesnake been killed by an Indian there. And that man paid bitterly.

The story is told by George Mennenick, aged chief of the Federated Yakima Indian tribes. He is the son of one of the signers of the treaty made by Governor Stevens with Northwest Indians at Walla Walla in 1855.

Several years ago an Indian, now called "Blind Jacob," killed a rattler in a fit of rage. The village was aghast. They feared that an epidemic of snake-bitings would ensue.

A conference was immediately called between medicine men and women of the tribe and representatives of the snake world. The result was an appeal to the Great Manitou to strike the snake killer blind as a peace offering to appease the wrath of the reptiles and save the other members of the tribe from harm.

It was only a short time afterward when Jacob became totally blind; and now has to be fed and led about by Lizzie Skamie, his squaw.

"His eyes are dimmed forever," the chief said. "He will never see to kill another rattlesnake and thereby place the lives of his fellow tribesmen in jeopardy." The chief talks very good English and is one of the most intelligent Indians of the region.

The story finished, the chief pointed to a near-by tepee where a fat mountain rattler, five feet long, was wriggling out into the camp street hastened by the imprecations of a squaw whose carmine-painted face bespoke her the medicine woman of the village. She was shaking her stick at the big reptile much as though it were a camp dog which had intruded upon her. The snake's head was elevated, and its bright eyes fairly snapped. Its exit was accompanied by the soft, rhythmic whirring of a set of seventeen rattles appended to a rigid tail.

"See, the rattlesnakes never bite us," the old man said. "For seventy-five years we have used E-lah-to-mah; and never has man, woman or child been molested.

"But do they stay around camp like this all the time?" he was asked.

"They come to see us once in a while to find out how we are getting along; and, when we tell them to go away, they leave," the venerable chief replied. "A person need not be afraid. If the night is cold, they may get into his blanket but they will not bite him.

"When a man kills a rattlesnake every other snake in the universe knows about it and is ready to avenge his death," he continued. "That is why so many white people are bitten by rattlers, because they make war on the snakes and kill them whenever they can."

The Round-Up

NOW, ain't it jest too funny for anything how some folks feel one way 'bout a thing, and others jest diametric opposite? Still, s'pose it's a good thing, some way, for it's what makes life interestin'. On the other hand, it makes wars, and all kinds o' trouble. However, no shootin' is allowed at these here meetin's, and we're goin' to let Ralph McPherson, Wahoo, Nebraska way, have his say now:

"I've been loungin' back here in the shadow of the wagon waiting for some man to step out in the light and make talk. But either they all have been feeling a little sick at having a girl like Miss Mexico have to state facts quite so baldly, or they have gone off for a quiet smoke and left the fire to the kids.

"How many of you wait for the stories of Max Brand, Baxter or Humphreys, huh? Do they use horses that have been gentled, huh? Did you ever see a gentled, one-man horse? No, to all those questions!

"You and I and any red-blooded man wants a horse with a fighting spirit. At least that is what we want for ourselves. For the dude ranchers, gentle 'em sure. But the horse you want with you in the pinch, the horse that'll run for you, work for you, fight for you, when his flanks are foamin' white an' the air's burnin' red-hot through his nostrils; that is the horse that's got his fighting heart still with him. He'll be the horse you have *mastered*.

"It's not so good, Miss Mexico, to stand out here an' have the boys all lookin, at me, horror-struck, like my hands were drippin' with blood. Don't reckon any of these waddies ever stood up man to man with their best friend just for the pure joy of knowing which had the heart and fire and nerve and muscle that made him the best man. Mebbe they never felt the glow of shakin' hands afterward—the sort of friendship that comes between man and horse that have been through the test, each knowin' the other's measure to an eyelash.

"Spur and whip, or just plain bare hands, can be some cruel—on a pony. Maybe you'd better explain to the boys, Miss Mexico, just the kind of horse you hanker for. Lead him out into the

firelight. Let 'em look at the arch of his neck, the old, never-die fight in his eye. Let 'em see you whistle for him, and him come trottin' to you all eager, spite of your quirt and clinkin' spurs. Then, maybe some of the boys would like to step out within reachin' distance of his teeth or heels!

"There are one-man horses, one-man dogs, and one-woman men, Miss Mexico. Maybe they're plum scattered now, few and far between. I'd kind of hate to think they have all got to be *gentled*. Seems like they'd be kind of wistful and droopy after that. They've been hunting for a master, and they'll know he has come when they feel the bite of a spur. They'll fight against him till he proves his stuff. Then they'll fight for him and—love him.

"Come back again, Miss Mexico. Somethin' tells me I'm goin' to be a lone-hand hombre for fair. Now step right out and show us for sure that you haven't been entirely *gentled* as yet!

"After which I'm backin' slow out into the shadows again, boys. Sorry to step out so hostilelike on my first visit. But don't go r'arin' for your guns till you think this over for a spell. Think hard back a ways over your experiences and you'll remember the horse, and the man, and the woman, who never was meant to lick lump sugar from every guy that shuffles past the hitchin' post. They want to be, like to be, gotta be broke! Not beaten or scraped with spurs in a fit of anger, but *mastered* by keen judgment and with whatever means the circumstances demand. They won't follow like puppies as Mr. Donahue states his fiery outlaws did. Heaven forbid! They will come bounding like great-hearted, loyal Airedales."

Here is one Bill Myers, now bivouacked at 4209 National Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who speaks right from his heart—I'll say 'way down from the bottom, jest the place he talks about. Jest listen to him. Them's his sentiments, and sentiments we're sure many of you have.

"DEAR BOSS AND FOLKS: Please permit me to offer you a few lines of congratulative appreciation for the letter in The Round-up of July thirty-first. I have read many articles by different writers, but to my mind Tizwygram's letter is the best I ever remember reading.

"I, myself, have rode many dim trails—and perhaps done many things that were not exactly 'accordin' t' Hoyle,' but, regardless, deep in the heart—mine at least—of every old-time cow hand there's a little secret wish that there's a 'hoss heaven,' and a poor old lonesome cowboy can get a job there! If there is, I know I have had several saddle horses that have passed on into the sand hills of the horse-ghost people, and they will sure be plumb glad to see me! And I know darned well—if I can get in—I'll sure be glad to see 'em!"

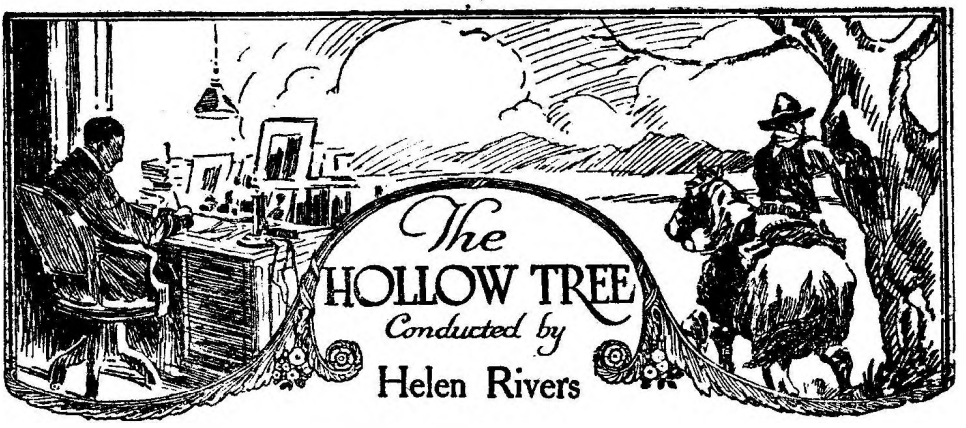
Private Joshua Elie Leeming, Jr., Army Hospital, Ward 8, Fort Eustis, Virginia, says as how our publication has helped him. Gosh all hemlock! We're better'n a drug store. Jest hark to him.

"BOSS AND FOLKS OF THE ROUND-UP: I am here in the hospital, here at the fort, with a disease that will probably keep me in bed for weeks or perhaps months.

"In general I like the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and know it is the best on the market at the present time. But, I agree with our Round-up friend, C. A. Knowles, R. F. D. No. 2, Oregon, as to it not being lengthy enough. I can absolutely say that it has helped

me on the road to recovery, and has kept my mind off my terrible disease. I have suffered much with it, until reading WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE again. I used to be a faithful reader of it.

"However, I shall close now, wishing you better success both in lengthy and better stories, and like our Round-up friend, Mr. Knowles, I shall sign the names which my mother gave me when I was too small a kid to object."



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.

ARCHER, you're invited to step right up to The Tree and give us an exhibition of your skill, so long as you don't aim your bow and arrow at friend Owl. Yes, sir, we're proud of the gangster who's become so efficient in the old art—archery. We remember you paid the Holla a visit some eighteen months back, and we're glad to have you again beneath our branches.

Earl B. Powell, the young man who's receiving all this flattering attention, has been to Miami, Florida, since we saw him last, and has killed three alligators with the bow and arrow, being so far the only man known to do that little stunt. To date he has killed one mountain lion, two deer, three alligators, twelve or fourteen bobcats, and countless smaller game with the bow. And this gangster, who's not a giant by any means, either, can pull a hundred-and-forty-pound bow. Just think of it, folks! And now that archery is becoming quite the thing to do, perhaps Mr. Powell will have the opportunity to make his dream of an African big-game hunt come true.

Better get out your hows and arrows, gangsters, if you want to keep up with the times. Mr. Powell, whose present address is 1725 Carondelet Street, New Orleans, Louisiana, will be glad to help you all he can.

And now—we feel quite sad—comes a letter from Hal C. Orrines, who says that a very long time ago he wrote asking to have a little appeal for correspondence put into The Tree, and that he's been disappointed week after week. Yes, gangsters, this waiting for our letters to appear is very hard for most of us, being only human, as we are, and I suggest that when any of you gangsters become impatient, just drop the old Owl a note, and he'll see if he can't get some one to start a little writing pronto. Don't forget to do some writing yourself, though, gangsters, for some one always has to be the first, you know. Address Hal Orrines in care of The Tree.

Some time ago there was a hombre came up to The Tree asking for a pet coyote. We have some one who can fill that bill now, hombre, so you'd better come forward. F. J. Chard, Cabrl,

Saskatchewan, Canada, has two pet coyotes, eight weeks old, and he'll be glad to hear from you as wants 'em.

A note from the little island girl who in the past has been known to put her writing in a bottle!

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Through this page I wish to thank all those who so kindly wrote to me. When I put that note in the bottle and threw it into the sea my mother was very ill in the hospital, and I was very lonesome and blue. She has recovered now, and my loneliness is almost forgotten.

Discovery Island is only one mile long and half a mile wide. It is nine miles from Victoria City, B. C. We are the only family living here; six of us, altogether.

Now, to those dear people who wrote to me, please say that I will answer all that I can, but you must know that I received so many letters that it will be almost impossible for me to answer them all.

AMY NOTT.

Victoria, B. C., Canada.

"Could I be one of the happy gathering?" asks Harry J. Swann, who, as soon as he finished reading his first W. S. M., sat down and wrote to the gang. He will tell about "a whole budget of places" to those who drop him a line. Address Harry J. Swann, Off. Std., Leanvant Officers Mess, H. M. S. *Enterprise,* care of G. P. O., London, England.

Here's Joy Eileen Hewett, who also comes to us after reading her first copy of W. S. M. "It's my ambition to spend a few months on a ranch in Montana," she writes. But in the meantime she would like to get acquainted with the gang's Western sisters. Address her at the Mansion House, Hurstpierpoint, Hassocks, Sussex, England.

You gangsters from Montana, please make room.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I will try to crowd in around your dear happy little bunch of Gangsters and see if I can find a few pen pals about my own age. I am thirty-three, and my occupation is electrician and motor-truck driver. Would especially like to hear from young fellows around Butte, Montana, as I figure on going there about the first of January, 1927. But I will answer all letters and post cards received, and will tell of my travels, also of my experiences in both the World War and the Mexican War. Was wounded in the war and have lots of time on my hands to write. Hope I will get a whole truck load of mail from now on when I drive into town after the mail.

CHARLES H. GRIFFIN.

Care of Park Work, Winterset, Iowa.

There must be one among you young hombres who would like to pal up with a young man of twenty-one who is looking for a partner on a trapping and hunting trip in Canada. A. J. Johnson, whose address is Coral Gables, Florida, Route 3, Box 55, says that he can't even get his pals off for a short fishing trip, let alone a much longer time, and he is sure anxious to find the right buddy. He can handle a boat and is no amateur with a rifle. Better get in touch with him, boys.

Another young man looking for a buddy. He lives with his foster parents, and to the right one will share his home. He would prefer to hear from young men who have no parents or home. Address A. F. S., in care of The Tree.

A. J. Hall, Afton, New York, is an elderly man who would be willing to share his home with a man somewhat younger than himself.

Any of you gangsters interested in hearing about life on the sea? Carl J. Fleischer, twenty-two, says that he will tell of some of the joys and the hardships. His address is U. S. S. *Redwing,* care of Custom House, Boston, Massachusetts.

Another lonely sailor, twenty-one, is James E. Batson, U. S. S. *Redwing,* care of Custom House, Boston, Massachusetts.

Fred M. Davis, Co. H., 18th Inf., Fort Schuyler, New York, is looking for pen pals.

A telephone operator in an army camp in Ohio, wants his name broad-

cast among you gangsters in the hope of getting lots of letters. Address D. Royer, Telephone Exchange, Columbus General Reserve Dept., Columbus, Ohio.

Chick Ross, R. F. D. No. 10, Box 826, Laurel Cañon, Hollywood, California, is anxious to get his old pen pals back. He was badly hurt at riding about a year ago, and his letters stopped coming when he was unable to answer them. He now wants to renew his old friendships and to form many new ones.

A native son of southern California, twenty-two, would like to exchange pictures and post cards with young men living in the East and Middle West. Address Frank R. Brandes, 925 Rialto Avenue, Venice, California.

One of the millions of factory workers, Miss Rose Thomas, 661 South Post Avenue, Detroit, Michigan, wants to hear about the daily experiences of sisters who enjoy the out-of-doors life of the West.

"I've seen some wonderful country during the last few years," writes Miss M. F. B., 1600 North First Street, Albuquerque, New Mexico. "Several years ago I lived in the San Luis Valley, Colorado, the 'land of the flowing wells.'" She has visited the oldest church in the United States, and countless points of interest that she wants to tell about and send postal-card views of. Here's your chance, sisters.

"A wanderer of the globe" who craves letters from all, wants you to drop him a line at Box 847, Vancouver, Washington. He can tell about South America, China, and something of the jungles of Africa. By the way, hombres, this wanderer is looking around for a pal.

Kenneth H. Bird, R. D. 4, Seneca Falls, New York, is planning on traveling through the Southern and Western States and wants to be informed about working conditions there.

Mr. and Mrs. Hallie Grider, General Delivery, Hollister, California, are a young married couple who are looking for pen friends. Mr. Grider is a native son of California, and Mrs. Grider is a "Webbfooter" from Oregon.

"I've lingered long on the outside of the jolly crowd, and now may I come in and be one of you?" asks Blondie, care of The Tree. She hopes for a deluge of letters from the sisters of the gang.

Robert Wendler, R. F. D., Box 424, Berkeley, California, would like to exchange postal cards with gangsters in foreign countries, and stamps with anybody.

Angus Hall, East Lumferton, North Carolina, wants to know what the chances are of getting work in Mexico, or New Mexico.

Mrs. C. B., care of The Porcupine Store, Chelan Post Office, Saskatchewan, Canada, asks for pen friends from California and Oregon.

Mrs. L. T. Fuller, 725 North Cory Street, Findlay, Ohio, is alone all day and wants sisters of her age, twenty-three, to help her to pass the time. She would especially like pen friends from Ardmore and Ada, Oklahoma.

"If some of you sisters have some good animal snaps or pictures that you could send, I would burn incense at your shrine forever," says Grace F. Strath, 1602 Turk Street, San Francisco, California. She is eighteen years of age, folks, and wants just lots of letters.

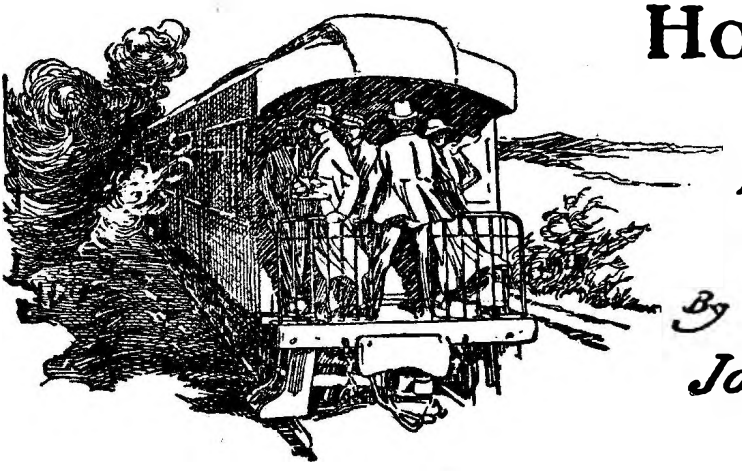
A cross-country hike!

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My buddy and myself are planning a cross-country hike and would like to hear from fellows who have made the trip. Also, we would like to hear about any good camping places en route. We intend to take the Southwestern route, but we might change our minds and go direct across. Here's hoping that we get a bunch of letters.

TWO OF THE GANG.

Care of The Tree.

Where To Go and How To Get There



By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

RIVERS OF THE WEST—THE RIO GRANDE

THE Rio Grande, famous in the history and romance of the days of the Spanish colonizers and missionaries, is an uncertain and treacherous river. There are times when its torrential floods are impassable and there are times when it is nothing more than a trickling stream. It rises in the Rio Grande National Forest, in Colorado, among snow-clad mountains, and when the snows melt in the spring and early summer its waters rise until they spread over the surrounding districts. But in autumn and winter the flow is insignificant and in places it can be crossed on foot almost without its presence being noticed. For a distance of about four miles above El Paso it forms the boundary between Texas and New Mexico; then for one thousand three hundred miles it winds in tortuous curves forming the boundary between Texas and Mexico, and emptying into the Gulf of Mexico. From its source in southwestern Colorado to the Gulf its length is one thousand seven hundred and seventy miles.

The valley of the Rio Grande is the cradle of the early history of America. It was penetrated seventy years before the Pilgrim Fathers landed on Plymouth Rock by Spanish explorers and was the base of the colonization of those sections that now form the States of New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado and Texas. In those days the Rio Grande valley was the scene of many encounters between the Spanish adventurers and the untamed Indians of the region who, when victorious, would torture and murder their victims without mercy.

All during these years of unsettled "settlement" the colonists established crude irrigation systems along the course of the Rio Grande, following the example of the Indians and utilizing the abandoned canal systems that had

been built by them. The Indians had been irrigationists from time immemorial, and although their systems were crude they served the purpose and preserved the waters that flowed so plentifully during the flood seasons for the time when the river bed would become dry. Sometimes their dams of brush and rock were washed away and could not be rebuilt until the water subsided, but many of them were in use long after the region was occupied by another race.

A military guard has always been more or less of a necessity along the Rio Grande, and thousands of boys in khaki have patrolled this lonely river. There are few places on the Mexican border that have not heard the tramp of Uncle Sam's sentinel, for some of whom it has been the last watch. Stray shots from the other side during a skirmish have at times cut short the life of a young American soldier, while on other occasions the bullets have been fired purposely. Many is the tragic tale that could be told of the border patrol.

The Rio Grande National Forest, where the river rises in the San Juan Mountains, is one of the finest recreation grounds in the country. It has an area of over a million acres with scenery that contains every variety that nature can bestow: snow-capped peaks that have been climbed by only the sure-footed mountain sheep, thickly timbered regions through which the deer and elk roam fearlessly, waterfalls, meadows gay with wild flowers, sparkling streams and rugged heights.

Campers come here by the thousand and tents are pitched along the river's brink, or under trees, or in a flowery valley, or in the depths of a wood near a splashing waterfall, or beside a clear lake. Fish are abundant and certain game, deer, bear, lion and bobcats may be hunted in season. Those intending to hunt or fish should provide themselves with a copy of the Colorado game laws.

Besides mountain climbing, trail riding, boating, hunting and fishing one may take auto trips over good roads and get acquainted with the country around. Motorists following the Spanish Trail may leave it at South Fork and drive seventy-five miles into the upper reaches of the Rio Grande del Norte. The road leads through Creede, the old mining town, where fortunes were won and lost and where night and day were one. This road terminates at Farmers' Union Reservoir, a huge storage project that supplies water for the production of crops on thousands of acres in the San Luis Valley. Camp grounds will be found at convenient points along this trip, and the motorist will have no trouble in securing supplies.

The Rio Grande Forest grazes about five hundred and fifty thousand head of stock each year and is one of the largest grazing units under the administration of the Forest Service.

The forest supervisor's headquarters are at Monte Vista, Colorado.

WHAT CHANCE HAS HE?

DEAR MR. NORTH: I am sixteen years old and I want to be a cowboy. Will you please send me the names of some ranches and their addresses, so I can go there and get a job?

ANXIOUS DICK.

There's just one chance for you, and I'm afraid it's not a very good one. If you've followed up this department, you know that cowboys on the Western cattle ranches are men who know their business thoroughly and have grown up from boyhood on the range, familiarizing themselves from their earliest years with the various details of a cowboy's duties. Now, if you can put yourself in the place of one of these men by going out to some part of the West where a lot of cattle are being raised, and get to know the ins and outs of the cow business just as they have

done, you may eventually make yourself into a good enough cow hand to land a job.

It will cost something to journey out there and pay your living expenses until you are proficient in the tasks that fall to the lot of the cowboy of to-day. It may be some years before you can make yourself into a fair hand, so that you will stand a chance to land a job in competition with a man who has been raised out there. Western ranch owners don't want to hire tenderfeet and greenhorns. They don't have to, because there are always good men on the spot to take any job that's going. You are young and have time to learn. It's a good ambition to want a life out in the open. But I think it only right to tell you that you can't just walk out to a cattle ranch and be given a job. You've got to be able to make good. If you want to make the experiment, the country round about Bozeman, Montana, or Burns, Oregon, or Amarillo or San Angelo, Texas, would be as good as any that I know of. Good luck to you!

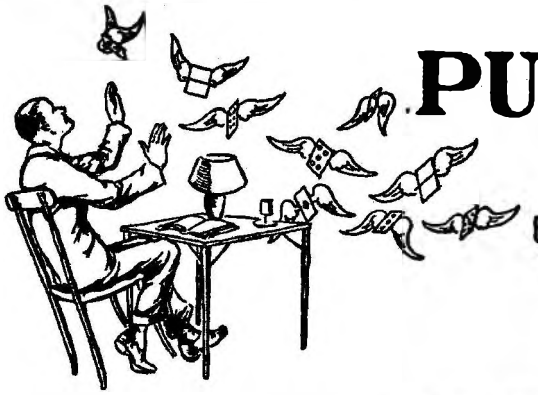
THE EVER-NEW WEST

SPEAKING before the Western States Convention recently at Denver, Colorado, George Otis Smith, director of the United States Geological survey, took for his topic "The Ever-New West." Mr. Otis spoke in part as follows:

"What American can enter this Western Empire without his imagination being stirred by the stories of its past—yes, and even more by visions of its future! Whether we travel by rail or by auto, our pathway has its traditions of exploration and its records of early settlement. The mountain passes and the routes used by to-day's commerce are lasting memorials of the pathfinders whose unconquerable purpose was to search out a way—Lewis and Clarke, Bonneville, Pike, Long, Frémont—their names still live in your rivers and lakes and peaks.

"It was the glory of these adventurers that they spied out the land so that others might follow—that long procession of pioneers who occupied the new country—fur traders, gold miners, cattlemen, and homesteaders. Each of these pioneers attacked the problem of transportation in his own way, and each sought by his own method to win the resources whose richness had been reported by the pen of the government explorer or by the swift rumor of the unnamed and unfamed adventurer. Trails were worn deep by these home and fortune seekers as they passed through the mountain barriers in successive waves—and these were waves that did not ebb, for this was an army of occupation. Along these main pathways of the West, as one historian has pointed out, the figure of chief interest was the sad-faced woman sitting on the front of the covered wagon.

"As I visit and revisit these broad areas of the Western States, what kindles my interest and captures my imagination is not what I read of the old West, but what I see of the new, the ever-new West. Each year as I traverse some of the inter-mountain valleys, whether in California or Washington or Utah or Colorado, I see golden grain fields perched high on some bench or ridge top, where before I had seen only sagebrush, and I note that more and more of the valley floor is green with alfalfa, and that the orchards are creeping higher and higher on the slopes. The rough trails that I once followed with a pack train are now railroad routes, and mountain fastnesses into which I once toiled afoot along the river bank are now penetrated by well-graded, hard-surfaced roads. The waterfall that thirty years ago had only scenic value now furnishes a distant city with light and power."



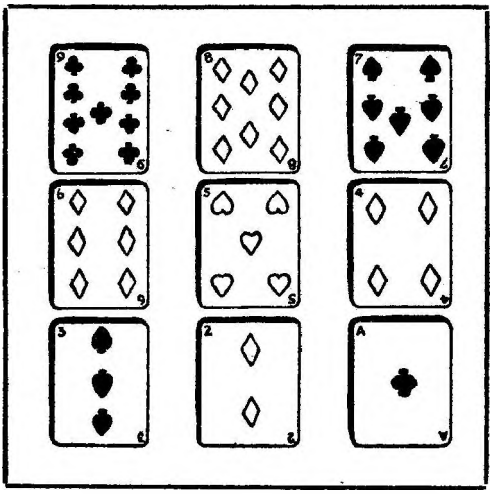
PUZZLING TRAILS

By **Prosper Buranelli**

After the Round-up is over, each week Prosper Buranelli will select for readers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE a couple of tricky problems that will make them get out their pencils and go to it. What kind of puzzle do you like the best? Write and tell us. Send in a puzzle and show us. Maybe you can concoct the one that will make WESTERN STORY readers quit cold.

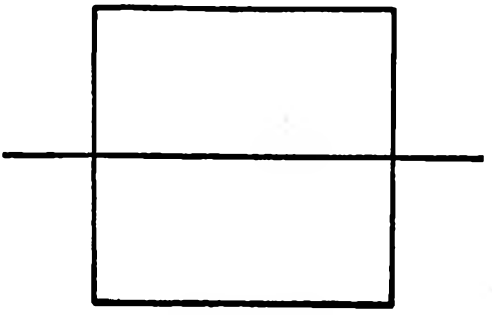
I'VE got a couple of sticklers for you this week. In fact that's you with the headache. But no ducking or running away.

Ever play cards? Certainly. Well, here's a chance for you to make a real royal flush, not exactly the royal flush that comes in at the critical moment and knocks out the four eights, but a puzzle royal flush. See the layout of nine



cards in the picture? Well, it's up to you to rearrange them so that they still remain a square and they add up in every direction to make fifteen. Also no two red or black cards are allowed to lie side by side, either across or up and down. In the layout given you will see that the second row across totals fifteen. The second file down totals fifteen. The diagonals total fifteen. You will see that red cards lie side by side, which violates the rule. Now go ahead and rearrange the cards so that every row, file and diagonal totals fifteen and red and black always alternate.

The second one will make the pencil operate. Draw this figure without taking pencil from paper, that is, with one continuous line. You must not cross lines, and you must not retrace. This one will make the brains work a little.



And now about a word puzzle. I am strong for word puzzles. Here are a few concealed Western cities. In each sentence you can spell out a city name. For instance, in the first one you can find DENVER.

With Adam and Eve it was a case of Eden versus Hades.

Send Warren over to the store.

Those at S begin. Those at T leave off.

They had left the port. Land was still in sight.

His name is Hassan, Francis. Come on, let's go.

Last week's answers were:

My dog and I went hunting one morning.

Dempsey, Delaney, Tunney, Walker, Wills, Risko, Berlenbach.

CATTLE BRANDS ON UNIVERSITY WALLS

THE picturesque and artistic quality of the old-time Western cattle brand has been given recognition by the architects of Garrison Hall, a new building on the campus of the University of Texas. Among the cattle brands that will form part of the decorations of this structure are the famous Running W, of the Henrietta M. King ranch; the S. M. S. of Swenson Brothers; the Lazy F of Anna Martin & Sons; the Lazy S of the late Colonel C. C. Slaughter; the J A of the Cornelia Adair estate; the Four 6s of the late S. B. Burnett; the X I T of the Capitol syndicate; and many others. The brands used in the decorative scheme were selected by members of the university faculty, under the advice of Captain George W. Saunders, president of the Old Trail Drivers Association.

PADRE ISLAND RANCH SOLD

THE famous Padre Island ranch changed hands this year. For many years, the cattle belonging to Pat F. Dunn have grazed on the rich grasses of Padre Island, a long, low-lying piece of land that runs alongside the Texas coast for some miles south of Corpus Christi. Mr. Dunn's ranch comprised some thirty-three thousand acres, and was sold to Colonel Sam A. Robertson, of Brownsville, Texas, as trustee for himself and W. E. Callahan, of St. Louis. The purchase price is said to have been $125,000.

It is reported that the famous old island ranch will be utilized in the completion of the ocean drive from Corpus Christi to Brownsville, extending through both Padre and Mustang Islands. A toll road will run from Aransas Pass to Brownsville and the Rio Grande and on into Mexico to connect with a highway to Mexico City, according to the plans.

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," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

GAMMEL, FRED.—About forty years old, tall, dark eyes and hair. Years ago used to cut timber in Washington. Please write to your daughter, care of this magazine.

SLOAN, ORVILLE or **ELTZ.**—Seventeen years old, fair complexion. Last seen in Idaho in 1924. His brother would like to hear from him. Walter, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from any one who was in the Orphans' Home at Boston, Massachusetts, between 1875 and 1878. Mrs. William Hutchens, 348 Dean Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

HUDSON, M. O.—About forty years old, short, blond. Born in Laurens, South Carolina. Last heard from about eight years ago in California, where he was employed in a vineyard. His niece would be grateful for any information. Helen Rhoden, Box 146, Warrenville, South Carolina.

PAULINE.—Have tried every way to get in touch with you. I am living true and waiting. Have a good job. Write to me. J. B. F., care of this magazine.

BRADOCK, L. S.—I would like to hear from you or see you. J. W. Canaga, Curtis, Nebraska.

HANNON, BRIAN.—Left home about twenty-two years ago to return to the gold fields of California. His sister is very lonely and would like to hear from him. Margaret Hannon, R. D. 2, Cambridge, New York.

BRADLEY, ANNA ELIZA.—Last heard from at Bridgeport, Connecticut, about eight years ago. Your cousin would like to hear from you. Alice I. Goldsmith, Box 168, West Sandlake, New York.

FERGUSON, LLOYD.—Please come back or write to me, for I want you so badly. Your wife. Address me 221 West Seventh Street, St. Paul, Minnesota.

O'ROURKE, PHADRIG.—Formerly of Dublin, Ireland. Went to America many years ago. Would like to hear from him or his descendants. L. Meehan, 5 Cazneau Street, Liverpool, England.

WILLDRIDGE, RALPH.—Formerly of Dublin, Ireland. Went to Australia many years ago. Would like to hear from him or his descendants. Address L. Meehan, 5 Cazneau Street, Liverpool, England.

C. G. K.—Received your last letter. Write to me, so I can answer. Little J. is dead. Come, if for only one day. A. J.

CHARLIE.—Please let me hear from you. Harold, Walter, and Dorothy want you and I need you very much. I do not blame you for anything, and will keep it quiet if you write. Cannot stay where I am, so write to me in care of this magazine. Ruth.

MURPHY, Mrs. PATRICK, nee **NATIE SHERRY.**—Left Liverpool, England, sixty years ago for America. Her nephew would like to hear from her. P. Sherry, 98 St. Mary's Wynd, Stirling, England.

MURRY.—Please write to your pal, who missed you in Zanesville, Ohio. Bill, care of this magazine.

NADINE, FLOSSIE, RALPH, VIRGIL, and **CLIFFORD.**—Lived at Picher, Oklahoma, in 1919. Please write to Ethel, care of this magazine.

MACK, DICK.—Used to be on the U. S. S. "Texas," storekeeper, first class. Please write to me for old time's sake. R. Patterson, Box 1246, San Diego, California.

McLAUGHLIN, FRANK, or **"DOC WILSON."**—Last heard of in Philadelphia. Believed to have gone to Canada. Tall, fifty-seven years of age, blue eyes, black and gray hair. Any information would be appreciated by M., care of this magazine.

FLANIGAN, HARVEY.—Short, blue eyes, light hair. Fond of reading. His brother would like to hear from him. Rexford C. Flanigan, Monroe, Wisconsin.

WALTON, SANFORD and **MONROE.**—Brother and sister. Last heard of at the home of their grandparents, S. M. Williamson, Bristol, Oklahoma. Between fourteen and nineteen years old. Address Mrs. C. C. Johnson, Route 1, Box 49, Brooksville, Florida.

SLAVIN, TERESA.—Who went to school at Olton, Wanette or Jenks, Oklahoma. Please write to Daphna King, B. 1, Box 199, Compton, California.

STRICKLER, HOWARD EARL.—Disappeared about a year ago. Was with the Fireman's Funds Insurance Company in San Francisco six years ago. Was also in the navy. Information will be appreciated by a friend. Miss Ella Meigs, 18 Clantoy Street, Springfield, Massachusetts.

HAYNES, MILTON E.—Last heard of near Daisy, North Dakota, about 1914. Has dark hair, brown eyes, and is about thirty-seven years old. Mother is ill. Please write to your brother Paul, in care of this magazine.

GUS.—Please write to me at the old address. Old Kid.

PETERSON, BRAYYELLE.—Nineteen years old, five feet three inches; weight, one hundred and thirty-five pounds; blue eyes, black hair. Please write to Mrs. Howard Armour, 1008 Park Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

ROGER, HARRY.—Brother of Ernie and Burrel, son of Dan Roger. Any one knowing anything about him please write to M., care of this magazine.

COLLINS, JOHN.—Born in Bridgewater, Ontario, Canada, about thirty-five years ago. Six feet tall, heavy set, fair complexion. Last heard of at Superior, Wisconsin, in 1914. Any information would be appreciated by his nephew, William Pye, 61 Cheever Street, Hamilton, Canada.

DEAN, Private JACK.—Last heard of at Schofield Barracks, Field Artillery, Hawaii. Please write to Earl Stone, Bonners Ferry, Idaho.

HARVEY, WALTER, HORACE, and **HATTIE.**—Walter was last heard of at Washington, D. C., during the World War. Important information. Please write to P. M., care of this magazine.

STOE, HARRY.—I have news for you. Would like to hear from you at once. Herman D. Hill, 758 West 9th Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.

LALLEY, CURTIS A.—Last heard of at Fort Worth, Texas. Please write to Tennessee Aldridge, General Delivery, Seattle, Washington.

JACK.—Daddy, have you forgotten all your promises? Am so worried. Let me know if you are all right. Regardless of what you have done, I want to hear from you. I still love you. "Rum."

CLEM.—Have sent the kiddies East. I am ill and alone and need you. Come or send for me. B.

VANCE, DILLARD J.—Last seen in Yuma, Arizona, three years ago. Any information will be gratefully received by his father, J. H. Dillard, R. F. D. 2, Box 44, Santa Anna, Texas.

CAMPBELL, DONALD.—Was in Kansas City, Missouri, when last heard of. About twenty years old, dark hair and gray eyes. Any information will be appreciated. Address H., care of this magazine.

FRANK.—Tried to communicate with you at 562, but could get no reply. Can you get in touch with me? Cail.

WILLIAMS, ROBERT E.—A woodcarver. Lived in Rochester, New York, over forty years. He is wanted concerning money matters. Any one knowing his whereabouts please notify J. Vincent Archer, 269 W. Tupper Street, Apt. 16, Buffalo, New York.

OLIVER, JAMES H.—Your children need help again. As I find I am not entitled to your pension, won't you please help them for a while, anyway? C. O.

DIX, FRANK.—Had two sons and one daughter by his first wife. Believe them to be from South Carolina or Georgia. A daughter by his second wife would like to hear from her half brothers and half sister, or any of her father's family. Mrs. B. F. Johnsen, 2207 Thirtieth Avenue North, Birmingham, Alabama.

OSBORNE, MARCUS JUDSON.—Dark, reddish hair, blue eyes, ruddy complexion, nearly six feet tall, twenty-six years old. Last heard from at Fort Worth, Texas, February 10, 1926. Address Sister, care of this magazine.

COURTER, NORA.—Last heard from ten years ago at Butte, Montana. She has light hair, gray eyes, medium height, and about forty years old. Please write to your sister, Maude, care of this magazine.

PHILLIPS, WILLIAM D.—Six feet four inches, age forty-two, weight one hundred and sixty pounds. Last seen in San Francisco, in 1913. His son, who is married, is anxious to find him. Edward J. Phillips, 1124 Ofarrel Street, San Francisco, California.

BROWN, LAWRENCE.—Last heard from in April, 1926, at Ellwood City, Pennsylvania. Short, has red hair and blue eyes. Part of second finger of right hand missing. Please write to your heartbroken Pal, care of this magazine.

COMISKEY, Mrs. MARTHA.—Lived at Chicago, Illinois, in 1916. Please write to Theresa Erler, General Delivery, Miller Creek, Missoula, Montana.

HACKER, BERTHA and **MINNIE.**—Mother and daughter. Last address was 876 Twentieth Street, Chicago, Illinois. Daughter's married name unknown. Please write to Theresa Erler, General Delivery, Miller Creek, Missoula, Montana.

TANNER, Doctor WELLINGTON LEE.—The wife you left in Florida is still ill and with no funds. M. Kimbrough, Bushnell, Florida.

T. E. D.—Daddy, please write to me at the old address. Remember your promise to play square. Margie.

READMAN, GEORGE.—About twenty-four years of age. Left home November, 1925. When last heard from was going to the hospital with blood poisoning. Write to your mother, who is so worried. Mrs. George Readman, 13 Amelia Street, Toronto, Canada.

BLEUER, GLENN.—My niece, Betty, has mysteriously disappeared. Am worried. Please write to me. Victor Raoul Breault, care of this magazine.

VAUGHN, JACK or **ROBERT STAID.**—Tall, dark complexion, curly hair, blue eyes. Important news. Please write to B. S., care of this magazine.

TABLER, GEORGE ROMEO, or **G. H. COOPER.**—Last heard from in 1917, working for Tony Lilly on a ranch in Condon, Oregon. Is tall, has brown eyes, black hair, and about thirty-five years old. Any information regarding him will be greatly appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Winifred Travis, 15 Seventh Street, Richmond, California.

ALFRED.—The suspense and worry is terrible. Please write to mother. Jane.

ONORATO, ORVILLE.—Your old friend Babe would be very glad to hear from you and Lila. Address Mrs. James E. Kerr, 851 East 92d Street, Los Angeles, California.

WINNES, TOM, Jr.—Formerly of Cincinnati, Ohio. Write to Rosella Winnes Maxwell, 714 Woodward Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

HAMPTON, WADE.—Left his home in Long Beach, California, five years ago to prospect for gold in Arizona. Was a Mason and government worker during the World War. Sixty years old, tall, black eyes, and curly hair. His sister would be more than happy to hear from him. Mrs. L. W. Gault, Route 1, Box 28, Hickman's Mills, Missouri.

NICELY, LAWRENCE.—I want you to arrange to meet June and me, as I have a great deal to talk to you about. Please write to Howard. Edna.

KOSWAY, BURT.—Seen at Niverville, Manitoba, Canada, about twenty-five years ago. Would like to know his whereabouts. M. V., care of this magazine.

BRICE, CLARENCE.—Would like very much to hear from you. Please let me know where you are. Your brother, Richard H. Brice, 2249 Woodmere Drive, Cleveland, Ohio.

SYMES, ETHEL MARSHALL.—About forty-two years old. Last heard of at Sacramento, four years ago. Delbert married again. Mother grieves for you. Come home and make her happy. Mike Marshall, 508 Capitol Street, Vallejo, California.

BUSH, BILL.—I want very much to find you. Please write to me at once. May Ballard, General Delivery, Hutchinson, Kansas.

MORRISON, GLADYS.—About twenty-one years of age. Last heard of at Chicago, Illinois. Please communicate with I. M., care of this magazine.

WILSON, JIM.—Your son, Orville L., died March 14, 1926. For details, write to his widow, Mrs. Marion I. Wilson, 1609 West 7th Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

WILSON, OSCAR.—Last heard from in Chicago, working as night clerk in a hotel. Your brother is dead. Please write to his widow, Mrs. Marion I. Wilson, 1609 West 7th Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

DARE, WILLIE HARVY or **WITHINGTON.**—Lived at Evansville, Indiana. Mother is not well, and will not get much better until she knows you are all right. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Orville L. Wilson, 1609 West 7th Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

ZELLER, J. H.—Last heard from December 1, 1925, at Saratoga, Wyoming. Write to John, care of this magazine.

ROBERTS, ERVIN E.—Would like to hear from you. Please write to your brother, Lester, Box 298, Sedro-Woolley, Washington.

GOSCH, WINSTON.—Last heard from at Jena, Louisiana. His wife now feels she was in the wrong, and is sorry they parted. She has some important papers for him to sign. Mrs. Marie Gosch, Box 683, Humble, Texas.

CLITHEROE, JOHN.—Emigrated to America about fifty years ago, and settled in Rhode Island, as a farmer. Was still there in 1922. Was born in Preston, England, about sixty years ago. Would like to get some trace of him or his descendants. J. Clitheroe, 5 Parker Street, Chorley, Lancashire, England.

MASHBURN, DELMAR.—Your letter intercepted. Please send address. Love. P.

WADDLE or **WADDELL, WILLIAM JACKSON.**—Last heard of in southern Oregon. Was on his way to Arizona for his health. His mother would like to have him communicate with her. Mrs. C. E. Miller, Alma, Nebraska.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from the girls who were at G. I. H., Howel, Ohio, in 1918 and 1920, especially No. 5, 7, and 9, as I was in all three. Scott, care of this magazine.

ROSS, WILLIAM.—Of Cochrane or Calgary, Alta. Your wife, Mary, is dead. Please write to your daughter, who was a baby when you last saw her, seventeen years ago. L. R. B., care of this magazine.

COULTER, EARL BART.—Of the 155th Aero Squadron. Reported having died in France, but believe this to have been another by the same name. Any one who knew him please write to Wilson, care of this magazine.

JAUNEY, Mrs. MARY.—Left England about forty-three years ago and became a naturalized American. Last heard of at Harvey, Illinois, in 1918. She would be over eighty years of age. Served as a companion for a Mrs. Golding of New York City. A niece would be glad of any information. Mrs. Maud Martin, 24 St. Margaret's Road, Brockley, S. E. 4, London, England.

RATCLIFF, EDWARD.—Letters written to him general delivery, Utica, New York, in 1912, were returned. His niece would be glad of any information. Mrs. Maud Martin, 24 St. Margaret's Road, Brockley, S. E. 4, London, England.

CURTIS, JAMES.—Was a well-known builder in Chicago. Would like to get in touch with him or his children. Mrs. Maud Martin, 24 St. Margaret's Road, Brockley, S. E. 4, London, England.

ANSCHUETZ, JULIUS.—Please write to your brother, Robert H. Anschuetz, care of this magazine.

WALSH, PAT.—Formerly of Hartford, Connecticut. Please send your address to Box 85, Highland Falls, New York.

WADE, MILDRED.—Was taken from the Oklahoma State Home at Pryor, Oklahoma, by her father, in April, 1926. Please write to Friend, care of this magazine.

CADIGAN, JOSEPH.—Left his three children upon the death of his wife, Julia, thirty-three years ago. His daughter would be very grateful for any information concerning him. Mrs. Blanche Henderson, 765½ South Pierce Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from any of the Jennings children who were taken to the St. Louis Home, five years ago, by their grandmother. Address Mrs. F. L. Green, care of Elk-O-Zar, Lanagan, Missouri.

FORSYTHE, FRANK.—Formerly of Tulsa, Oklahoma, later of Portland and Oregon City, Oregon. Have important news for you. Please write to R. U., care of this magazine.

FLANERY, ANGELINE.—Of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Johnny is here with me. Please communicate with Stanley Clyde Scharmach, 713 South San Julian Street, Los Angeles, California.

MILLER, AUGUST M.—Has not been heard from since he was honorably discharged from the navy, three years ago, at Los Angeles. He is about twenty-eight years old. Any news will be appreciated by his father, August Miller, 112 Court Street, Utica, New York.

SHARP, RICHARD.—Scotch entertainer. Medium height, thirty-four years old, light auburn hair. Last heard from in New York City, latter part of 1925. Distressing family news awaits him. Communicate with Susie, care of this magazine.

LYLE, CARLSON KENNETH.—Last heard of with the Marines at Cape Haitien, Haiti. Any information would be very much appreciated by a friend. Mrs. Charles Anderson, 1340 East 8th Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

DAVIS, PERCY EUGENE.—Formerly of the U. S. cavalry. Maybelle and your mother are worried about you. So is your pal in Texas. Please communicate with us. H.

ATTENTION.—Would like to get in touch with some of the boys who served in the 32d U. S. Infantry, from December, 1920, to August, 1921, especially those in Company H and H. Q. Joseph C. Campas, Lindsay, California.

WEIR, JACK.—Last heard from at Hambleton, West Virginia, in 1904. Please write to your old pal, N. J. Donahue, Box 141, Centralia, Washington.

HARRIS or STOHMER, FREDA MAE.—Last heard from at Birmingham, Alabama, in 1924. Any information regarding her will be appreciated. Dewey Linton, Luray, Tennessee.

WESLEY.—Write to Horace at Gardiner, Maine, for my address. Have had a stroke. Left side paralyzed. Emma.

JOHNSON, ADA.—Formerly of Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Write to Al Akin, 332 South Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, California.

BIRDIE.—If you want me to, I will take your baby and love and care for it as if it were my own. Write to me direct. Mrs. Ruby Fairchild, Waldport, Oregon.

ERSKINE, Mrs. JULIA and sons, **WALTER, NOEL, HERBERT,** and **HENRY.**—Last heard from near Medford, Oregon. Will deeply appreciate any information. Mrs. Ruby Fairchild, Waldport, Oregon.

RYAN, ED D.—Last heard of at San Francisco, about six years ago. His sister would like to hear from him. Adele Ryan, 2603 Market Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

O'HARA, STEVE.—Where are you and why don't you write? Help your mother by sending her some money. She is in need of it. Della Smith.

CARMICHAEL, C. Q.—Very worried about you. Need you and want you badly. All is forgiven. Write to me and register letter. Beulah, 89 Georgia Avenue, Lowell, Massachusetts.

PROVOST, VIRGINIA.—Last heard from at Denver, Colorado. Your last letter was two months late in reaching me. I still love you and want you. Your husband, Wolfard Provost, Headquarters Troop, 4th Cav., Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming.

BENJAMIN, BESSIE.—Please write to me. All is forgiven. Have never heard from Jackie. Very lonely here. "Salty," care of this magazine.

HUNTER, Mrs. CLEO.—Last heard from about eight years ago. Lived in Oklahoma. Please write to me, as I am alone with the two girls. Mrs. Willie Mae Wester, Box 384, Coleman, Texas.

McGARRIGH, A.—Emigrated from Bolton, England, with parents and two sisters about 1920. When last heard from he was living in Ontario, Canada. Please write to Joseph Leo, Frobisher Avenue, Flanders Park, Adelaide, South Australia.

HEATH, A. V.—Have written care of the "Emporium," but no answer. Write to "Spic" Morris, 2306 A Street, Tacoma, Washington.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from the boys who graduated from Spring Garden Institute, electrical department, Philadelphia, in the class of 1919. Address Manager, Telephone Company, Bunnell, Florida.

HATFIELD, OTIS.—Last heard of at Clarksburg, West Virginia. Any information concerning him would be gratefully received. Nellie Carrell, 1235 Bigley Avenue, Charleston, West Virginia.

ROBERTS, JAMES LESTER.—Twenty years of age, medium height, dark hair and eyes. Last seen in San Diego, California, in July, 1918. Must get in touch with him, as there is an estate to be settled. Address Eulah, care of this magazine.

ALVEY, JOHN HENRY.—About twenty-three years of age. When last heard of was in Indiana. When quite young was taken from Clayton, New Mexico, by his mother. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his father, George E. Alvey, 2869 Champa Street, Denver, Colorado.

TALBOT, GRACE ELIZABETH and **FLORENCE.**—Colored. Mother and daughter. May be employed as servants in New Jersey, Long Island, or Rhode Island. A son and brother would like to hear from them. George E. Drayton, Janitor, 102 East 128th Street, New York City.

BEALL, JAMES A.—Last heard of in Veterans' Home at Yountville, California. Please write to Ollie. Kate has disappeared, and your brother wants to hear from you so badly. R. C. B.

PARKER, MARK ASA.—May have been in the hospital at Imperial Valley, California, about five years ago. His son, whom he has not seen since he was nine years old, would like to hear from him. Lee Asa Parker, R. 1, Box 171 B, Glendale, Arizona.

BENETT, BENJAMIN.—Last heard from at Covington, Kentucky, December, 1925. Please write to your old pal, Private Marion E. Morgan, Company A, 27th Infantry, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

HESS, Mrs. FRED.—Lived at New Haven, Connecticut, in 1917. Had three children; Edna, Freda, and Fred. Would be glad to hear from her. Mrs. Theo Miller, R. F. D. 6, Ewing Station, Trenton, New Jersey.

TONEY, H. D., or GEORGE STROM.—Last heard from at Des Moines, Iowa, in 1920. Has brown hair, blue eyes, medium height. Your sister would love to hear from you. Mrs. Allie La Mathieu, 217 Washington Street, Pascagoula, Mississippi.

HAWKYARD, JOHN THOMAS.—Seventy-four years of age, medium height, bald on top of head. Last heard of at Hallock, Minnesota, in 1914. Brother wants to hear any news of him. Fred Hawkyard, Kenny, Illinois.

COLEMAN, CURLEE.—Of Taft, California. Believed to be with his mother in Oklahoma, recuperating from a broken leg. A very anxious friend would like to hear from him. C. M., care of this magazine.

CARTER, BERNARD.—Age nineteen. Last heard of at Detroit, Michigan. Would like to hear from you. Important. Archie Carter, Box 242, Weston, Massachusetts.

TAYLOR, A. L.—Was a traveling salesman in Texas, in 1915. His address will be appreciated by an old friend. Ethel Armstrong, care of this magazine.

GUY K.—Acted in anger. Am so sorry. We love and want you. Please write to same place. D.

GREENLEAF, RALPH.—Formerly of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Last heard from at Charleston, South Carolina. Come or communicate with your brother at once. Frank M. Greenleaf, 7 Agawam Street, Worcester, Massachusetts.

T. M.—Please write at once. Have many things of interest to tell you. Am worried about you. Your mother, C. D., 636 Buffalo Street, Franklin, Pennsylvania.

MELTON, WILLIAM J.—Please write to your pal in West Lynn, Massachusetts. B. K.

ED.—Communicate with me at once. Have good news for you. Ray.

CLARK, FRED.—Please write to your brother, Corporal Clarence Clark, Company K, 20th Infantry, Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

MOON, FREDERIC ELSWORTH.—Please write to your mother. It is very important. Any one knowing his address please send it to Box 141, Humansville, Missouri.

If You Want to Make $100 a week and get a Hudson Coach

If you want to make $100 a week, *write to me at once.* You won't have to invest a cent of capital. You don't need experience. Your earnings will start *immediately.* And, in addition to this *big money*, you can get a new Hudson Super-Six Coach absolutely FREE.

this is your chance

Amazing Profits Waiting For You

We are the largest and most successful company of our kind in the world. We have been in business for eighteen years Our resources are over a million dollars. Our products—ZANOL Products—are advertised in such big national magazines as The Saturday Evening Post, The Ladies' Home Journal, Woman's Home Companion, and McCall's. We have hundreds of thousands of customers in every part of the country. During the past twelve months, these customers bought millions of dollars worth of ZANOL Products from us.

I need 500 men and women to represent us in some of our richest territories. I want men and women who know a real proposition when they see it; who are ambitious to make *big money*, who would like to become the most successful person in their community. If you act *quickly*, this wonderful opportunity is yours. Then, if you will simply follow a few instructions, you will find it easy to make $100 a week, or even more.

Your Earnings Start Immediately

You can begin to enjoy a big income immediately. I furnish you with a complete equipment for doing business, absolutely FREE. I tell you exactly what to do. I tell you where to go and what to say, how to make money. *T. R. Anders*, Pa., made *$15 his first day. Albert Peters* earned *$20 in 3 hours*, and *$75 his first week. Glenn Kiser*, Va., ended his first day with a profit of *$16.68. Christopher Vaughn* netted *$125 in one week.* And there isn't a reason in the world why you can't do as well or better than any of these REPRESENTATIVES.

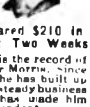
All we ask you to do is introduce yourself as the ZANOL REPRESENTATIVE in your locality. The rest is easy. Your income will increase by leaps and bounds. You will be astounded at the way the money will come rolling in. You will be amazed to find that in a short time you will have an income of $100 a week.

$47 in One Day

Henry Ablere has made $47 profit in ONE DAY as a ZANOL REPRESENTATIVE.

$8 an Hour

Henry Grosshaus says "I have made as high as $8 an hour."



Cleared $210 in First Two Weeks

That is the record of Edgar Morris. Since then he has built up a big steady business that has made him independent.

Hudson Super-Six Coach FREE

We want to help you in every way to make large profits and we offer to provide a brand-new Hudson Super-Six Coach, without any expense to you whatever. The car is given to you outright and becomes your personal, permanent property. Mail the coupon for details of our new plan.

Send No Money

I don't want you to send me a cent. You risk nothing. You do not have to agree to pay anything or do anything. Let me tell you about this marvelous opportunity. Let me prove to you that you can make $100 a week without working half as hard as you are right now. Mail the coupon today. Get started in this fascinating work. Don't wait until some one else gets in ahead of you. Make up your mind now that you are going to get your share of the two million dollars profits which my REPRESENTATIVES are going to make this year. Write today.

THE AMERICAN PRODUCTS CO.
Albert Mills
President and General Manager
Dept. 5612, Cincinnati, Ohio.
©A P Co

Mail this NOW

Albert Mills, Pres.,
The American Products Co.,
Dept. 5612, Cincinnati, O.

I want to know how I can earn $100 a week as a ZANOL REPRESENTATIVE. Send me all the facts about your money-making proposition, without cost or obligation.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

First in the field

Baby Ruth is the best "forward pass" in the game; it scores every time—and all the time!

And it has the largest, most enthusiastic following of any candy in America.

Forty million people eat **Baby Ruth** with delight. Over five million bars are sold every day. Over $250,000 worth of nickels pass over the candy counters daily for this favorite confection.

Fits every taste—fit for any taste—Curtiss **Baby Ruth.**

CURTISS CANDY COMPANY

New York CHICAGO San Francisco
Boston Los Angeles

5c