Western Story Magazine

Every Week

Feb. 2, 1929

15¢
20¢ IN CANADA

A STREET AND SMITH PUBLICATION

Features by
Kenneth Perkins
Max Brand
George Gilbert
Robert Ormond Case

Taste the Juice of Real Mint Leaves

It sweetens the mouth and breath—aids digestion. A lasting, cleansing flavor that gives prolonged enjoyment.

After Every Meal

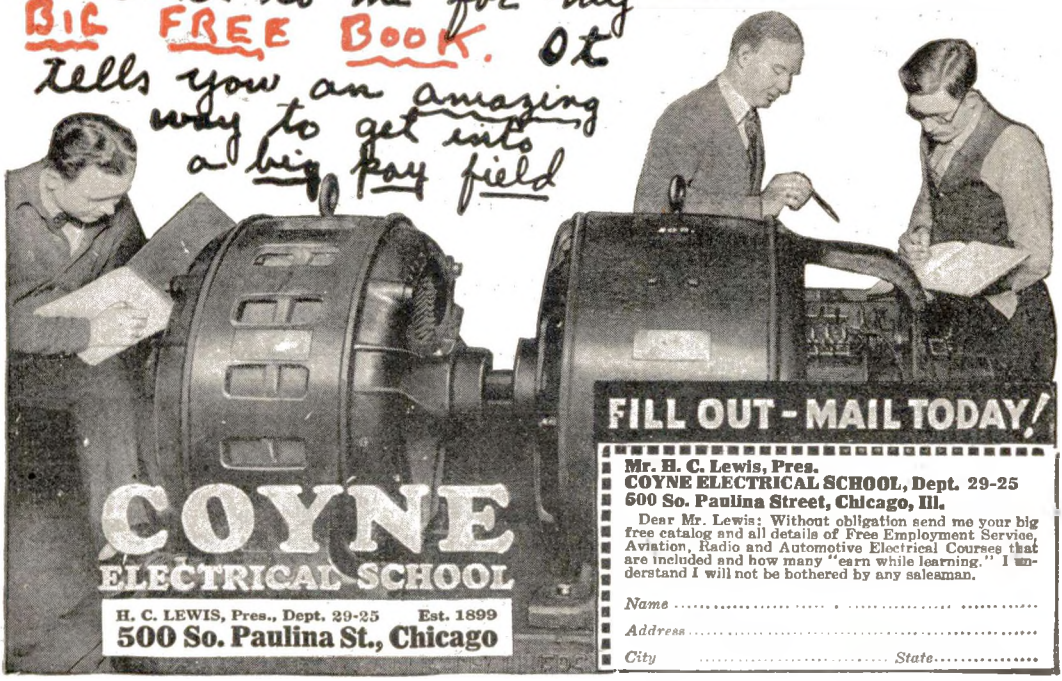
BE SURE IT'S **WRIGLEY'S**

J-5

SAY FELLOWS — LEARN ELECTRICITY

H. C. LEWIS — President

Let me tell you in my big FREE book how I can train you quickly for jobs leading to salaries of $60.00 to $200.00 a week. NOT BY CORRESPONDENCE NOT BY BOOKS. But, on real Electrical machinery in 90 DAYS you don't need advanced education or Electrical experience. EARN WHILE YOU LEARN. Free employment service for life after you graduate. AVIATION Electrical Course included free if you enroll now. Clip coupon TODAY and mail it to me for my BIG FREE BOOK. It tells you an amazing way to get into a big pay field



COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL

H. C. LEWIS, Pres., Dept. 29-25 Est. 1899
500 So. Paulina St., Chicago

FILL OUT - MAIL TODAY!

Mr. H. C. Lewis, Pres.
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, Dept. 29-25
500 So. Paulina Street, Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Lewis: Without obligation send me your big free catalog and all details of Free Employment Service, Aviation, Radio and Automotive Electrical Courses that are included and how many "earn while learning." I understand I will not be bothered by any salesman.

Name .....
Address .....
City ..... State .....

WESTERN STORY
MAGAZINE

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office

EVERY WEEK

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

Vol. LXXXIV Contents for February 2, 1929 No. 3

ONE NOVEL

The Boss of Skull Mesa . . . *Kenneth Perkins* . 1

TWO SERIALS

Trigger Trailers . . . . . *George Gilbert* . 47
A Five-part Story—Part Two

The Stranger . . . . . *Max Brand* . . . 80
A Five-part Story—Part Four

FIVE SHORT STORIES

Windy's Fowl Play . . . . *Robert Ormond Case* . 63
Hardrock Beards the Goat . . *Seth Ranger* . . . 104
Touched With Gold . . . *Hugh F. Grinstead* . . 109
Water (Poem) . . . . . *Arlen Luvano* . . . 118
Shorty On His Own Hook . . *Ray Humphreys* . . 119
The Killing Streak . . . . *John Briggs* . . . 127

MISCELLANEOUS

Birds of the West and North America (The Spotted Sandpiper) . 46
Kootenay Reclamation Project . . 62
Treasure Islands of Alaska . . 77
Game on the Increase . . . 103
A Time-keeping Fish 126
Now Doth the Little Busy Bee—Deserve More Praise . . . 141

DEPARTMENTS

The Round-up . . . *The Editor* . . . 134
The Hollow Tree . . . *Helen Rivers* . . 137
Where to Go and How to Get There . *John North* . . . 139
Missing 142

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

We do not hold ourselves responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.

All manuscripts must be addressed to the Editors.

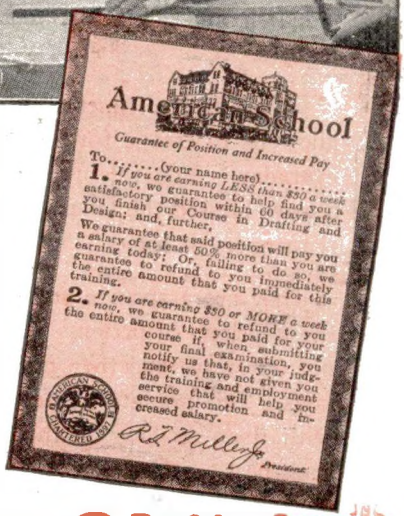
Yearly Subscription, $6.00 Six Months, $3.00 Single Copies, 15 Cents

We have placed machinists, carpenters, masons, plumbers, railroad men, office clerks, farmers and even laborers in fine Drafting Jobs under this plan. Mail coupon for details of our remarkable offer.

Men Who Work With Their Hands

Make the Best

DRAFTSMEN



and We'll Back Them With This Guarantee of a DRAFTING JOB and RAISE!

"Only one other man and I, of six taking California State Board examination for Architect passed. Then I realized the thorough and practical training given by American School. In 18 months I have gone from tracer to Chief Draftsman, in charge of all architectural and engineering work in one of the oldest offices here." R. L. WARREN, Los Angeles, Calif.

"When I started American School training in the Spring of 1915 I was working 14 hours a night, seven nights a week for $1.83 a night. That Fall I got a job in the Engineering Dept. of a large firm near here. Today I work 5½ days a week and my salary is larger than I ever dreamed of when I began that course in Mechanical Drafting." B. H. SEAVERNS, South Bend, Ind.

We are looking for more ambitious young fellows with factory, building-trade or any other kind of mechanical experience to prepare for and help place in well-paid Drafting positions. Such men, we find, are unusually successful as Draftsmen, because they know how things are done, and that's a priceless asset to the man who makes the blueprint plans. For there's a great deal more to Drafting than "mechanical drawing" and reading blueprints. The real jobs, those paying $50 to $100 a week, **give you a chance to cash in on your entire past mechanical experience.** Get in touch with me and I'll tell you how.

DRAFTING Is Logically YOUR NEXT MOVE!

Of course you realize the biggest handicap to mechanical work is that you're limited in earning capacity to the output of your two hands, as long as you live. Even the skilled mechanic earning $50 to $60 a week has reached his limit. He can never earn more and when he gets old he will earn **less.** So I don't blame any man for wanting to get away from his futureless outlook. For wanting to get into something where he can use his **head** as well as his hands—where he will be paid for what he **knows,** instead of only for what he **does** . . . You know enough about blueprints to understand that PLANS govern every move in factory and construction job. The Draftsman who makes them is several jumps ahead of the workman who follows them. And so I want you to know that DRAFTING is a logical, natural PROMOTION from mechanical and building work—better-paid, more interesting—just the kind of work you'd enjoy doing.

Get My NO-RISK Plan

The way to a fine Drafting job for **you**—is easier than you think. It takes no "artistic talent" or advanced education. Thousands of men no smarter than you, with no more education or ability have learned it quickly and you can, too. With the co-operation of some of the biggest employers and engineers in the U. S. we have worked out a plan to prepare you for Drafting work in your spare time at home—to actually place you in a fine position and to raise your pay. **Backed by the guarantee shown above to refund the small cost, if we fail.** Mail the coupon and I'll be glad to tell you all about this life-time chance to get into Drafting.

The American School

Dept. D-24, Drexel Ave. and 58th St., Chicago, Ill.

3 Drafting Lessons Actually FREE

To Show You How Interesting and Simple Drafting Is . . .

I wish I had the room here to tell you all about DRAFTING—how it has become the most important branch of every kind of manufacturing and construction work—how fascinating the work is—what a fine bunch of fellows Draftsmen are, the big salaries paid—how while Drafting is white-collar office work, it is closely hooked-up with big projects and big men. All that takes a 36-page book to tell and I'll be glad to send it to you *free*, and in addition I want to send you the first three lessons of our home-training so you can see how you'll like the work and how simple it is to learn. Coupon brings everything—mail it right away.

American School, Dept. D-24
Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago, Ill.

Please send free and without the slightest obligation 3 Drafting lessons, 36-page book about the opportunities in Drafting and your Guarantee to get us a Drafting Job and a Raise.

Name.....

St. No.....

City.....*State*.....

Age.....*Occupation*.....

.....

GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

IMAGINE, if you can, a world without fiction. Then you would have a place where imagination had no outlet, where romance was dead and the spirit of man no longer roamed the realms of make-believe.

In such a world, Monotony would be monarch and all of us mere machine tenders.

For it is the function of fiction to allow us to escape for a little from the everyday. For this reason men have always blessed the tellers of stories and the singers of songs.

They are a strange and curious folk, these writers of fiction. Their ways are not our ways and they make their own laws. But we are content to put up with them so long as they give us of their best. So long as they take us with them on romantic trails and down adventurous by-ways.

Many of them have their headquarters at a huge building on Seventh Avenue, New York City, just at the edge of Greenwich Village. This is Chelsea House, one of the oldest publishing concerns in the country, and to Chelsea House from all parts of America come the writers of America's finest fiction to offer their wares.

What precious merchandise of the mind is displayed at Chelsea House! Here is a fine swashbuckling story of the South Seas. Here is a galloping romance of the Western plains. Here a tale of strong men grappling with the elements in the North Woods.

One and all they are given hearing and then the best are culled for your delight.

From Chelsea House at 79 Seventh Avenue, clad in gay jackets, the popular low-priced copyrighted novels go out to cheer some invalid on her sick bed, to make life more colorful for that hard-pressed business man, to give flavor and spark to that clerical worker.

Praise be to fiction and the men who make it. Without them life would be a drab affair.

And so we come to some hasty glimpses of the latest Chelsea House offerings, assuring you that in this brief space we can only suggest the delights these books contain. May we remind you that they are for sale by a dealer near you and that he will be glad to let you look into them more thoroughly?

MR. CHANG'S CRIME RAY, a Detective Story, by A. E. Apple. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Now if you're all alone in the house and the wind is moaning round the eaves and things are generally a bit spooky, take our advice and *don't* start this book. For, of course, if you once start it, you'll have to go

GOOD READING—*Continued*

on to the smashing finish. And this is no book at all to be read by nervous folks in a lonely house at night.

It has to do with slant-eyed Orientals and the dark and devious ways of Chinatown. And it tells of a laboratory of horrors and how in that laboratory there was discovered a terrible death ray. And then there is a magnificent battle of wits between a master crook and a master detective and——

But don't expect us to tell you the whole of it here. Sufficient now to assure you that the seventy-five cents you pay for admission to this adventure is one of the most profitable investments in romance you will ever make.

THE RANGE WAR ON V V, a Western Story, by Emart Kinsburn. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Very literally she fell into his arms. But not the way you think. That is, there was no sentiment about the affair. In fact, "Sunlight" Carlton was pretty sore when she found herself looking into the face of "The Kokomo Man-licker." For the latter had, in his ignorance of Western ways, broken up a swell horseback stunt that Sunlight was practicing.

Anyhow, that's the unconventional way the two met. And from then on, they went through a heap of adventures together, fighting off a treacherous band who were plotting to steal Sunlight's ranch, riding hard, shooting fast and generally eating up one thrilling incident after another.

Mr. Kinsburn has written a number of books which you most likely remember. "The Carved Trail," "Spanish Nuggets," and "The Girl from Shanty Creek," for example. He has a host of enthusiastic followers the country over.

They're going to be cheering when they see his name on the jacket of this new book, for it's one hundred per cent Kinsburn, and that just about tells them all they need to know.

Relief from Curse of CONSTIPATION

A PROMINENT physician, of Battle Creek, Mich., says: "Constipation is a disease of civilization. Wild men and wild animals do not suffer from this malady, which is responsible for more misery than any other single cause."

But immediate relief from the scourge of constipation has been found. The Research Laboratories of the United Drug Company in Boston have developed a tablet which attracts water from the system into the dry, lazy evacuating bowel called the colon. This fluid softens and loosens the sluggish food waste and causes a gentle, complete evacuation.

Rexall Orderlies (the name of these wonderful tablets) form no habit and never require an increase of the dose.

Stop suffering from constipation. Chew a pleasant-tasting Rexall Orderlie tonight before retiring and feel fine tomorrow. Rexall Orderlies are sold only at Liggett and Rexall Drug Stores. Get a package of 24 tablets for 25 cents. Save with Safety at your

Rexall

DRUG STORE

There is one near you. You will recognize it by this sign. Liggett's are also Rexall stores.

The Rexall Store

The **U.S. Government Job is a Good Job**

$1260 to $3400
a year

STEADY WORK
PAID VACATION

MEN—WOMEN
18 to 57

Many February Mail Carrier Examinations

VALUABLE COUPON

Mail it today SURE

Franklin Institute, Dept. M 276
Rochester, N. Y.
Rush to me FREE OF CHARGE, list of U. S. Government jobs now obtainable. Send FREE 32 page book telling salaries, duties, hours, etc. Tell me how I can get a position.

Name.....

Address.....

GOOD READING—*Continued*

Go get this story of a tenderfoot prize fighter who learns all about how hard boiled folks can be, even if they've never stepped inside the squared ring.

FORTUNE UNAWARES, an Adventure Story, by Joseph Montague. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Ever hear of a Chinaman who could play football with the best of them? Then meet En Sue, the Shanghai Sphinx.

Not only football, but poker as well, and that is what En Sue is doing in the back room of Pop's gambling house when the story opens. But he is playing with some shifty characters. As En Sue remarked, very quietly, he liked to play with fifty-two cards, not fifty, and a grand row started then and there.

In most books, Chinamen get the bad breaks. They are usually pictured as being clever villains. And as I happen to like Chinamen tremendously and have a deep admiration for their philosophy, I want to thank Mr. Montague for giving us an exceptional Chinaman.

You will thank him as well for giving us a refreshingly different sort of adventure story that ranges all the way from that brown stone gambling joint of Pop's to the twisting, romantic streets of Shanghai.

Here in vivid manner, Mr. Montague tells us memorable stories of adventures on sea and land. Here he takes us on perilous voyages, and furnishes us adventure, flowing over.

A football-playing Chinaman, a two-fisted Irishman, a strange little joss, these are some of the figments of Mr. Montague's lively imagination.

This book has been called "A Modern Arabian Nights." That's a very apt description. See if you don't agree with it.

LOOT OF THE LAVA BEDS, a Western Story, by John H. Hamlin. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

I don't remember having read a book by Mr. Hamlin before, but if this is a sample of the way he can write, why then here's one reader who is hungry for more.

Do you like mystery stories? Well, here's one tailor-made for you with all the great West for its rich background.

It begins with a tenderfoot finding his brother-in-law dead on a lonely ranch. It ends with this same tenderfoot sitting on top of the world. And how he gets that way makes a story that I, for one, won't soon forget.

Now, just as I'm finishing the book, comes a buddy of mine with the good news that Mr. Hamlin has written at least two other books, "The Fighting Wades" and "Range Rivals," and you'll have to excuse me while I hustle out and get them.

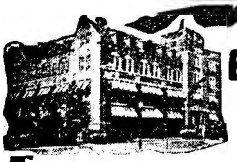
PICTURE PLAY

The Best Magazine of the Screen

Price, Twenty-five Cents Per Copy

ON SALE AT ALL NEWS STANDS

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements



High School Course in 2 Years

This simplified, complete High School Course—specially prepared for home study by leading professors—meets all requirements for entrance to college, business, and leading professions.

20 Other Courses Over 200 noted Engineers, Business Men, and Educators helped prepare the special instruction which you need for success. No matter what your inclinations may be, you can't hope to succeed without specialized training. Let us give you the practical training you need.

American School
Drexel Ave. and 58th Street
Dept. H-24, Chicago

Money Back When You Finish If Not Satisfied

American School, Dept. H-24, Drexel Ave. and 58th St., Chicago

Send me full information on the subject checked and how you will help me win success in that line.

.....Architect	.....Electrical Engineer
.....Building Contractor	.....General Education
.....Automobile Engineer	.....Lawyer
.....Civil Engineer	.....Mach. Shop Practice
.....Structural Engineer	.....Mechanical Engineer
.....Business Manager	.....Steam Engineer
.....C. P. A. & Auditor	.....Sanitary & Heating
.....Bookkeeper	.....Surveyor & Mapping
.....Draftsman & Designer	.....High School Graduate

Name.....

Address.....

"Angel Face"

A new serial

By Vivian Grey

Begins in the February 2nd issue of

Love Story Magazine

Also in the February issues be sure to look for a new series of articles dealing with "Marriage or a Career?" They are written by well-known people in all walks of life, the first of whom is Fannie Brice, famous stage and screen star.

15c per copy

THRILLING LOVE LETTERS
LOVE'S PSYCHOLOGY BEAUTY PSYCHOLOGY

ALL FREE

You want to be the center of attraction in your circle of friends, with poetic grace and personal magnetism to attract LOVE, HAPPINESS and WEALTH. Our 2 New Books of 120 pages, Beauty's Psychology, Secrets of Love's Psychology and art of winning the one you love, with the original 7 Psychological and Successful plans for winning, inspiring and holding the affections of the one you love, also thrilling love letters, burning love epistles of prominent men and women. All sent free with each purchase of

BLOSSOM BRIDE PERFUME

Rich and pure, old and young surrender to its charms. It whispers of the mysterious alluring enchantment of Movieland, the lingering odor of which leaves one with the desire to be ever near the person who imparts its fragrance. $2.50 size $1.00 postpaid, or $1.24 C. O. D., with instructions for use.

WONS CO., DEPT. 103 BOX 1250, HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.

GET RID OF YOUR FAT

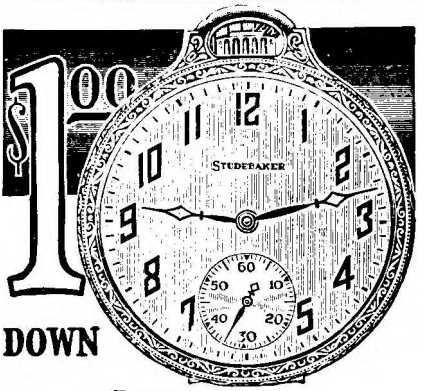
Free Trial Treatment

sent on request. Ask for my "pay-when-reduced" offer. I have successfully reduced thousands of persons, without starvation diet or burdensome exercise, often at a rapid rate.

Let me send you proof at my expense.

DR. R. NEWMAN, Licensed Physician

State of New York 286 Fifth Ave., New York Desk M



Brings a

21 JEWEL-*Extra Thin*

STUDEBAKER

Just $1.00. The balance in easy monthly payments. You get this famous Studebaker 21-Jewel Watch direct from factory at a saving of thirty to fifty per cent.

Your choice of 80 new Art Beauty cases and dials. Latest designs in white gold, yellow gold and green gold effects. 8 adjustments, including heat, cold, isochronism and five positions. Insured for a lifetime. Ladies' Bracelet Watches, Men's Strap Watches, Diamonds and Jewelry, too. All sold on easy monthly payments. Your credit is good! Write today for free book of Advance Watch Styles or Jewelry Catalog.

Watch Chain FREE! For a limited time we are offering a beautiful Watch Chain free. This special offer will be sent to anyone who writes at once. Don't delay! Get this free chain offer today—while it lasts.

STUDEBAKER WATCH COMPANY
Directed by the Studebaker Family—known for three-quarters of a century of fair dealing
Dept. C140 South Bend, Indiana
Canadian Address: Windsor, Ont.

How to Obtain

A Perfect Looking Nose

My latest improved Model 25 corrects now ill-shaped noses quickly, painlessly, permanently and comfortably at home. It is the only nose-shaping appliance of precise adjustment and a safe and guaranteed patent device that will actually give you a perfect looking nose. Write for free booklet which tells you how to obtain a perfect looking nose.

M. Trilety, Pioneer Noseshaping Specialist
Dept. 3212 Binghamton, N. Y.

TRAVEL FOR UNCLE SAM

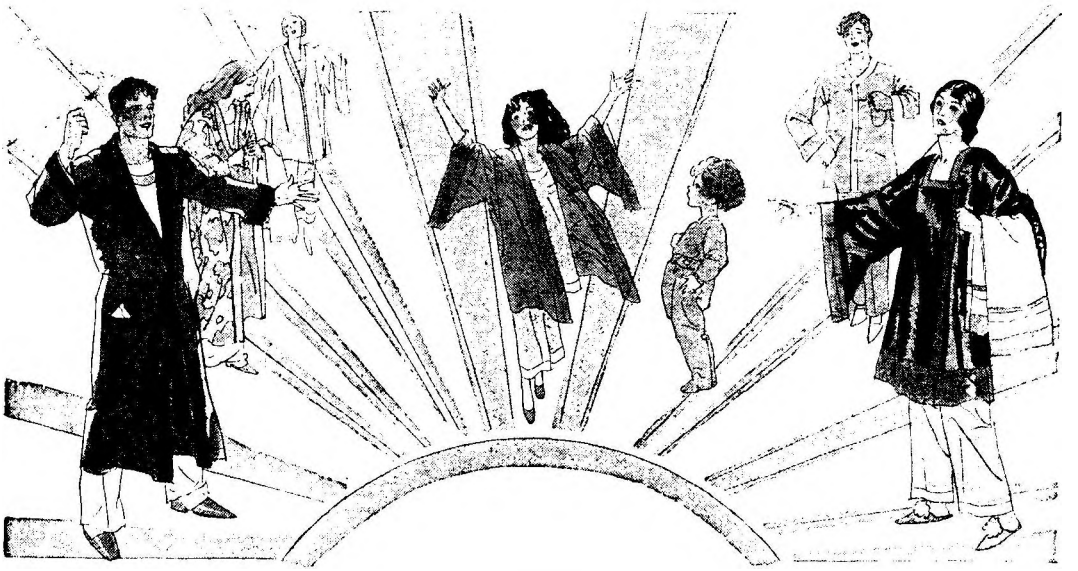
Be RAILWAY POSTAL CLERK, $158 $225 month; travel, see your country. Short hours, pleasant work, paid vacations, steady—no strikes. Experience unnecessary. For details, write Norton Inst., 1402 Temple Court, Denver, Colo.

Big Money with a Buescher

First class Saxophonists make big money and the work is easy and pleasant. You might become a great record-maker like Clyde Doerr, whose picture is shown with his Buescher. $100 to $500 a week is not unusual for good musicians to earn. Even if you don't care to become a professional, you can have a lot of fun and earn extra money with a Buescher Saxophone.

6 Days' Trial on any Buescher Saxophone, Cornet, Trumpet, Trombone or other instrument. Mention instrument in which you are interested for free literature.

Buescher Band Instrument Co.
2658 Buescher Block Elkhart, Ind.



The sunny side of seven

When 7 o'clock seems to you like a dim and drowsy dawn, there's a quick, jolly way to scatter the night mists from heavy eyes—

Plop your sleepy self into the tub while a clear torrent rushes around you. If you are still drowsy after sixty tingling seconds and a gentle caress of Ivory lather—well, really, you should consult a doctor!

Your brush or sponge slips over the creamy smooth cake and works instant magic—light-hearted clouds of quick-cleansing foam. And then, when the shining bubbles have done their refreshing work, how gaily they rinse away!

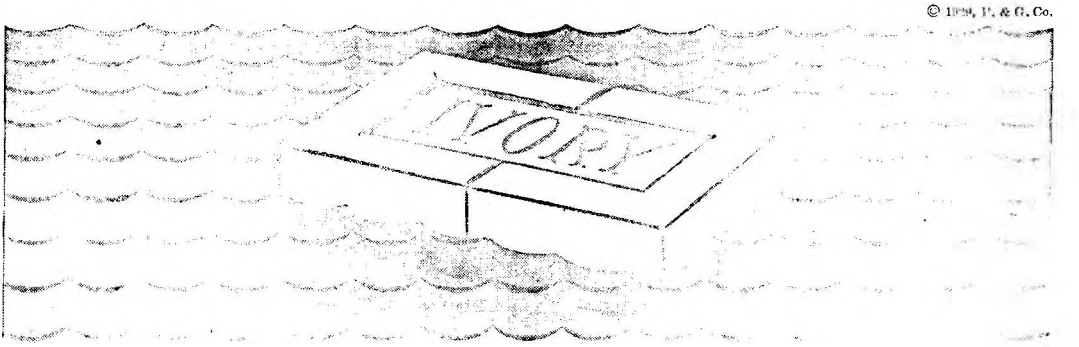
If, in the course of this revivifying process, you should drop your Ivory, don't even look for it. In a second the gleaming friend of ten million bathers will cheerfully bob to the surface again.

You're clean now as a birch tree in the rain. And if you're brave, you'll run in water that's coolish—or cold—to bring youth glowing to eyes and skin.

This is the kind of tub that raises a smile to greet the sun, a zest to welcome breakfast—it's a flying start to an active day.

. . . kind to everything it touches · $99^{44}/_{100}\%$ Pure · "It floats"

© 1929, P. & G. Co.



Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXXIV FEBRUARY 2, 1929 No. 3

The Boss of Skull Mesa

by Kenneth Perkins~

Author of "Old King Paint," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUARRY ESCAPES.

THE Boss of Skull Mesa was perplexed. What in the world was the matter with that paint mare? Something had happened to her, for she kept bolting off from the rest of the wild band, heading for the nearest knoll or divide, standing there sniffing the air, and gazing in a bewildered, locoed fashion at the surrounding landscape. One would think that she had caught the dreaded scent of man in the wind. Or—what the Boss thought more probable—she had made the mistake of thinking loco weed was a succulent and healthy feed. Then again there was another possibility. Perhaps she was losing something of her adoration for her lord and master.

The Boss of Skull Mesa was a jealous monarch. He was by no means an old horse. The marks wearing out on his two center teeth indicated that he was somewhere around six. He was entering his prime. But he was by no means handsome, except in a rugged, barbarous sort of way. He came from a race that boasted many outlaws—the Sugg; that breed in which size, strength, and ferocity tops all other qualities. In fact, the big Boss had gathered his bunch of mares by driving off or killing all other contenders.

And here was one of his favorite

mares forsaking him of her own free will! What was she yearning for? A new master? Was it possible that another stallion had crossed their trails and that she was experiencing a change of heart?

The big Boss would find out, and he would call for a very definite settlement. One mare tailing off was an act of mutiny which the others might follow. The Boss untracked at a gallop, his giant hoofs, flint-hard from desert trail, pounding out sparks from the rim rock.

His wild brood followed. It was their custom to follow their lord wherever he led them. But this time they were prompted by a feminine curiosity —a not uncommon trait in a cavvy of horses when they sense a rumpus. This rumpus had the intriguing quality of being a scandal. A member of the harem had escaped, and the Boss was about to ask, "How come?"

As the giant stallion went pounding up the rocky trail toward that unlucky mare it certainly looked as if he were going to teach her a lesson. But as soon as he topped the divide, he checked himself, his muscles quivering, his shaggy black coat foaming, his eyes glaring in a rage that was softened by something very much like a baffled tenderness.

There is nothing quite so heart-rending as the sight of a horse in misery. They say that some horses laugh, and the phenomenon has actually been seen, although their laughter is generally prompted by a desire to refill tired lungs. But when they look dejected there is a cause which is always quite rational. Sometimes it is due to colic, sometimes to thumps, sometimes to misery that is entirely mental. The latter was the case with the paint mare.

She stood there, no longer gazing around at the arroyos and gulches beyond the divide, but standing in an attitude of utter dejection, her neck lowered, her head hanging, her upper lip trembling and her nose twitching, precisely like a child who is about to cry. Her dull, sad eyes were gazing down into a gully at the bottom of a twenty-foot cliff.

The giant stallion looked down there as soon as he arrived. And he understood what had happened.

At the base of the cliff, twenty feet below the point where the mare was standing, there was the carcass of a foal.

It is not to be assumed that the Boss of Skull Mesa took very much interest in the foals of his brood. It is doubtful if he ever knew just how many of them loped along beside their mother mares. The pudgy-footed, furry-coated little creatures were more or less of a nuisance at best. It was impossible to urge the mares to a faster gait than their beloved charges could keep up. The foals never realized the danger of a band of horsemen on the horizon, nor could they understand that at such times they should speed up to the utmost of their strength. On the other hand, a ball of tumbleweed rolling before the wind would set them in a panic. Once when he was enticing a tame mare from a ranch house, her foal stopped to drink the milk that was set out in a pail at the back of the house. Nor would it leave when it saw its mother "romancin'" off toward the desert with her newfound master. The mare, of course, went back. And by that time the rancher came out.

In a word, foals were just *non compos mentis*. They had no "savvy." Of course, the Boss had to tolerate them until they got their six incisors, then he cordially invited them, by the use of his own powerful nippers and forestriking hoofs, to vamose. From then on they could hunt their own grazing land and water pockets.

But the death of this particular foal seemed to strike the big Boss in a peculiar way. He meandered slowly up and down along the rim of the cliff.

Perhaps he was searching for a mule-deer trail by which he could make the descent into that rock-strewn gully. At any rate, he paused when he came to a narrow draw that led down to a shelf of rock midway on the cliff's side.

He did not descend. He stood there, while a very definite transformation came over his whole body. His great muscles began to tremble. His feet champed, and his nostrils widened, snorting loudly. He lowered his head toward the ground and sniffed, blowing up puffs of alkali. Then, abruptly, he shied backward, giving a fierce, piercing neigh.

He knew what had happened to that foal. He had caught the scent of the enemy that had ripped its carcass, torn chunks of horse meat from its side, and gorged itself. It was his most hated enemy on earth: The thing that dogged his triumphant journey from desert to sierra, from the holes of the bottom-lands to the grassy plains of the big mesas; the prowler that haunted him in the long, cool evenings which was the time for grazing in the mountains or for traveling in the desert; the death-dealing puma that brought down his mares at a blow, sucked the blood at their throats, left their bodies for the coyotes, and then slunk off into the dark arroyos.

Many a time the Boss had attempted to follow that trail. But it led through rocky gorges and up the sides of steep cliffs, far into the splintered peaks of the sierras. His mares were too slow with their foals. Some were young mares which he had stolen from ranches on the rim of the cattle country, and desert trailing came hard for them. Others had been brought up in moist grazing lands, so that their feet were flattened and soft. The Boss himself was a paragon of strength and ferocity, but not of speed. He had tried for three years to kill that puma. He had seen him many a time. Many a time he had picked up his scent and raced madly to run him down and smash out his life with those giant, flint-hard hoofs. But, nevertheless, the killer still lived.

But he would not live this time. The Boss of Skull Mesa neighed an oath. He would not forget it. He never forgot anything—this old giant. He made up his mind then and there that the killer was to be killed, and he announced this to his brood and to the desert air by a throat-tearing scream which seemed to shake the very rim rock upon which he was standing.

His mares lifted their heads, pricked up their ears in alarm, and watched him. He gave them no further signal. The fact was, he put them out of his mind. His one thought now was to get that puma.

He went down the narrow defile, sliding on his haunches in an avalanche of sand and rocks. Then, picking up the scent again at the bottom, he went off at a breakneck gallop down the narrow gorge toward its mouth and out to the open plain.

The mares followed, utterly bewildered at the pace their master was setting. The little foals scrambled down awkwardly, tumbling in heaps of gaunt legs and furry bodies toward the rocky bed. The older colts and the mares that had no foals kept up the pace, reaching the flat plain. The others trailed on behind—a long string of them, with the soft-footed foals straggling along as best they could. It was a conglomerate-looking bunch of horseflesh stampeding in single file, stretching for a mile across the alkaline plain.

Finally the Boss and three of the most fleet-footed members of his remuda outdistanced the rest, crossed the plain, and galloped up into a narrow gully which was like a cleft hewn in the breast of a giant mesa.

The Boss sniffed, puffing angrily at the dusty ground, his eyes red-rimmed,

blazing with hate, his shaggy coat lathered white, and steaming with heat.

The scent was growing warm. Up into the far reaches of that gulch he climbed, unmindful of his exhausted followers, and the brood which he had left far behind.

Up the sand stream bed he went, hurdling patches of sage, rounding the massive boulders, leaping up the steps of the dry watercourse. The gully deepened, the walls rising in sheer precipices of granite and quartz until there was but a ribbon of blazing sky high above. Far up there the walls began to close in, and there was room for but one horse to run in the narrow, gutted trail.

The scent was still hot. The wind coming down in a stifling, concentrated blast, seemingly from the center of the earth, brought with it the detestable stench of a giant cat.

The mares paused, trembling in panic, their coats foaming with heat and nervous dread. Far up at the farthest reach of the gulch they saw their lord and master, lifting his head, his mane tossing, his forefeet champing murderously against the rocks. He had seen the enemy.

There was the puma crouching on the top of a boulder, its long neck taut and lowered, the head tilted somewhat as it watched the stallion prancing up toward the base of the rock.

Would the cat spring? Was it crouching there, biding its time until the horse came within reach? Was that long tail stiffened and flipping at the end, a signal that it accepted the challenge?

The Boss planted his forefeet on a rock slab, tossed up his massive head, and uttered another ear-splitting, throat-tearing call.

The puma suddenly leaped from the rock.

But it did not leap out to meet that challenge. It whisked about like a horse "changing ends" in the air, and scurried off, a tawny streak, up the narrow ledges of the gulch wall.

The stallion pounded in a rage upon the great boulder, striking out a shower of sparks, sending deafening echoes through the narrow gorge as if two anvils were being swung against the mass of granite in an attempt to split it.

But it would not split. Nor could the Boss leap over it and climb to the edge of the outcropping quartz which the puma had reached.

The puma was prowling along, jumping in long, graceful leaps to the ledge above, skirting the side of the cliff, zigzagging up higher and higher, where only mountain sheep had trailed before. Then, while its enemy was pounding in a frenzy against that boulder far below, the cat reached the divide and leaped across into the safety of another gulch.

It looked to the Boss as if his enemy had leaped over the edge of the earth.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNDECIDED BATTLE.

THE stallion swung back. There were other ways of getting to that divide. He galloped down the stream bed, following the base of the cliffs in search of a side draw.

Down where his mares were waiting for him, huddled together in a terror-stricken group, he found a dry waterfall. Plunging through the cactus and mesquite at its mouth, he climbed the alluvial cone which led up from the canyon bed into this narrow ravine. His mares cantered up and stood at the base of the cone, baffled, whinnying anxiously to their furious master. But he kept scrambling up the steep bank, sending an avalanche of stones and sand toward them. All three followed: a sorrel, a pinto, and a black Spanish mare.

They could not understand what the master was doing. He always led them away from danger, warning them with a frantic neigh, or biting at their flanks

and heading them off toward the open ground which all wild horses love. But now he was leading them into a maze of arroyos where they could not see the horizon. He was leading them where the scent of a dreaded enemy now hung like a poisonous pall over sand and rocks.

They followed him to the top of this narrow draw until they were on the divide, under the blazing heat of the sun. In times past their master had always rested his brood whenever they were climbing the mountains. When their coats foamed, he had the instinct of seeking shade. For the desert sun on a sweaty coat made pimples which turned into sores.

But he seemed to have forgotten what "savvy" he had about this mountain trailing. He cared nothing about the shade now. He stood out in the blazing sun, his head lifted, his bur-clotted mane tossing, his nostrils sniffing at the hot wind.

Although he had cast aside all the wisdom by which, as a benevolent patriarch he had ruled his band, there was one bit of desert knowledge which he had not forgotten. He did not get to the windward side of his enemy. He raced along the divide, running down with the wind, pausing at every high crest to sniff the air.

Once more he got the scent, and went plunging down into a brush-filled barranca, crashing through the chaparral, sliding on his haunches on the banks of sand and stones.

Yes, the puma had been there, prowling through the brush, scurrying across the tops of granite slabs, leaping into the sandy washes of the streams, fleeing the avenger through deep gorges, across the sharp divides, over the flatter tops of mesas, down the steplike cliffs, out across the alkaline plain.

All day the hunt was on. The mares kept up, now a furlong behind their master, now dropping back a mile, now catching up again while he quested through the brush to find a lost scent.

They passed a water pocket, and the mares smelled it. But for the first time within their memory their master did not lead them to it. He kept on, racing toward the setting sun, galloping a glorious figure with tossing mane and flashing eyes, as if he were racing with the wind.

A blood-red moon climbed up over the shoulder of a jagged sierra.

A slim brown thing prowled out of a granite gate, the mouth of a barranca. It slid across the moonlit alkali like the fleeting shadow of a buzzard's wing.

A giant horse thundered down the wind, pounding on rock slabs, kicking up a funnel of steam as it crossed the alkaline dunes. It saw the mouth of the barranca just as the fugitive darted out.

Three other horses cantered up, wild-eyed, snorting, exhausted. They saw the slim brown shadow hovering over a dune. They saw the giant horse quartering across the plain, bearing down on the crouching enemy.

The puma was flattened to the ground, its slim neck lowered so that its yellow-white beard was on the sand. It looked like a cat lapping milk. For a tense moment it watched the onrushing horse, then, darting a fleeting glance over its shoulder toward the mouth of the barranca, it whisked about and headed back.

But it did not return to the protection of that granite gateway. For some reason or other it curved off, skimming over the dunes, still like the shadow of a buzzard's wing, and coming out again into the open.

This was just what the Boss wanted. He had his enemy out in the open now, where he could run him down. If the puma had skulked off again into the black shadows of that barranca, it would have had the advantage.

The two beasts raced madly over the mounds of earth, the lion a furlong in

the lead. The stallion followed with ears flattened, neck stretched out, his massive hoofs churning the clouds of alkali or striking up showers of sparks.

He was a few lengths from the fugitive now.

The lion darted another glance over the bulging muscles of its shoulders. The avenger was bearing down on it.

The fugitive curved off, twisting in the air in a single leap, and heading once more for the protection of that granite gate.

It gained a few lengths in this maneuver, for the heavy-set stud went crashing on in the same direction before wheeling.

Again the puma whisked off to the side just as it reached the cliffs, and instead of darting into the jet-blackness of that barranca, slouched off across the dunes again.

The stallion did not know why his enemy avoided that one chance of escape. He did not care what danger lurked in that granite gateway. He was too insensate with his rage to think of anything else, of any other danger, of any other scent.

The giant horse swung about on his hind feet, untracked at a fast gallop, running his enemy out into the open, moonlit dunes. He was a length from him now. Now a yard. The puma skimmed into the hollow of the dunes, slid up to the crest of one, and whirled about.

It was now like a rabbit that had been beaten out of the chaparral into the open. Or, rather, it was like a cornered rat. It was the embodiment of desperation, cowardice, panic—everything except helplessness.

As it whirled about on the high crest of that sand dune, it sprang straight for the face of the oncoming fury. The stallion came to his haunches in a cloud of dust. There was a loud neigh, a piercing, almost human, scream, a wild mêlée of forestriking hoofs, of dust funneling up into the moonlight, of unsheathed claws and flashing teeth.

Out of the confusion the gaunt, patchy body of the puma slouched into a sand wallow. The stallion turned, ears flattened, eyes rolling, arched neck reddened with blood.

Down he came once more with his sledge-hammer hoofs pounding in a frenzy at the crouching lion, but only landing in the deep silt where the lion had been. With a convulsive twist the slim, shadowy form had missed those murderous hoofs by the fraction of an inch. In the same movement it had dealt a long, jagged wound in the horse's flank.

Again the horse turned, standing a moment longer this time, pawing at the ground, grunting in baffled rage.

The puma was off at a fast slouch, heading for a third time toward that barranca, and for the third time curving off and skirting the base of the cliffs.

The stud quartered across the dunes to head the cat off. He was galloping heavily, as if tons of weight were behind the blows of his hoofs. His gait was unsteady, breaking into a canter as he chased the puma up against the boulders of the cliff base. The puma leaped up easily, noiselessly, to a vantage point, and waited—once more assuming that tense and deadly attitude, with neck low-crouched, tail stiffened, and motionless except for the angry flip at the end of it.

The Boss did not pause. He mounted the steep slope, his hoofs clanking heavily on the rock slab. Then, reaching the boulder, he towered a giant silhouette against the moon, his eyes blazing, his hoofs lifted to forestrike, his trembling skin clotted with blood.

The puma leaped for that uplifted head, its forepaws buried in the massive neck, its teeth fastened in the throat, its hind paws raking at the chest.

The horse went down with a neigh of pain and baffled fury, his hoofs fore-

striking at the empty air, with that slim, sinewy killer safe between them.

Down to his knees went the Boss, his grunts coming like gasps of agony from his massive lungs.

His mares cantered up, stood about him at a distance of fifty yards, whinnying piteously. A strange dread had frozen the blood in their veins. They smelled the blood of the horse, the hated stench of the cat, and they smelled something else, something which they could not understand. It was the faint but dreaded scent of an unknown and intangible enemy. The desert which was their mother had turned into a strange country fraught with many deathlike perils—perils from which until now their lord and master had saved them.

And now as the giant Boss was on his knees, struggling, grunting, sinking like a wrecked ship, a shift of the wind sharpened that strange and dreadful scent.

It was the scent of a human being.

That it was which had warned the puma to stay out of that granite barranca at all costs. It was because of that dread scent that the puma had turned like a cornered rat and attacked the stallion on his own ground.

From the black shadows of the gorge a thin streak of light spurted out. There was a sharp crack of sound, sharper and louder than those resounding hoofbeats against the granite slabs. The puma's bulging muscles relaxed, it twisted convulsively, rolled to the earth, then, dragging itself across the rock slab, went off at a slow slouch, skirting the base of the cliffs.

It left a spattered trail of crimson on the smooth, moonlit surface of the rocks.

The stallion struggled up, stood for a moment with head hanging, his chest streaming red, his belly heaving in long, uneven sighs. Then, slowly, the knees of his forefeet doubled, and he sank again to the ground, then rolled over.

CHAPTER III.

ENEMY OR FRIEND.

A RAW-BONED, powerfully built youth, riding a shaggy pinto, came out from the shadows of the ravine and rode toward the wounded horse.

He dismounted and walked up cautiously to the slab of rock where the giant stallion lay. Ned Carson knew something about these wild stallions. When they were leading a remuda of mares they could be relied upon to fight anything from a rattler to a man. It was not unusual for them to start the fight themselves. Cowboys hunting for drags on the southern rim of the cattle range carried weapons primarily to protect themselves from the most dangerous of all their enemies—almost the one and only enemy that they had any cause to fear. The days of hostile Indians had passed. Puma lions were rare, except in the higher sierras, and they were very careful, furthermore, to stay out of the way of mankind.

But here was a wild stallion that to all appearances was dying. As a lover of all horses, good and bad, cow horse or outlaw, Ned Carson was affected by the agony and helplessness of this stout-hearted monarch of the desert and the desperate fight he had put up. He circled the horse several times, and finding that his presence aroused no interest except to scare the mares away, he came closer.

He poured some water into his sombrero and held it to the gaping, wounded mouth. The horse was too far gone to lift his head, but his nostrils sniffed, and a tremor went through his massive muscles, as if he had some faint consciousness that somewhere in that world of misery there was the blessed promise of a water hole.

Carson thrust his arm under the shaggy, torn neck, lifted the ponderous head and immersed the nose in the sombrero.

The great sides heaved weakly, like a pair of leaky bellows, as the horse sucked in the life-giving water. He had been on an exhausting chase, without stopping for a much-needed drink at any of the water pockets on the trail. The refreshing draft brought back a glimmer of light to the glazed eyes.

After this Ned swabbed the burning alkali from the nostrils and lips. He then went back to his own horse and rummaged in his pack for the only medicine which he carried—some iodine. Within the ravine there were a few piñons—the first scraggly growth where the cactus and mesquite merged into the timber line. From the piñons he collected some gum, made a fire, and melted the gum in a frying pan. Outside of the ravine, at the base of the cliffs, there were the last vestiges of the desert vegetation—saguaro, and cholla, and barrel cactus. He cut a hollow cup in one of these, waited for it to fill with sap, and soaking a cloth in it, went back to the wounded horse.

The sap was like a cool oil upon the jagged wounds. Carson followed this treatment with a paste made of pine tar and iodine. He had barely completed this treatment upon the last gash of the shaggy, blood-drenched chest, when the giant stud began to realize what was happening. His muscles quivered with a nervous excitement; his head moved, tossing upward violently; the nostrils snorted. Then his white-rimmed eyes saw something that sent a galvanic current of fear through his whole body. The most dreaded of all beings in the world—a man—was bending over him. This fearful enemy had him at his mercy. The enemy was certainly a being possessed of more power than that hated and detestable thing that had tried to claw out the stallion's lungs. But he was using his power in a peculiar way. The Boss was baffled. There was a strange gentleness to the touch of those hands. There was a soothing feeling now where there had been torn and trembling flesh.

And yet, it was a man who gave this relief.

The Boss of Skull Mesa pawed weakly at the air as he lay there on his side. A convulsion gripped his giant muscles. He rolled, arching his neck, thrusting his hoofs into the air, then rocking back again with a movement like a fish on a hook. It seemed to be the last ounce of his fear-prompted strength, but it brought the big stud to his feet.

The man had leaped out of the way. And now for a moment both creatures stood there facing each other, as if in prelude to another desert combat. The man was low-crouched, watching tensely from under his lowered brows. The horse stood with forelegs spread wide apart, his heavy head hanging from sheer exhaustion.

Weakly the horse pawed at the granite rock, but there was no ring to the anvil hoofs. His ears were flattened, but there was no threat in the gesture. One of them, in fact, flipped out and hung sideways as if even its weight was too much for the muscles. A low, whimpering neigh—a sorry imitation of that splendid challenge he had sent forth when facing the puma—issued from his spent lungs. It was scarcely a challenge at all. It was more like a bleating cry, as if he were saying:

"Your hands were gentle. But they were the hands of a man. So back away—back out of the reach of my hoofs."

That at least was how Ned Carson interpreted it. He backed off, slowly, cautiously, never taking his gaze from the white-rimmed, bulging eyes.

When within reach of his own pony, he turned abruptly, leaped into the saddle, and kicking the bronc into a fast run, headed out toward the desert plain.

The Boss of Skull Mesa watched him until the small cloud-mist churned up

by the galloping bronc merged into the faint golden haze of moonlight far across the plain.

The stallion's emotions must have been peculiar. He had the instinctive knowledge with which all wild animals are endowed. It is the knowledge that there is an all-powerful enemy against which the claw of a puma, the talons of a buzzard, the teeth of a lobo cannot prevail: An enemy which walks upright, balancing itself with consummate ease upon two legs; whose call is a sharp, deafening bark like the call that comes out of the sky in a thunderstorm; an enemy that shoots out a thin tongue of fire, more dreadful than a rattler's tongue, because it can bring down its victim at a great distance. The Boss of Skull Mesa knew what that tongue was like. He had the scar of a bullet wound across his withers as a memento of a previous contact with mankind.

But mingled with that inscrutable power there seemed to be something else. The Boss could not understand it. There he had been, sinking to the ground, with a puma clutching with all four claws at his chest, and suddenly the call of a man—the sharp bark with the tongue of fire—had put a stop to the battle. The puma had slouched off, and the Boss had an intuitive conviction that he would never be bothered with it again. Then the man had come down out of the shadows of that barranca and soothed his tortured mouth with water, and poured balm into his wounds!

A strange and dreadful creature! The Boss stood there on his weak, trembling legs, wondering, worshiping, fearing.

And then, abruptly, he was awakened from his reverie by the soft *clip-clop* of horses' hoofs over the granite slab. He recognized the mincing gait of one, the nimble clunk of another, the soft, flat-footed, weary step of a third.

His three faithful mares had come back to him.

The monarch neighed. The Boss of Skull Mesa was himself again!

CHAPTER IV.

WHERE IS THE WATER HOLE?

THE years that Ned Carson had spent in that corner of the bad lands had taught him many things. The first law of the desert—the law which decrees that a man must help another in distress—had been etched deeply in his soul. But it was a man-made law. The animals were strangers to it. So, for that matter, were the plants. The cactus grew thorns to keep away the touch of other beings. Even the rocks threw back a murderous threat of burning sunlight to warn all creatures out. And the water which in other parts of the earth invites every living thing to taste it, here was bitter with alkali or poisoned with arsenic. Lizards grew spikes; wolves turned into gaunt, fierce, skulking beasts called loboes. And men turned into hermits, shriveled by the sun, forgetful of the rest of the race, eager for gold.

To this latter category there are exceptions. Ned Carson was one. He had the outward appearance of a renegade, with clothes torn by rocks and thorn, a mount that looked like a Mexican plug, a brush-scarred holster in which was stuffed a black six-gun. But when he saw a creature in distress—man, or animal, or bird—he was a modern edition of the Good Samaritan. And he indulged in this avocation even though all the denizens of the desert feared him. Whether they gave him thanks or not is unknown. At any rate, they considered all creatures enemies, and the enemy most greatly to be feared was man.

Curiously enough, when Ned trailed down southward into the desert after his meeting with the Boss of Skull Mesa, he had the same experience all over again, almost to the letter. He

found another desert tragedy about to reach its climax. He tried again to help, even though, as in the case of the wounded stallion, it was at the risk of his life. And once again he was warned off, as he had been warned off by the horse whose life he had saved.

In this case the tragedy concerned human beings.

He found three people lost in one of the canyons in the heart of the desert.

Ned saw them down in a hollow of the canyon bed; their two horses, standing in the shade, packed carefully as if they were just starting out, well laden with food and provisions, from an outfitting post. An old man was lying upon a blanket, partly hidden by a clump of cholla cactus. Near by was a younger man, sitting dejectedly upon a rock, his face turned to the ground. A slim, bareheaded girl in a ragged smock and moccasins was kneeling by the side of the older man, fanning him with a sombrero.

All three looked up when they heard the hoofbeats of Ned's horse. As they saw him riding down toward them, the ragged young scarecrow on the rock jumped to his feet and drew a gun. The old man who was lying on the ground, struggled up likewise, drew his gun, and staggered out to meet the stranger.

Ned curbed his mount to a standstill, and confidently expecting that one of those two strange characters was going to fire at him, he dropped from the offside of his horse.

From the earliest days of Western frontier history, this has been understood as a hostile gesture.

The men ducked behind a red rock, the younger grabbing the girl's arm and whisking her to cover with him.

The gray-headed old man spoke first.

"Don't come any closer, stranger, or we'll drill you."

"What are you goin' to drill me for? If you're a bunch of renegades, no need of bein' scared of me. I ain't a sheriff."

They stared suspiciously. "Whoever you are," the old man went on, "don't come horsin' into this outfit. Better vamose afore we start burnin' our powder."

"If that's the way you greet a stranger, it's jake with me," Ned shot back warmly. "Thought you were in trouble, and I was ridin' down into this gully to lend a hand."

"We ain't in trouble, and we don't want no hand lent to us. All as we want is to be left alone."

Ned stared across the rim of his saddle at the peculiar picture. Three heads were thrust up over the rim of that boulder: The ashen-hued old man, the haggard youth, the white-faced girl. All three were staring with wide-open, fear-ridden eyes. Ned could not help wondering what there was about his own person to throw these hapless wanderers into such a panic.

He stuck to his first conviction that they were fugitives. One of those men, or perhaps both, had committed some crime, and the three were trying to cross the desert on the way to the border. This was only a conjecture. But there was no conjecture whatsoever about the fact that they were in trouble. That was obvious at first sight.

"I ain't goin' to press my services on you folks," Ned said after a moment's thought. "But I see you've only got two nags, and they're pretty well loaded. If you ain't got anything to ride, you'll be stuck in these here bad lands for a good while yet. It's a day's fast ride to the nearest water pocket."

The girl spoke for the first time. She seemed less fear-ridden than her two companions. In fact, she had not got to cover until the ragged youth yanked her behind the rock.

"Which way is the water pocket?" she called out.

"So that's the trouble, is it?" Ned exclaimed. "You're out of water!"

"Yes—we're out of water."

"Well, then," Ned replied, "wherever you're goin', all I can say is that you ain't goin' to get there."

"If you'll tell us where the nearest water is——" the girl went on helplessly.

"The nearest water is right in this canteen I'm totin'," Ned said. "Come on out here and get it."

The old man stared, his red-rimmed eyes blazing through the tangled strands of his hair. He was evidently the thirstiest of the crowd. But the younger one shouted back:

"Oh, yes—we're likely to come out and get dumped! I ain't hankerin' that much for a drink!"

Before either of the two men knew what had happened, the girl had leaped over the rock.

She came toward Ned at a run, holding out both hands.

"If you'll give us just a drop," she cried, "just a drop for this old man, it'll save his life!"

"Go ahead, little woman, all three of you drink." Ned held out his precious canteen and she grasped it eagerly.

With an incoherent murmur of thanks, the girl ran back and held the water to the old man's lips. He drank in long, eager swigs, tipping the canteen up and letting the moisture trickle down his grizzled beard. It looked as if he were going to empty it to the last drop, until the haggard youth standing by his side snatched it away from him.

"You'll make yourself sick, pard!" he cried with an oath. "You'll kill yourself, swiggin' it down like a hog that a way! Here, sis." He handed the canteen to the girl.

She started to drink with the same frenzied eagerness that had characterized the old man. But before she had taken three gulps, she looked back to Ned Carson.

"Is it all you've got, stranger?"

"Take it all," Ned said, waving his hand. "I can stand it a day until I get some more. You can't."

But she did not take any more. Instead, she handed the canteen to her young companion. He also drank with a feverish eagerness, clinging to the canteen with trembling, clawlike hands. And, like the girl, he checked himself at the very climax of his ecstasy and handed it once more to her.

"Go ahead, sis. You didn't take enough."

Thus they passed it from one to another, and when it came for the last time to the old man, he drained it to the last drop.

He had taken the lion's share of the precious gift, and it had a peculiar effect upon him. It seemed to make him drunk. His eyes turned glassy, his lips drooled, he swaggered out from the protection of his rock as if imbued suddenly with a devil-may-care courage.

He held the canteen up. "All right, kid, here you are," he said thickly. "We're thankin' you!" He staggered out as if with the intention of walking to Ned, but then he swayed, held out one hand, and groped blindly. The canteen fell to the sand, and the old fellow reeled back against the rock.

"Take it to him," he mumbled. "Thank him. He's a good kid—whatever his business is."

The younger man still stayed behind the protection of the boulder, staring with every mark of suspicion at Ned. It was the girl who came out, picked up the canteen, and walked once more toward the stranger.

They faced each other across the saddle of Ned's mount. Ned saw an oval face which had got back some of its color. He saw a pair of brown eyes, no longer widened in fright, but kindly, gentle, and brimming with tears of gratitude.

The girl was looking at him with a frank, steady gaze. She saw a lean face, deeply burned by desert sun and wind, the face of a fighter, which was softened by a look of deep sympathy. His keen,

gray eyes met hers and kindled to a soft fire.

Abruptly the girl's forehead clouded. "Don't stay with us, stranger," she said. "I'm begging you for your own good. Whoever you are—go on your way."

"Ask him first where the water hole is at!" the old man called out.

"I'll take you there," Ned said.

"No, no! Don't take us!" she exclaimed hurriedly. "Please leave us. Tell us how to get there, and we'll go alone."

"That old duffer can't walk that far," Ned said, pointing to the gray-bearded man who had sunk helplessly, drunkenly, to the sand. "You'd better cast off some of your provisions, and let him ride."

The girl looked back, her face showing a baffled helplessness as she saw the old fellow crumpled up like a discarded scarecrow on the sand.

"Is it far?" she asked piteously.

"Too far for him to walk. And the scenery's too mixed up for me to describe the trail. You'd go over a divide and get into the wrong draw, sure as shootin'. I can't remember the landmarks. I have to trail through those arroyos kind of by instinct. I'll take you there."

"Leave him take us!" the old man murmured. "I got to have more water. This here heat's fryin' up my brains. Leave him take us."

The younger man had got up sufficient courage now to come out into the open, but he still held his gun in his trembling hand. He seemed to turn the situation over in his mind for a moment. Then, realizing the hopelessness of their position, he said: "You lead the way, hombre."

"Put the old coot on this horse," Ned said readily.

The girl looked back, once more facing Ned with a desperate anxiety in her eyes.

"You'll regret joinin' up with us, stranger. You're too good a man to throw your life away!"

"It looks pretty certain you three are throwin' your lives away if you don't let me get you out of this mess," Ned answered.

The two ragged men came over the sand dunes, the haggard youth supporting his sick and aged companion.

Ned saw the younger man—evidently the girl's brother—was little more than a boy.

"Put up your gun, kid," he said with a certain amount of indulgence. "You couldn't hit me anyway—with your hands shiverin' like that."

"I'll put it up," the boy said. "But I'm stayin' my distance. I ain't hankerin' to dump you, stranger—after the way you treated us. But don't forget I'm pretty quick at the draw."

Ned shrugged. "All right, kid. I won't forget." He helped the old man to the saddle while the boy stood back, watching every move with the vigilance of a cat. When Ned started out on foot, leading his pinto by the reins, the boy went back for the two pack horses. He walked along, leading the nags, and holding tightly to the hand of his sister.

Thus the strange band of wanderers took the trail into the maze of arroyos toward the west, which—according to Ned's promise—would bring them to a water hole.

CHAPTER V.

DOUBLE CROSSED.

A FEW hours' trailing was all that they could cover at a time. The pack horses were tuckered out. Ned noticed that one of them had stopped sweating and, fearing that the sign might mean heat stroke, he searched out the nearest shade.

"Keep on goin'," the girl's brother cried. "We got to have water before dark."

"The water hole is too far away for that," Ned replied. "We'll be travelin'

most of the night. Right now we better rest the old plugs, cook a meal, and take a little snooze. When the sun goes down a bit we'll hit the trail. It's the best time for desert travel, anyway."

The girl realized that the old man was exhausted. He could scarcely cling to the pommel of the saddle without toppling over into the sand. She prevailed upon her brother to let their guide have his way.

Ned immediately began to gather some sage sticks for a fire. A meal of flapjacks and bacon would help their spirits.

"What-all are you doing now?" the boy snapped out.

"Goin' to cook you folks a meal."

"No—don't light a fire!" cried the old man as he sank down in the shade of a boulder. "If you light a fire I'll go daft! This sun is killin' me. Can't stand a fire!"

Ned was about to argue that he did not have to sit close enough to a fire to feel the heat. But he said nothing. Something told him that it would be best to humor the old fellow. He glanced over to the girl and her brother, who were both watching—their faces betraying that strange panic which Ned had observed upon his first meeting with them.

He did not light the fire. Instead, he unstrapped the little pack of provisions from his pinto, and rummaged in it for some canned beans. Cold beans would be more palatable under these conditions anyway.

But Ned could not help reflecting that since he had shared his water with these ragged waifs, it was only fair that they supply the food. And they most surely had a good supply, judging from the packs on those two old plugs. The brother was unstrapping those packs now. From the heavy thud with which they fell to the ground Ned estimated that there must have been a lot of canned stuff in those rawhide bags. But whether that was the case or not, the boy did not offer to supply anything for the meal.

Ned distributed a few strips of jerked beef, then tore open the last cans he had in his pack, and gave one to each of the travelers.

The old man could not eat. He was too thirsty—or else he was too far gone with his fever. The can dropped from his palsied hands and rolled into the sand. The brother, who had been gouging out the beans with his fingers and stuffing them into his mouth, snatched up the extra can like a dog going after a bone.

"Here, sis," he said, trembling with eagerness, "me and you will finish this."

But the girl looked up at Ned.

"Is this all you've got, stranger?" she asked.

"I've got some raw bacon and flour," Ned replied. "Enough for another meal when we get to the water hole."

While they were eating, Ned let his horse forage on the weeds under the shade of a cliff. Meanwhile, with the saddle for a pillow, he picked out a slender patch of shade and lay down. He wanted some sleep, for it was his plan to spend most of the night on the trail.

He advised the others to follow his example. The old man obeyed, choosing some shade near the two packs, and dropping off into a fitful, troubled sleep.

The girl was the next to succumb to the exhausting ride, the murderous heat. She sank down by the two packs, pillowing her head upon her arm and falling asleep almost instantly. It was the peaceful, untroubled sleep of a child.

The brother paced up and down for a moment, alternately casting suspicious glances toward Ned, and peering from the top of a high rock at the simmering plain, the mirages, the red, sun-scorched mesas.

Ned was a bit uncertain about this nerve-ridden brother. He was afraid

that the ragged young hombre would frisk him of his gun if he fell asleep. For that reason he crawled off a little farther under the lee of the cliffs where his horse was browsing, then stretching out on the sand, he dozed like a coyote "with one eye open."

The sound of a lizard crawling through the rattleweed, the champing of the two pack horses, the sound of his own horse munching dry grass, the tiny thud of a grasshopper against the granite wall—each one of these sounds brought him to with a start. And every time he opened his eyes, he saw that slim scarecrow of a boy, now pacing up and down on the sand, now sitting on a high boulder and watching Ned out of his red, fevered eyes, now standing upon a sand knoll and carefully scanning the horizon.

Awakening from another fitful doze with a nervous start, Ned saw that the boy had lain down by the packs, and that his sister had got up. She seemed to have taken his place as guard. She was sitting high up on a giant boulder, watching the alkaline plain, turning her face upward toward the rim of cliffs high above them, then across the heated strata of sky-blue air at her feet.

The ragged youth slept, snoring fiercely. Ned felt tremendously relieved. He knew that it was safe for a few moments at least to get some real sleep himself.

It was not exactly sleep. He could not shake off the feeling of doom which hovered over this unhappy trio. The girl had warned him that if he joined them he might be killed. Nevertheless, he slept. He was dead tired. The strain of riding with these queer characters was beginning to tell on him. He had been constantly expecting that that feverish-eyed youth might run amuck and shoot him in the back. Thirst was working its exquisite torture upon his own lips. He had saved his water as any prospector will, denying himself in case of accident, then in one gesture he had given every drop of it to these derelicts. He did not regret the deed, but he was paying now with thirst, anxiety, and utter exhaustion of body and mind.

He slept until subconsciously something warned him that the girl was no longer on guard. He awoke with a violent start, sat up blinking, his hand clutching his holster.

The girl had lain down again on the sand. A third guard had been posted: it was the old man.

The sun was lower now. Some of the mirages had receded like an outgoing tide, leaving scattered pools of illusory water on the breast of the plain. The old man was staring anxiously across them. He did not stand upon the boulder or pace up and down as the boy had done. He just leaned there, clinging to the rock for support, his pale, bleary eyes scanning every mark of the horizon and returning intermittently to watch the stranger lying over there under the lee of the cliffs.

Ned dropped off again into another fitful doze—his ear attuned to every sound. The boy was still snoring, his haggard, blood-drained face turned toward the sky, his nose poked upward beyond the sombrero rim. The girl was lying near him, her brown, uncombed hair streaming over the side of her pallid face. It would take more than the sound of a scurrying lizard to awaken those two.

The noise of heavy breathing, of grunting, of the shuffling of feet, the champing of hoofs, brought Ned wide awake. He did not sit up this time. He merely watched out of the corner of his eye. Something was surely happening.

The two young people did not stir, even though the old man was dragging one of those packs across the sand directly past their heads. With a laborious effort, he was now trying to swing

the pack to the back of a horse. Either his strength was little more than the strength of a child, or else that pack was of tremendous weight, for he could not lift it.

Having failed in this first attempt, he dragged the pack up the slope of a granite slab, then led the horse to the slab's edge. From this vantage point, he was able to slide the pack over to the horse's back.

He repeated the process with the second pack and the second horse. Then, completely exhausted, he sank to his knees and remained there, gasping for breath.

Ned watched all this, but made no move. The packs did not belong to him. Neither did the two plugs. The old duffer could do what he wanted with them. Evidently he was getting ready for the trail, and was making use of the time while his two young companions slept. It was, to say the least, a good deed for an old man who was exhausted to the point of a collapse.

Ned paid no further attention to him. He had a very reasonable conviction that if he asked the old fellow what he was doing there would be trouble. There was little sense in having an argument that would achieve no end except to awaken the girl and her brother. Ned did not want to awaken that girl. She had a hard night of trailing before her.

Instead of making a move, Ned took advantage of the old man's preoccupation to drop off for a few moments of deep, untroubled sleep.

When he awoke the old man was gone. The two plugs were gone, and so were the packs.

But there was the girl, still lying there, her tousled head pillowed on her arm, her blue lids closed tightly, her lips parted as if in a fear-ridden dream. Her brother lay next to her, face turned upward, uneven snores coming from his long nose.

Ned went over and awakened the youth.

The latter came to with a violent start, grabbing his gun, sitting up, and staring in a befuddled fright at the gaunt man standing before him.

"Your pard's lined out, kid," Ned announced simply. "Thought you'd like to know. Vamosed with the broncs and their packs."

The young scarecrow blinked, his jaw hanging, his dazed eyes roving wildly from Ned's face to the surrounding boulders.

"Vamosed—old Spinner vamosed—and with the—the packs!" He let out an oath and jumped to his feet. "Hey, sis! Wake up! Spinner's vamosed. Double crossed us. Rustled the packs! You hear me! You awake? Quit staring and get what I'm tellin' you! Spinner has sneaked out—with the packs!"

"What you sayin', Larry?" she asked in utter bewilderment.

He repeated the news, clinging to her arms, his voice rising to a screech, an incoherent jumble of vituperation, threats, oaths.

"The crawlin', thievin' old miser! I knew he'd turn on us! Dad warned us agin' him when he died. He's took it all. We're here—cast off in the desert—stripped of everythin' we had in the world—and after we stuck by the claim for years so's we'd be sure to get our share!"

He checked himself suddenly, realizing that he had forgotten the presence of that young stranger. But the girl, following her brother's glance and looking over her shoulder at Ned, broke into a soft, strange laugh.

It was like the laugh of one who has been in the throes of a nightmare.

"I'm thankin' Heaven it's all over," she burst out fervently. "At last we're free!"

"Thankin' Heaven—for losin' everything!" The brother snorted in a frenzy. "You ain't awake, sis! You're

daft! Come to your senses. Can't you see—we've lost everythin'! We've stuck by that old varmint and stood for his crabbin', and helped him dig and blast and pan ever since we was kids—and now we're stripped of all except the rags on our backs! 'Thankin' Heaven!' I'll be darned if you ain't just plumb daft!"

"Plumb daft and free!" the girl cried. She turned to Ned Carson. "Stranger, we can tell you everything, now that it's over——"

"No, no, don't dast tell him! 'Tain't his business. Keep our troubles to ourselves. He's out of it!" He turned fiercely upon Ned. "You understand that, stranger? We're thankin' you for the way you've helped us. But keep out of our business. And whatever you seen or heard here to-day, you just keep it under your sombrero. You get that?"

Ned knew perfectly well what he had seen—but he changed the subject.

"It don't look to me like you've lost much," he said. "Those plugs weren't helpin' you get out of this desert. And if there was any food in those packs, it wasn't doin' you much good. You were starved when I fed you."

"It wasn't food," the young hombre said hurriedly. "It was our pans and picks and gold borers. Our prospectin' outfit. It wasn't food."

Ned knew perfectly well what it was. These three wanderers had been packing the results of many years panning. The heavy rawhide bags were filled with something more precious than food, infinitely more precious than a miner's outfit. Ned was convinced now of the truth of which he had been suspicious for a long time. These three derelicts were rich. They were fugitives, as he had suspected from the first. But they were not fugitives from justice.

They were fleeing with their treasure. And that treasure was as much gold as two horses could pack!

CHAPTER VI.

PURSUED.

"RECKON we might as well be hittin' the trail," Ned Carson said finally.

"Hittin' the trail for where?" the young man asked in a baffled, despairing voice. "What've we got to live for now? I ain't headin' out for no water hole. What good is water—except to keep us alive. I don't want to live. I don't want nothin'—'cept to get that snivelin' ole miser!"

"If you can find out which way he went," Ned stipulated. "Which you can't."

"I'll trail him! I'll find the tracks of them plugs somewheres. He ain't ridin'. He's on foot same as I am—and I'll get him! And when I find him—I'll pump some lead in him afore he blinks an eye! So help me!"

He started pacing about, fuming, swearing oaths of vengeance, hunting for tracks in the sand. Meanwhile the girl was trying to quiet him, pleading in her gentle voice, begging him to forget what they had lost. It had only been a curse on their lives. It had meant torture and thirst and hunger; it had promised to bring much more agony to them, perhaps gun fighting, perhaps death.

The hot-headed brother could not be persuaded to forget his thoughts of murderous vengeance, but at the moment that Ned was ready to start upon the trail, something happened.

The old mucker came back!

They saw him winding down through a narrow gulch, riding one of the plugs at a fast gallop. The other loped along in the rear, sending up a clatter of stones and sand. Both horses were able to go at a good clip for a very good reason: They were no longer carrying their packs!

The brother ran out, brandishing his gun and calling to the old fellow before he came within range.

"What did you do with 'em? The packs—where are they? You tell me, Spinner, so help me, or I'll curl you up!"

The old man did not rein in. He kept riding down the boulder wash, kicking his heels into the sides of his old cayuse, as if with the firm intent of running down the boy who was waiting there to blaze away at him.

"Jump up behind me, kid!" he cried in a choking voice. "Jump to that horse, Samanthy. Quick, now, if you don't want to be shot down like dogs!" The boy grabbed the reins of the bronc, yanking it around with such force that the exhausted old rider almost toppled to the sand.

"Them packs!" the boy snarled, glaring out of flaming, murderous eyes. "You tell me where they're at, Spinner! You stole 'em. You give 'em back to us, or I'll empty this gat into your snivelin' ole hide!"

"I hid 'em!" the old fellow cried, gasping for breath. "I got suspicious of this here stranger. They're safe. But we ain't. Soon as I had the stuff buried I seen a bunch of riders comin' up over the divide!"

As the significance of this dreadful news began to dawn upon the brother, his rage subsided. The fear of pursuers, which had seemed to dominate every move the three derelicts had made until now, assumed a greater importance than the loss of those packs. As a matter of fact, old Spinner had worked a clever ruse in getting the treasure hidden before they were caught. And the hot-headed youth could not help but realize this fact.

"Quick, sis!" he cried. The gold hoard was nothing now compared to this infinitely more precious thing—his sister. "Climb aboard that cayuse. And follow us!"

The girl obeyed. Ned Carson, meanwhile, had vaulted into his saddle and was riding up the bed of the narrow arroyo to find out just what all this excitement was about.

He saw a long string of riders coming down over the divide. At that distance he could not tell just what type of men they were. But he could discern the straw sombreros, the shoulder holsters, the stove-up little Mexican plugs.

When they caught sight of this lone horseman coming up the stream bed toward them, the foremost riders curbed in. There was a moment of palaver, and then the gang divided, a few heading up a washout so as to reach the plain by way of the adjacent gulch. Another detachment found a draw on the opposite side of the arroyo, and led their horses up the steep, rocky bed. The rest came down toward Ned, sticking to their original course.

Ned did not wait for them to get within six-gun distance. He caught sight of their grim, dark faces, their unshaven jaws protruding under the shadow of lop-brimmed hats—and then he wheeled his horse and galloped again to the mouth of the draw.

The three fugitives were heading off across the plain, the girl, having a horse to herself, was in the lead. Her brother and the old mucker, Spinner, were belaboring their cayuse and lining out at a slow gallop over the dunes.

A race across that plain would not last long, and Ned knew it. He spurred his horse to a gallop and caught up with them before they were a mile out.

"Head for that mesa!" he cried. "There's a big bunch of 'em, and they're coming down out of three different gulches!"

"What in the name of Heaven will we do!" the old mucker cried in dismay.

"Follow me. We'll find a ravine over yonder where we can hold 'em off!"

This was obviously the best possible course to take. Ned got into the lead and headed off across the plain. The three fugitives followed him. They had

awakened to the fact that here was a good man to stick to. It meant that they would have one more fighter—very probably a fighter worth all three of them put together.

They reached the cliffs—Ned and the girl in the lead, the brother and old Spinner still belaboring their mount, and trailing about a furlong behind. As they clattered across the plain, the pursuers came out of the gulches far behind—four riders from one, three from another, four more from a third. It looked as if the mesa were disgorging armed horsemen from every crevice and canyon in its massive breast.

It was a race for their lives across that plain, with the gang of horsemen gaining every furlong. Then, just as the fugitive boy got under the lee of a small mesa, a fusillade of shots came singing through the air.

Ned accompanied the girl into the nearest gulch.

"Guard these horses," he shouted, dismounting and handing her his reins. Then drawing his gun, he ran back to the mouth of the gulch and met the two men.

Old Spinner was slouched forward in his saddle. His face was drawn and gray, his eyes glassy. The boy seated behind was clinging to him—not to support himself—but to hold his aged companion in the saddle.

"The old man's hit!" he said.

"Take him up there and leave him with the girl!" Ned cried. "Then come back and help me fight!"

CHAPTER VII.

TARGETS.

THE narrow gorge to which the unlucky little band had retreated was guarded at the mouth by two massive pillars of rock. It made a gateway to what seemed a narrow slit in the solid granite mass of cliffs.

Between the two pillars there was a row of boulders waist-high, heaped up with detritus—sand, pebbles, tree trunks —so that the entrance of the gorge was protected by a perfect barricade.

Ned Carson, kneeling behind one of the boulders, was the only fighter to stop the advance of those galloping horsemen. But he had every advantage. The horsemen were in the open, and in order to come within range they had to ride up an alluvial fan, which spread out in sloping banks from the mouth of the gorge.

Ned waited until the men dismounted and started crawling up the slope. They left their rat-tailed ponies in a bunch at the bottom of the fan in charge of two of their men. The rest deployed, making a wide semicircle, in which formation they advanced. They darted from one boulder to the next, crawled through the mesquite brush, ran low-crouched across open ground, concentrating their shots at the one target—the gateway of the ravine.

Ned peered over the rim of his boulder, showing nothing for a target except his sombrero and two eyes. A shot sang above his head, another cracked across the top of the boulder, another struck a horizontal slab of granite, flattened itself with a sharp *ping*, and then went hopping along like a scared toad.

As the foremost of the attackers came within range, Ned poured his lead into them. A man running across the sand for a nearer boulder sagged at the knees and rolled to the ground. The one nearest to him fell forward across his boulder, arms outstretched, head dangling sideways as if his neck was broken. A third dropped into the brush, then crawled off, groaning and clutching his leg.

The result of this first fusillade seemed to sober the attackers. They dropped back, each man crouching low behind the nearest cover. In the interim the girl's brother came out of the ravine, crawled through the dense

mesquite, and then ran on all fours toward Ned's rock.

"It's up to you and me, pard," the brother said. "The old man back there is out of it—he's dyin'!"

The two men went at their work with a frenzied desperation. They kept up a continual fire, blazing away at every sombrero tip, at every exposed arm or leg, at every darting figure.

But despite their entrenchment, and the ferocity with which they fought, the odds were against them. They were facing the sun, which had now rolled down to the horizon so that its red disk was shining directly into their eyes. The patches of mesquite and sage on the slopes of the alluvial fan had turned black. Black shadows veiled the men's eyes. Against the confusing background dark silhouettes were crawling, hurling streaks of fire. One of the men whom Ned had hit had crawled back to his horse, and was now firing at long range with a rifle. He was fighting with a vengeance, for he had a score to settle.

The two youths crouched low behind their rocks, peering over the rim and sending six shots at a time. Slugs of lead sang in answer above their heads. Ned felt his sombrero give a convulsive jump as a slug zipped through it. Another creased him just across the left shoulder. He felt a slight burn as if a hot knife blade had been stuck into his flesh. But he kept on firing, reloading his gun, firing again, aiming at the dark shadows against that low strip of flaming sky.

Meanwhile the girl had been listening to this hoarse bark of guns, and a terrific fear for the safety of her brother began to grip her. She tethered the three horses to a tree bole and then crept down the stream bed toward the granite gate.

She kept under the cover of the mesquite as her brother had done, but by this time the attackers had advanced and were pouring their shots across the barricade. The lead slugs dug into the ground on every side of her, zipping through the tangled brush, until the terrified girl stopped in her tracks, flattening down in the narrow space between the ground and the thick matting of the mesquite.

She had reached the end of the brush, and there was an open stretch of black alkali, beyond which she saw her two defenders fighting shoulder to shoulder. The youths were so close that she could have reached out and almost touched their boots.

Her eyes were focused on peculiar details: On the hole in Ned's sombrero tip; on his blood-drenched arm; on his haggard profile; on a chip of rock flying through the air scarcely a foot from her brother's face; then on a slug flattening itself against the boulder, on the side where the two men were crouching.

This last detail baffled her. How could that lead slug hit this side of the boulder, when the attackers were on the other side? She glanced upward, jumping instantly to the conclusion that her two defenders were being attacked from somewhere in the rear.

She uttered a scream. The two men looked around, startled to find that she had come down into the thick of the fight. They saw her pointing upward, toward the cliffs.

One of the men had crawled along a ledge of rock and was pouring his shots down from above.

"Looks kind of bad, kid!" Ned cried. "But keep blazin'!"

"We're done for!" the boy answered in despair.

"Not yet! Keep blazin' away!"

Ned was firing a round of shots toward the cliffs above. And on the very moment that he made a hit he felt a heavy impact as if some one had struck him on the head with a sledge hammer. A shot had cut through his heavy mop of hair, barely grazing the skull.

The girl saw him crumple up and roll

out to the open ground, where he lay as if dead.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COYOTES CRY.

THE girl jumped from cover and ran to where Ned had fallen. She had warned this hapless young stranger that he would be killed if he cast his lot with hers. And here, it seemed, her warning had been fulfilled.

She bent over him, as if with a desperate hope of screening his body from the murderous shots that were being aimed across the barricade. And at that very moment she realized that her brother was in the same danger. For the men out in front, observing that one of the defenders had been hit, decided to try their luck. They made a charge, racing low-crouched up the bank.

The girl could see a circle of sombreros moving rapidly across the surface of the mesquite brush, and concentrating toward one point—the mouth of the gulch.

She had a vision of the disastrous end: Her brother would be shot down before her eyes.

Abruptly she took the situation in her own hands. She jumped to her feet, and ran out in front of the boulder, holding up both hands.

From the patches of mesquite that covered the banks below her, heads popped up. She saw a circle of swarthy faces, of bulging, astonished eyes, of unshaven chins, of lips tightening across stained teeth.

She said nothing. At that moment she was too frightened to speak, even if she had tried. Her one gesture of stepping out into the open with upraised hands was enough.

Her brother looked over the rock, stupefied at this abrupt termination of the fight.

"You consarned little fool!" he gasped. "Now you've done it!"

"Sure she's done it!" the leader of the renegades laughed, standing up waist-deep in the mesquite. He was confident that the remaining fighter behind the rock would not dare to go on with the defense—now that the girl had given herself up. He came wading through the brush, while his companions got up and followed his example.

The brother stared at the circle of men surrounding him. His face was contorted with a baffled rage. It looked for a moment as if he would shoot down some of the renegades, making his last desperate gesture before the whole gang drilled him with lead. But the girl stepped back to him, clinging to his hand. He cast her one glance—a glance of piteous resignation. His taut arm relaxed; the gun went down.

"Now, then, young feller," the leader of the gang said, "you look like you've come to your senses. Reckon we can talk this over like gentlemen."

The boy put his arm about his shrinking, terrified sister, and stared with savage contempt at the squat, red-whiskered hombre in front of him.

"My name's Hazen, 'Spud' Hazen," the renegade went on affably. "Ain't had the pleasure of meetin' you afore this, but I know you. Your name's Kirk. And this here little sage hen is your sister. Am I right?"

The boy did not answer. He kept his gaze riveted upon the ugly runt, his eyes blazing with hate, like the eyes of a cornered wolf.

"But who is this young waddy stretched out here in the alkali?" the chief went on. "Can't say he fits in with the description of you folks."

"Whoever he is, chief," one of the other renegades said, "he's the one who plugged me in the arm, and he's the one who dumped McCorckle and Pete. And I'm goin' to blow out his brains. He'll be too dead to skin when I'm through with him!"

The girl broke away from her broth-

er's arms, and, sobbing, threw herself once more upon the prostrate form of Ned Carson.

"Don't kill him!" she cried hysterically. "He didn't belong with us. He's a stranger. He's not the man you want. He just joined us so's to take us to water. I'm beggin' you, don't kill him. Take me. Do what you want with me. Take everything we have. But let this poor boy live!"

"Well, I never refused a lady," the red-whiskered fellow said, leering up into the girl's face. "You ain't asked much, seein' the kid looks about as lively as a dead pack rat. Leave off kickin' him, 'Tondo.' You're just bringin' him back to life."

The fact was that Ned's glazed eyes were beginning to move, rolling up till they stared at the bewildering scene about him: The girl's white face, the ragged boot that was timed for another swift kick at his side, the brown, pinched visage of the man he had wounded, and finally the circle of grimy men.

His hand went to his holster with a spasmodic, awkward movement. He groped there, found it empty, then with a groan he tried to rise. He was like a prize fighter trying to lift himself from the canvas while a hand above him marked off the precious seconds. Helplessly he sank back again—his head falling with a lolling movement into the girl's lap.

"I must say, ma'am," the red-whiskered man chuckled, "that this friend of yourn can draw a pretty neat bead when he's shootin'. Wounded three of my men, and killed two others. Which, if it didn't mean that our fightin' and raidin' days is over, I'd feel right irritated. But as it is, why, it only means there's much fewer of us to divvy up the swag. So I'm willing to admit that he's done me a good turn. And the rest of you too, eh, men?"

"Sure, we'll let him live," they said. "He wasn't with the outfit. The girl's told the truth. He ain't Spinner. Spinner was a old man."

"Which, to make a long story short," the leader said, "we'll let your friend live, and we'll let you live, and we'll let your brave kid brother live. Only first leave me specify: We'd admire to see that gold."

The girl glanced up in mute helplessness at her brother.

The latter shot out savagely: "There ain't no gold!"

Spud Hazen laughed—a loud, raucous laugh that was strangely lacking in merriment.

"Maybe you'll tell us, lady," he said, leering up at her again and smiling ingratiatingly.

"What gold?" she asked falteringly.

"The stuff old Spinner's been pannin' out of Jackass Creek for the last ten years—with the help of this friendly young gentleman here." He pointed a thick thumb at the brother. The eyes of the latter were like two burning coals.

"Spinner took the stuff out long ago," the brother snarled.

"Oh, he did, did he?" Again the chief chuckled, looking around at the grinning, eager faces of his gang. "Well, a good friend of mine, a Navajo, hid in the mesquite one night and watched you folks diggin' up a lot of nuggets where you had 'em cached under your arrastre. And he seen you packin' 'em in some rawhide bags, and strappin' 'em to a couple ole sorebacks. Then he seen you linin' out for the north. Maybe it was only rock specimens you was takin', for to get same assayed at Rawhide?"

"Yes, it was rock specimens," the boy said quickly. "Iron pyrites, most of it —that's what I told the old coot. Not worth a whoop."

"Well, we'll settle that there point," the chief said affably. "We're assayers ourselves, we are. Know a thing or two about meltin' ore and gettin' the slag and bullion. We'll relieve your

minds of all worry concernin' that there load of—specimens, as you call 'em."

"You will, if you ever find it!" the boy shot back.

"Oh-ho! So that's it! You've hid it somewheres!" Spud Hazen looked back at the faces of his companions, which were now betraying a very definite consternation. Had they cornered these miserable fugitives only to find that they did not have the gold?

"The stuff was packed on two plugs, chief," one of the men said anxiously. "The plugs couldn't hardly carry it, bein' it was so heavy. Then we seen these folks ridin' the plugs—and nary a pack. The kid's told the truth. They've hid the stuff."

"Wait a minute now. We'll go at this systematiclike." Spud Hazen turned to the girl: "Look here, ma'am. You don't want us to start in torturin' this kid brother of yourn, do you, now?"

The girl turned white. "He doesn't know where it is!" she cried frantically. "Old Spinner took it away—he hid it somewhere. He knows. But we don't."

"Where is this gent, Spinner?" Hazen asked. His voice was beginning to betray a slight perturbation.

"He was ridin' one of the plugs when we chased these birds into this gulch," a henchman said. "He was ridin' double with one of these hombres, and I plugged him."

"Most like he's up the canyon a ways, chief," another suggested.

"Well, we'll have a little confab with the old gentleman," the chief said.

He then turned to his men. "Tie up this kid's arms. And you, Gonzales, shag down there and get the horses. Dab a rope around that coot's feet"—he pointed at Ned Carson—"and drag him through the brush. That'll most like bring him to. Suggs, we'll leave you take care of the little lady."

A few moments later the whole crowd trailed up into the canyon and found Spinner lying on the sand.

The old prospector looked like a mere heap of clothes and bones, tossed away there and forgotten. The chief knelt by his side, took him by the shoulders, and shook him.

"Hey, you!" he said. "Look up at me. Let's see you smile!"

Old Spinner's deeply lined, leathery face turned upward. The glassy eyes stared with a bewildered, terrified look at the ugly visage hovering over him. Then a faint, incoherent oath escaped his ashen lips and his head fell backward, pillowing itself again in the sand.

The chief grasped the limp body by the shoulders and shook it frantically. The renegade leader had quite lost his former suavity.

"Wake up, you! Don't stall. Open your eyes or I'll make you open 'em. You hear me! I'll use fire on you if you don't talk!"

The faded eyes opened, a pale sheen gleaming in their depths. The lips tightened, and old Spinner looked for a moment as if he were actually grinning.

"You got me, you rattlers!" he said weakly. "But you ain't got my gold. Oh, no! I'm dyin'. Think you can get the secret from my dead body? Go ahead and try!"

Spud Hazen got up and turned to his men. An insensate fury distorted his face. "Suggs, you collect some sage sticks, and start a fire. We'll make the old varmint talk."

The girl and her brother looked on while the renegades started a fire. Ned Carson had been dragged through the thorny chaparral, and across jagged rocks. He lay in the middle of the group, his clothes torn, his face and hands crosshatched with deep cuts. He was awakening slowly to the consciousness of supreme agony, of supreme defeat. He was like a man who had died and found himself in a new existence—the existence of a lost soul.

As he looked up he saw the battlements of the cliffs swaying and rocking

against a blood-red sky. It was dark where he lay, but he could see gaunt figures standing all about him. There was the drone of voices; there was the sharp smell of burning sage in his nostrils.

Suddenly he heard the scream of a woman—a terrified, fearful utterance more like the cry of a she-wolf than of a human being.

"Don't touch him!" the girl was screaming. "He's an old man—and he's dying! I know where the gold is! I'll take you there!"

"Well, we're gettin' somewheres," the voice of Spud Hazen filtered through the gloom. "Fire always gets the truth —either from the man you're burnin' or from the woman who's watchin'."

Ned Carson groped vainly in his befuddled and aching brain for an explanation of these events. He realized two things: Old Spinner was dying, and the girl was giving up the treasure in order to save him from torture during his last moments on earth.

The voices droning in Ned's ear increased. There was an exchange of sharp, excited sentences.

"Might as well finish the old coot, and this young hombre," another voice said. Ned felt a boot prodding him.

"Wait now." Again the voice of Spud Hazen was suave and triumphant. "We ain't got the gold yet. And until we have it I ain't goin' to kill nobody. I ain't stackin' all my chips on this girl's word. She may be lyin'—for to gain time."

"That there's a good point, chief," some one said. "No use finishin' these two hombres. To-night a coyote will come and finish 'em."

"We'll leave 'em bound with that there lass rope," Spud Hazen decreed. "The old man's as good as dead. The young one can't get nowhere in this country without a horse. This here desert is the safest calaboose a man was ever locked up in." He stalked off—a squat, black shadow swinging into the darkness.

"Come on, men," he cried exultantly. "We'll take the girl and her brother along with us—and all the horses." Then Ned heard his last command during the confusion of wheeling horses, mounting men, and jingling reins.

"All right, little lady. Take us by the surest and quickest trail to where that gold is at!"

Thus Ned Carson was left, his lacerated hands bound, his back hitched in many tight coils of horsehair lariat to old Spinner.

He had the feeling that he was bound to a corpse.

The hoofbeats of the retreating horses died away. A blood-red moon came up. And almost immediately Ned heard the doleful call of a coyote. It was answered by another call high up in the narrow reach of the gulch.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REWARD.

AS the doleful, ominous sound came down the gulch the old man shuddered. It was as if every fibre in the dying body revolted at the hungry call of those predatory beasts.

"Don't be afraid, pard," Ned Carson said. "I'm here. I'll keep 'em away."

A faint murmur answered: "What-all's happened?"

"They've taken the girl and her brother. The girl said she'd give up the bags!"

Old Spinner groaned. It was a groan which came from the depths of his heart, eloquent of mental agony. "The two kids'll be tortured," he said.

"Not if they give up the gold. Their troubles will be over then."

"But they don't know where it's at."

"What are you sayin', pard!" Ned cried in surprise. "The girl said she'd take 'em to it!"

"She's takin' 'em on a wild-goose

chase—and when it ends——" Another agonized groan completed the sentence.

Ned Carson was squirming savagely at his bonds. He dragged the old man over with him until he reached the embers of the fire which the outlaws had built.

Old Spinner gave vent to gasps of pain with each move.

"What you doin', kid?" he whimpered finally.

"I'm goin' to free myself. I'm goin' after those scoundrels and kill 'em!"

"You got a gun?"

"My bare hands—that's all I want."

"You got a horse—so's to chase 'em?"

"I'll walk. I'll run!"

"Kid, you listen to me. I'm dyin' and I got to tell you first. I buried that gold, savvy?"

"Where'd you bury it?" Ned asked eagerly.

"In the mesa where we was restin' this afternoon." Spinner spoke in a frenzied, husky voice as if spending his last breath. "You'll find a gulch where the walls are snow-white—quartz, banded with red rock. You listenin'?"

"Go on, pard, hurry!" Ned was afraid the old man would die before he gave up the precious secret.

"You go up to the very end. There's two boulders there bigger'n barns." The voice faltered. The speaker choked, gasped for breath, then managed to whisper: "One is red. They's a cleft in it. I buried the stuff a foot under the sand right beneath——"

Ned had freed himself from the dying man. Rolling over onto an open space of sand, he started untying the knots that bound his feet. "Go on, pard," he said, "I'm listening."

Old Spinner was mumbling something else, but Ned could not understand. As a matter of fact he could not hear the words, for at that moment another sound came drifting down the gulch, drowning out the last gasping words of the old prospector.

Ned sat up with a start, turning his head to listen.

A rhythmic galloping of hoofs was distinctly brought down by the night wind.

His first impression was that the cavalcade of the outlaws and their prisoners were returning. But he knew that this was not true. In the first place, the sound of hoofs came from a direction opposite to that taken by the outlaws. Furthermore, Ned's well-trained ears told him that those were not the hoofs of the Mexican plugs which the bandits had ridden. These had a rhythmic swing, a freedom, a ring of flint-hard feet against slabs of rock.

Ned realized on the instant that it was a band of wild horses tearing down the stream bed, heading directly for the spot where he and the old prospector were lying.

Out into the moonlight they raced, their heads lifted, their manes tossing. Then, when within a furlong, a giant black horse in the lead sent out a loud neigh of warning.

A bunch of wild mares clattered to a stop, herding close about their lord and master, the big stallion.

Immediately after giving his brood this warning, the giant horse came prancing out in the sand wash, tossing his tangled mane, stretching out his massive neck, flattening his ears. He came down with a heavy *clip-clop* of hoofs, snorting in apprehension, then in rage.

Ned Carson had cast off the last knot that bound him. He jumped to his feet. But here he was, without a gun, and standing out in the open facing a wild stallion! He might have leaped up the jagged rocks of the gulch's side and saved himself. But the helpless and pitiful figure of old Spinner was lying out there in the sand, directly in the stallion's path.

The big horse pawed threateningly at the ground, then advanced. When within his own length of the prostrate

form, he reared, hovering like a massive black shadow over the helpless man.

Ned rushed toward the forestriking hoofs. And at the moment he did so the truth came to him in a flash. He had seen that shaggy black beast before. In that momentary glimpse he saw that the bulging chest muscles and the upcurved throat were crosshatched with newly healed wounds.

The stallion pranced back, his dilated nostrils snorting wildly.

What was this new enemy? What was this peculiar scent—not strange, not new, but always terrifying?

The horse came down, prancing once more on all four feet, pawing at the ground, snorting in astonishment. Then the animal remembered.

He remembered the tongue of fire which the man had belched, the deafening crack of his call, the magic that sent the puma slouching off in a trail of red, and he remembered the touch of gentle hands.

Ned had picked up a large rock and was holding it up to hurl, when he heard the wild horse give a peculiar whinny. It was not like the whinny of a giant stallion. It was more like the trembling but gentle utterance of a mare whinnying to a foal.

What that call meant Ned did not know. But he had the impression that the horse was begging him not to throw the rock. He did not throw it. He waited a moment. Then the shaggy old Boss wheeled about abruptly, with a flip of his tail, plunged through his remuda of mares, and ran up the canyon.

The mares, always inquisitive, watched the man standing there, and they probably wondered what sort of a palaver he had had with their Boss. He was a lucky man, they thought. And they were right. They must have reflected that their indomitable lord and master had changed much since his fight with that puma. wice he had spared this man's miserable life!

The black stud was off now, clanking along the upper reaches of the gulch, with his brood trailing after him.

The old man lying on the ground had witnessed this incredible drama out of wide-open, faded eyes. He could scarcely believe what he had seen. That black shadow towering over him with front feet poised and ready to crash down. The slim, defenseless man standing up and walking straight into the face of that poised death. That querulous whinny, the indecisive champing of giant hoofs, and then the retreat.

But as he saw the remuda of mares stringing out and following their master, he called in a gasping, excited voice: "A horse, kid, quick! Dab that rope on a horse. It's your only chance to get out of here! Go after those kids, and save 'em!"

Ned had already picked up the reata and made a loop. He was running up the canyon as the old man gasped those last few words:

"Never mind me, kid. I'm past help. I'm tired! I'm through! I'll be dead and gone when you get back. But save them kids!"

His head lolled over as he was talking. From his glazed eyes he could barely make out a few details of that thrilling scene.

He saw Ned Carson skirting the side of the gulch, scrambling over the boulders, staggering into a dark shadow, and emerging again on high ground.

Below Ned there was a mare waiting for her exhausted foal. The foal had crumpled up and was now lying, a fuzzy brown heap in the sand, like a ball of tumbleweed. The calico mare was whinnying to it, prodding it with her nose. It got up, and immediately its mother headed off on the trail of the wild herd.

But Ned was standing above on a high boulder. Although he was weak from the loss of blood from the flesh wound in his shoulder, and still dazed from the slug which had barely missed

his skull, he was able to stand and swing the lariat. It was the rope with which the bandits had bound him to old Spinner but a short while before.

The loop sailed out in the moonlit air, and dabbed itself on the neck of the wild calico as she raced up the boulder wash.

The terrified horse went off at a gallop, dragging Ned from his perch. But he clung on, sliding up the dry wash till he braced himself against another boulder. The mare reared as the rope tightened, swinging around to keep herself from falling backward.

For a few moments Ned played with her, as he might have played with a fish on the end of a line. She darted off in one direction, reared again as the noose tightened about her throat, swung back, headed down the gulch, reared once more. Then she stood with her breath choked off, her sides heaving in desperate gasps, her shaggy muscles trembling in terror. She tried to whinny, with a desperate hope that her stallion would come back and fight for her. But the stallion was far up in the gorge leading a long string of mares and colts, unmindful that one of his favorites was in the dreaded clutches of man.

As the mare sank forward on the ground, rolling over and heaving frantically for breath, Ned was making a crude headstall out of his end of the lass rope.

Then crawling on his hands and knees through the brush, he reached the prostrate horse and slipped the contraption of knots and loops over her head.

This accomplished, he loosened the noose that was choking her. A flame came to her glazed and bulging eyes. Her sides heaved, taking in glorious breaths of life-giving air. Then, with a convulsive swing, she was on her feet.

The next moment the wild bronc felt the terrifying weight upon her back, scrawny, tight-muscled, balancing itself in some uncanny way, even when she lurched high for a buck.

She was not much of a bucker, wild as she was. Not many of those desert-bred broncs know how to buck—contrary to the general impression. A trained bucker knows the tricks after it has dislodged many riders. But this little mare was concerned more for the safety of her foal than of herself. She went off in a series of straightaway bucks, eager to get that dreaded being on her back as far away from her beloved offspring as possible.

Ned went tearing down the gulch, through brush and over sand mounds, clinging on for dear life. If she threw him once he would never have another chance, he knew that well enough.

He went down the stream bed, past the prostrate form of Spinner and out toward the open plain. He gave the mare her head, letting her spend herself in a long breakneck race. She mixed some bucks with her galloping flight, but these futile aberrations came at rarer intervals.

Four miles out she settled to a straight gallop, then to a slower canter. Then in exhaustion, she fell to a walk.

Ned was still on her back, his head swimming, his shoulder wet with blood from the wrenched wound, his eyes trying to focus upon that mesa on the opposite edge of the plain.

It was to the mesa that the girl had taken her captors. Ned was hardly able to keep it in his distracted vision. For it was like a ship in a storm; it seemed to lurch forward, tip up, roll along on a horizon that was constantly moving, circling like the edge of the sea in a hurricane. Nevertheless he stuck on, and kept the mare's head turned toward the goal.

Old Rufe Spinner's time had come. He had witnessed a glorious scene during his last few moments on earth, and the sight of it seemed to satisfy his

soul. He could die in peace. But just before he died he did something which gave a very definite clew to his thoughts. He must have relived the tragic events of that day in the desert, for when they found his body, lying there in the stream bed, in one shriveled hand there was a slab of quartz upon which he had written a message.

His last thoughts can be deduced from that message. He must have come at last to the conclusion that Ned Carson deserved a reward. He had joined Spinner's ill-starred little outfit as a stranger. He had given its members his water. He had given them his food. He had fought for them, not hesitating to offer up his life—had that been necessary. He had saved old Spinner himself from being crushed to death by a mad stallion. And here was this last picture of him, fighting desperately with a wild horse. He wanted that horse to carry him on the same trail—a trail of sacrifice and combat and perhaps of death.

Old Spinner reached out to the fire which had been built for his own torture. He extracted a charcoal and wrote:

I herby leave my shair of the gold to the Good Samaritin.

He started to sign his name but he could not finish. He died still clutching the slab in one hand, the burnt sage-stick in the other.

CHAPTER X.

THE SPELL OF GOLD.

NED CARSON believed confidently enough that he had that wild little cayuse broken. And he was right. She let him stay on her back. But that was all. Although he was able to keep the mare's head turned toward that mesa on the other side of the plain, she seemed to have a definite aversion to going there.

A mare with a foal is a changeable critter at best. When she is a wild mare that has just been broken, there is no accounting for her whims and notions. A little while before, she had been gripped with an insensate desire to take her dreadful rider as far away from her foal as possible. And now she wanted to go back.

Ned was a born rider, and he knew how to lead a horse by the shifting of his weight, the pressure of his knees, and all the other aids known to horsemen. But riding a wild mare without a bit was a difficult procedure. No matter how much he insisted that she carry him across that plain, she insisted more firmly on going back to the gulch, even if she had to walk backward or prance sideways.

Ned realized the trouble soon enough. In his frantic eagerness to pick up the trail of the bandits and their prisoners, he had completely forgotten the little foal.

He looked back. Far off there across the stretch of moonlit plains over which he had managed to travel, he saw what looked like a stuffed sack on four sticks. The foal was struggling along bravely in an attempt to reach its mother.

It scrambled up the side of a sand dune, poised there a moment, and then toppled over the brink, as if tossed there by the wind.

Ned decided to wait. His time was precious. Life or death might hang on a moment. But he could not change the mind of the mare. And he did not like the idea of leaving that little bundle of fur and legs off there alone on the dunes, anyway. He remembered the doleful call of the coyotes.

The foal was up again, its gaunt neck thrust over the crest of another dune, its diminutive body coming up behind it, and the four legs appearing as if they just dangled from the body without any contact with the sand.

When it finally caught up, a very

definite change came over its mother. She became as docile as a lamb. Evidently now that her colt was with her she decided that she might as well follow her rider's directions. Only she would set the pace herself, and it would be a pace that that blessed little nuisance behind her could follow.

As Ned started once more across the plain he had time to think. His one desire was to find the bandit gang. But this might not be so easy as he had at first expected. The plain was covered with a fine silt in which the bandits' ponies had left no clear tracks. The prints their hoofs had made were immediately effaced by the wind.

But he had one hope, although it was slim enough. He reflected that the girl would do her utmost to find the gold. If they did not find it, if the bandits believed she was leading them on a wild-goose chase, she could be certain of a pretty grim punishment at their hands. They would most likely punish her by torturing her brother before her eyes. That seemed to be their favorite mode of procedure. Her only hope, therefore, of saving her brother and herself, was to get that gold. It was, of course, an impossibility. Even though Spinner might not have gone half a mile away to bury the stuff, it would have taken months to find it in the maze of gulches and boulders and washouts surrounding the spot where they had rested that afternoon.

Ned Carson had a vision of the distracted girl trying vainly to conjecture where that treasure had been buried; of the bandits growing more and more suspicious; of their bullying her, terrorizing her, and finally resorting to torture.

He kicked his heels into the flanks of his mount, in an attempt to increase the gait. Precious time was passing. The girl was probably in one of the gulches of that mesa now, frantically making up excuses. She would have to explain why she had not brought them directly to the spot, as she had promised. She would have to say she had got into the wrong gully. She would have to take them to the next, and make up the same excuse. Perhaps she would not stop at that mesa at all, but tell them that the treasure had been buried ten miles farther south.

This possibility gave Ned a good scare. What if they kept on, riding past the mesa, and taking a trail which he could not find?

He urged his mount on, flipping the end of his lass rope, swinging it over his head, shouting to the mare to get going. But her gait was preordained. No amount of shouting and kicking would change it. She might hurry on for a furlong, but then, finding that the colt was trailing too far behind, she would curve off, try to go back, and finally make a threatening pitch or two until the rider gave up. When the colt caught up again she would set out once more, racking slowly along.

Thus it was that Ned Carson crossed the plain. After what seemed an eternity, he came under the shadow of a row of cliffs.

Ned skirted this until he found the gulch described by the dying prospector. It was easy to find, for the walls, which were of quartz, glistened snow-white in the moonlight, crossbanded with strata of a dark rock in waving stripes.

He rode up into the narrow defile cautiously, fearful lest he might run into the outlaws before he was ready to meet them.

But there was no sign of any horsemen having followed that trail. The sand of the dry stream bed would have left clearer tracks than the silt out on the plain. Furthermore, there was less wind here. Ned was confident that he could have found their tracks.

There was no sound in that rock-bound sanctuary. It was as if he were walking his horse into the dim precincts

of a heathen temple, where he met a silent assembly of gods and devils and monsters carved of stone.

He kept on going, heading for what seemed to be the center of the earth. Ned began to wonder if Spinner had told him the truth. He reflected that the old prospector could not have been gone more than half an hour when he left his companions asleep and came here to bury the gold. But this discrepancy was soon explained. As Ned rode on toward the end of the gulch, he saw a trail leading up one of the walls. Spinner had evidently come down from the divide that separated this canyon from the adjacent one. And the adjacent one, doubtless, was the very canyon where the fugitives had rested that afternoon.

At the end of the gulch Ned found the two giant boulders which had been described to him. One was a solid mass of shale, and it might have been red in the light of day. There was a cleft in it.

Every detail had turned out just as old Spinner, in his few dying sentences, had described it. The treasure was there. It would take but a few moments to dig it up.

But what would be the cost of those few moments?

Ned Carson thought quickly. He had no gun. He was mounted on a horse that would travel just so fast and no faster. The two unlucky prisoners were in the hands of a band of armed men. And those men would not give them up without a pretty desperate fight. For if they gave them up, it would mean they would give up their last hope of ever getting that gold.

But, now, at the very moment that Ned had found old Spinner's cache, a Heaven-sent inspiration came to him: If he had the gold in his possession he would have the whip hand. Those bandits cared nothing for the two prisoners, except for the fact that they represented the one chance they had of finding the treasure.

He dismounted, tethered his horse, and began to dig.

As he scooped up the sand and sent it flying between his legs, he kept on groping frantically in his bewildered brain for the next move. He must trail the bandits and show them that he had that treasure in his hands. He must dicker with them. He must be careful and not give it up until he was certain that the prisoners were free. Just how he was to do all this he did not know. Perhaps the bandits were at that moment heading off with their unlucky prisoners on some trail that he could never find. He dug faster. A well-founded conviction had gripped him that if he had that gold in his hand it would be more powerful than a loaded six-gun.

His hand scraped against rawhide. And underneath that rawhide it felt as if he had dug to bed rock.

Ned sank forward in exhaustion, his body streaming with sweat, his chest heaving in an agony of spent breath.

With what seemed to him his last ounce of strength, he tugged a rawhide bag up into the light.

In that excited and frenzied moment Ned Carson fell under the spell that grips many men—the spell to which, of all men, prospectors are the most susceptible—the spell of gold.

He tore the thong which bound the mouth of the first bag he had unearthed. He thrust in his weak, trembling hand, brought it out, and opened it so that the rays of the moon lighted it.

In his palm there lay a pile of small nuggets, while a yellow powder sifted down like a falling mist through his fingers.

"It's the stuff!" he gasped. "And it's worth—it's worth——" He paused and shook his head, then looked up, scanning the cliffs beyond which in some deep arroyo he knew the girl and her

brother were being bullied, perhaps beaten and tortured, by that gang of bandits.

"Whatever it's worth," he said to himself, "the girl is worth a million times more!"

CHAPTER XI.

AGAINST THE MOON.

THE Boss of Skull Mesa gathered his brood in a bowl-shaped valley where there was a sparse growth of bunch grass. Here they could feed a while and then sleep. In the early hours of the morning, when it was cool, the stallion would take them to the water hole westward in the low sierras.

This was a favorite canyon of the big stud. Inasmuch as there was no water in the locality, the Boss had never known it to be visited by man. His brood was safe here for the night. Nor was it one of those narrow, cooped-up arroyos in which the field of vision was too abruptly cut off. Wild horses like to see where they are. Steep canyon walls with side draws from which a lobo or puma might spring out upon them, were not to the Boss' liking. In this canyon he had a good view of the whole grazing ground. He could watch every mare and colt and foal in the remuda. Of course the latter did not count, but the Boss maintained a protective, if merely tolerant, attitude toward them just the same.

He stood on a high rock now, like an iron statue in the moonlight, taking stock of his possessions. They cantered along below him, like a troop of cavalry passing in review, and then scattered over the flat canyon bed. Some of the mares munched at weeds, others sought shelter from the wind for their tired little foals, others picked out a gentle slope so that their forefeet would be a few inches below the hind ones, and in that position, with their heads hanging, they went to sleep.

It was a peaceful scene. But the Boss was not quite satisfied with it. Something was missing. He was always apprehensive for the safety of his brood whenever he came into too close contact with mankind. And that last scene with the two men in the gulch on the other side of this mesa irritated him. Perhaps he should have followed his original intent and killed the man whom he had found lying in his path. Instead, he had experienced a curious conflict of emotions and had spared the wretch, even though his mares were all behind him. If he did not look out, he would be losing his prestige as an unconquerable monarch. His set-to with that puma had not been entirely satisfactory. He had fought like a hero but had come out like something else. He had gone into the fight like a lion and come out like a lamb. Many more scenes like that and his mares would be forsaking him.

He began to paw the ground. He tossed up his head and snorted inquisitively, apprehensively. A certain dire fear began to grip him:

He realized all of a sudden that one of his mares had already forsaken him!

It was easy to discover this dreadful truth. For she was a mare that stood out above all others. She was a calico. And even when the pintos merged into the background of white quartz and red shale, this calico mare was always conspicuous as a mass of splotchy white.

He had been tricked! Perhaps he had not been tricked by the mare herself, for she was one of the most faithful of his brood. But he had been tricked by some one. And it had happened since his encounter with those two human beings in the gulch on the other side of the mesa.

He sent out a frenzied neigh.

The drowsy herd awoke. In every corner of the canyon bed a horse stood, with head upraised, ears pricked up. A moment of this, and then there was a

confused whinnying to foals, a general movement of the whole herd toward the rock.

But before they got there the black giant had wheeled, leaped down from his pedestal, and was racing off across the canyon bed.

He headed for a mule-deer trail up the slope of the bowl. The remuda followed, confident that some new adventure was about to befall them. Their master did not ordinarily start out on a long journey at such a time of night. He had brought them here for a night's rest, and then, after "bedding them down," he woke them all up, and gave them a peremptory call to action.

Up the sides of the bowl he went at a fast run, then across the divide to a higher canyon; up this until he reached the level top of the mesa.

There was no such thing as a water hole up here. There probably never had been since the glacial age. Nor was there any grass. It was a bare plain of lava patches, stretches of pumice stone and sand. Their master had come here for only one reason: He wanted to get a good view of the whole desert. And up here he could see it stretched out before him, dotted with sharp points of rock or small mesas, or cut deep with black arroyos. From where he stood on the rim of the cliffs, it seemed as if the whole desolate country were unfolded to his view as far as the edge of the earth.

He gazed across the moonlit terrain, his eyes, which were as keen as the eyes of a buzzard, scanning the alkaline plains for the slightest sign of movement.

Failing to find what he was looking for, he wheeled back, galloped along the edge of the mesa top, picked out another promontory—a lip of granite sticking out high above the white plains—and once more surveyed the earth. Again he raced along the rim, mounted a high boulder, stood there with his clotted mane tossing in the wind, his nostrils dilated, his eyes bulging.

Then he saw it.

It was a white speck which he detected moving across a stretch of black alkali. It was his beloved calico. Perhaps it was instinct that told him he had found her. Perhaps he knew that there was no other animal in the desert that was white, and therefore, this was a horse. And if a horse had been roaming alone in that country he would have found it before this. The distance was too far in that moonlight to discover any other details about that moving speck. He did not see the foal. Nor did he see the man riding on the horse's back. He caught but one fleeting glimpse, and then the speck merged into the whiter sand.

The stallion leaped down from the jutting granite, and raced once more along the mesa rim in search of a washout by which he could descend. A little later he was on the floor of the plain, followed by his remuda. The whole band of wild horses raced across the dunes, the black stallion in the lead.

He never caught sight of the fugitive while crossing that plain. But he never lost the direction of that stretch of black alkali where he had seen her. He kept on in a bee line with the instinct of a homing pigeon. It might take him a long time to run her down. She would be swallowed up in some of those arroyos in the low mesas on the other side of the plain.

Nevertheless the stubborn old stallion did not intend to give up the chase. He would find that calico of his even if he lost his whole brood—and his own life—in the attempt.

Ned Carson had been right in his conjecture concerning the course the girl would take.

She led the way to the canyon where they had rested that afternoon. She knew that old Spinner had hidden that

gold somewhere in the locality, but to search for it in that maze of arroyos and draws would be like searching for a needle in a haystack.

The girl had been racking her brains for a solution to the problem while they were riding across the plain. But there was no solution. She knew that, even though she succeeded in killing a certain amount of time, the bandits would grow suspicious. They would not follow a wild-goose chase very long. They were in a hurry. Whenever they entered into a transaction which involved theft and murder, time was precious. Furthermore they trusted no one.

In fact, their leader, Spud Hazen, keeping his crafty eyes focused upon the girl as she rode ahead of him, decided to call a show-down.

It came as a surprise to her. She was in a frenzy of desperation. She was praying frantically, almost audibly, that a merciful Heaven would reveal to her the secret of that hidden treasure. If she only knew where that gold was buried, she would have turned it over gladly, eagerly, to her tormentors.

Then came Spud Hazen's voice in sharp, biting tones directly behind her shoulder:

"Just where-all do you think you're leadin' us, girl?"

"To where the gold's buried," she firmly declared.

"Where's that? Describe the place to us. Describe the trail you're goin' to take. And do it accurate. We'll check up on it, and if the trail don't look like the way you've described it—then we'll know what your game is."

The girl groped in desperation. She could not think clearly. The scenes of the last few hours had left her bewildered, dazed. It had been her first taste of gun fighting and murder. The combat back there where they had left old Spinner dying was not easy to forget. Added to this there was the constant fear that they would torture her brother if she made the slightest misstep.

Nevertheless she was cool-headed enough to realize a certain truth: she must describe a trail which would take them a long time to follow; and she must describe one which she herself knew.

The only trail she knew in that complicated system of gulches and divides was the one that she and Spinner and her brother had been traveling the last few days.

"You go up through this canyon," she said as Spud Hazen rode along by her side. "You head south when you cross the divide. Then——"

"What do you see when you cross the divide?"

"Four red mesas——" she said, trying desperately to remember.

"She knows that much, chief," one of the other renegades said. "It's the same trail they took comin' from their diggin's."

"Go on," the chief ordered. "Where do we head for after that?"

"Across the plain toward Mexico. You pass a deep gorge. A trail leads down to the bed. It's a mule-deer trail. It's——"

"Is the gold cached south of that gorge?" Spud Hazen asked.

"Yes—way south—ten miles——" the girl said resolutely.

"You're lyin'!"

She turned and looked across her shoulder at the hideous, red-whiskered face.

"You're lyin' like a cock-eyed Injun!" the leader said in a low-pitched snarl. "One of my men seen you and your whole outfit comin' up out of that gorge and headin' up this a way. And your pack horses was still totin' them rawhide bags!"

"Sure she's lyin, chief!" one of his henchmen said. "Knew it all along. She's leadin' us down into them bad lands again, killin' all the time she

wants, till maybe we'll bump smack into a posse."

"Oh, no, she ain't goin' to kill no more time," the chief said with a venomous chuckle. "And we ain't goin' to bump into no posse—nor into nothin'! This here goose chase ends right now."

The rest of the riders caught up, bringing the other prisoner, the girl's brother.

"Pull that kid down and stand him up agin' that rock," the chief ordered calmly.

"What for?" the girl screamed. "What are you goin' to do with him?"

"Shoot the young varmint down by inches," the red-whiskered chief purred. "All you men join in with the fun," he called to the others, raising his voice above the girl's horrified cry. "Get down from your mounts and line up. But don't nobody hit him above the knees. Work up slow, beginnin' with his feet, savvy? By the time you get up to his knees the girl will maybe tell us the truth."

The girl leaped to the ground. She landed on her feet without losing her balance, even though her arms were bound behind her back.

"Don't hurt him!" she begged. "I'd give all the gold in the world to save him. You can have it. It's yours—and I'll thank Heaven when it's in your hands!"

Spud Hazen had dismounted and now came waddling across the sand toward her. In the moonlight he was a half-human, apelike thing, slouching forward with his long, ungainly arms hanging to his knees. One of the arms reached out at an incredible distance and swung the girl back.

"Keep out of range now, little one," he said almost wheedlingly. "We ain't the kind of gents as will harm a lady. All right, men! Start burnin' your powder!"

But with the ferocity and the agility of a wild cat the girl squirmed free and threw herself once more between her brother and the hilarious "shooting squad."

"It's no use, sis," the boy said resignedly. "If Spinner told you where he hid that gold, you give it up. If he didn't—if you're only pretendin', then, sis, it's good-by."

The girl broke down. It was the first time her brother had been able to speak to her since their capture. In her abject despair she realized that the boy was doomed if she kept up her bluff any more. It would be better to confess the truth—that she had no idea where the gold had been buried.

"Don't touch the boy," she sobbed hysterically. "I'm the one you should punish. I've tricked you-all. I lied to you. I don't know where the gold is. The old man buried it. If I knew where, I'd tell you. I'd be eager to tell you——"

Spud Hazen fairly yelled in his insensate rage. He might have known it! He had let this little skit trick him and waste precious time, and they had left the old mucker back there dying. Worst of all, if they went back now, they would most probably find him dead, and the secret of his cache would be forever lost.

The furious leader flew at the girl as if he were going to rend her to pieces. He dragged her from her brother and sent her spinning across the ground.

She lay there in a heap upon the sand, her head swimming, the dark forms of the bandits hovering over her like ghouls in the moonlight. The chief was coming toward her again, and she looked up horrified, fascinated at the abnormal size of his head, which seemed dilated against the crimson face of the moon.

And as she stared at him, like a bird awaiting the final leap of a rattler toward her nest, she saw something just above the tip of the man's mushroom-like sombrero. It was at a great distance, so far that it seemed midway between the sombrero and the moon.

It was the silhouette of a man far away on the edge of a cliff.

The girl jumped to her feet with a wild, exultant cry.

The little man in front of her could not understand that cry. It frightened him, for in her voice there was a chaos of strange emotions—of triumph, of a frenzied hope, of a prayer of thanks.

Despite the distance and the fact that she could see only the silhouette, the girl knew at that first glimpse that Ned Carson had come to the rescue.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GOLDEN PEBBLE.

A DISTANT halloo came back from the cliffs like an echo. Instantly every outlaw in the gang whirled about and cast terrified glances at the rim of cliffs above.

They saw the black silhouette of a man up there against the moon—a man sitting astride a horse and waving his arms.

Although they were well out of range of the stranger, the men ducked to cover.

Spud Hazen, however, was not so dumfounded as to forget his two prisoners. He clutched the girl's arm and dragged her with him, at the same moment shouting to one of his henchmen to guard the boy.

"What in tarnation do you make of it, chief?" the men cried. Although the girl, prompted by her intuition and by a desperate hope, had recognized the rider, the bandits had not.

"Most like it's only a lone prospector," Spud Hazen said, peering over the giant boulder behind which they had all gathered. "He was hallooin' to us. If he was a sheriff or deputy he'd've sneaked up on us different."

"He's hallooin' again," another said.

"Seems like he wants to palaver with us."

"Better not, chief. It may be a trick."

"Maybe they's more riders up there," some one warned.

"If we all shag up outa cover and find what he wants, we may get ambushed."

"Still and all, I want to get to the bottom of this," the chief said. He did not relish attempting a flight, thus giving up a chance of finding the gold, when as yet there was no real proof that this lone horseman was to be feared. Of course he was an enemy. Every stranger in the desert was an enemy to Spud Hazen and his gang. But that was all the more reason for finding out who he was and what he wanted.

"Gonzales, you go over yonder," he said to one of his henchmen, "and find out what he wants."

"Me?" the man cried. "Why you pickin' me out for the job, chief? He may plug me as soon as I get in range."

"Don't have to get in range. Keep under cover. Climb up that there trail till you're close enough to see what sort of a hombre he is."

"I dassen't, chief."

"Oh! Then maybe you dast stay here and waste my time refusin' to obey orders?"

The half-breed Gonzales knew better than to do that. The unknown danger up there on the rim of the cliffs was nothing compared to the certain danger of disobeying the red-headed leader, Spud Hazen.

"If he plugs me, chief——" he began uncertainly.

"Let me see your gat," Spud Hazen said calmly.

The slim, furtive breed handed over the weapon. The chief broke it open.

"Load her up with six shots, and likewise take Sugg's gun. It's cleaner."

The man named Suggs obediently handed over his six-gun.

Thus armed with two guns, the envoy, Gonzales, went out across the canyon bed, and walked cautiously up the slope toward the base of the cliffs.

Then, falling to his hands and knees, he scrambled up the steep mule-deer trail that zigzagged up to the rim.

When he came within rifle distance, he approached more cautiously, keeping his eyes focused sharply upon the silhouette of that horseman high above him. When he came within six-gun distance he approached with still more care, keeping behind the projecting boulders. Then, scrambling part way up an overhanging strata of rock, he peered across the edge and found himself standing here almost face to face with the enemy.

He knew it was an enemy at the first glance. It was the man they had left, wounded and bound, on the other side of the plain. And by some miracle which the breed Gonzales could not fathom, he had got a horse!

Gonzales felt a prickling under his thick mane of hair. He was gripped with an unnamable terror. This dreaded enemy had shown his marksmanship in the fight that afternoon. If he had come for some more fighting, it was a certainty that he had found a gun somewhere, as well as a horse.

But Gonzales did not intend to find out the answer to that question by precipitating a duel. In the first place, the enemy had him at a disadvantage; he was hiding behind his horse now, whereas Gonzales was clinging in an awkward position to that outcropping strata of rock.

"Hey, hombre!" the breed whimpered. "I'm here as a peaceable man. You called to us. My chief—he send me to palaver."

"You take that to your chief!" Ned Carson cried. He hurled something at the head of the breed, which was partially revealed above the edge of the rock.

The breed ducked, for it looked precisely as if Carson had lifted his hand to hurl a streak of fire from a six-gun. But before his head dropped down behind the rock ledge a small pebble rolled across the flat stratum, hit his sombrero, and fell to the sloping bank upon which he was standing.

The breed's first impression was that he was facing an enemy who had no other way to fight except to throw stones. He was about to creep back again and open fire when that pebble rolling down the slope caught his eye. It did so for the simple reason that it was the most conspicuous point of light in that dull background of moonlit granite and brown adobe. It sent out succinct yellow rays, until, hopping along down the rough bank, it came to a stop and lay there, glowing like a smoldering coal.

The breed dropped from his position and scrambled down the bank to examine that intriguing little spot of light. He picked it up.

Instantly all thought of firing his six-gun at that miracle worker up there on the top of the cliff vanished. The enemy was armed with something which in certain ways was more powerful than lead slugs.

Gonzales scrambled up the bank again, and his sombrero peak appeared above the rim.

"You have the bags, stranger?" he exclaimed in a voice that was almost reverent.

"Sure I have the bags. But not where you'll find them. I have 'em handy. And you can tell that to your carrot-headed friend down there."

"I'll tell him, stranger. I'll tell the chief! I'll show him this pebble."

"And you can tell him he can have every pebble and nugget and grain of dust in the hoard—the moment he gives up that girl and her brother."

"Sure, I'll tell him, stranger!" the breed answered eagerly. "It's all he wants. He won't harm the señorita or the boy. No, sir. He'll free them. But"—the breed seemed to foresee an objection which his maestro would cer-

tainly bring up—"you give him the bags first."

"Give 'em up first!" Carson snorted. "A likely idea! You bring the prisoners halfway up this cliff, under guard of one man—and no more. I'll bring the bags halfway down. If your sawed-off runt of a bandit chief will agree to that, then he gets his gold. If more than one man comes up, then I'll ride off—and you won't ever get a smell of the dust, even if you hunt the rest of your lives."

"I'll tell the chief, stranger," the breed said finally. It was, to say the least, a fair bargain. If the whole gang came up to join in on the transaction, it was obvious that they could get the gold and keep the prisoners as well. If merely one guard came up, then both sides would have an even break.

The trouble was that the chief, Spud Hazen, did not believe in even breaks. He preferred a game when the odds were a dozen armed men against a helpless woman.

Nevertheless, the breed, Gonzales, returned to the canyon bed with his message—and with that persuasive symbol of the enemy's power—the gold pebble.

CHAPTER XIII.

LIKE HUNGRY WOLVES.

DOWN in the stream bed a ring of grim-faced, ragged men were examining the object which one of their number held in his grimy palm. On the ground two prisoners sat, their hands bound behind their backs.

The dwarfish man in the center of the ring of scarecrows lit a match and held it over the twinkling pebble of gold. The flames of that tiny match were large enough to throw a momentary gleam of dancing light and sharp shadow upon the rugged faces, the red-rimmed eyes, the parted lips.

"Don't need no saleratus test for this," Spud Hazen said in a voice that shook with excitement. "It's the stuff we're after. And that hombre up there is most likely speakin' the truth. He has the bags. Look here——" He turned to the envoy who had brought this eloquent and soul-satisfying message. "Look here, Gonzales, where-all did he get a horse?"

"Search me, chief. It was a calico mare, and it didn't have no saddle. They was a little colt tryin' to stand up in the sand near it and the calico was lickin' it."

"Most like it was a pack horse which foaled while that hombre was trailin' in the desert," some one suggested. "And maybe the hombre discarded it and then hunted it up again after we'd rustled his saddle horse."

"'Tain't likely," Spud Hazen objected. "A man ain't goin' to discard a pack horse in this country just because she's foalin'."

"Maybe he just landed onto a wild mare," another man suggested.

The chief shook his head. "He couldn't've busted a wild mare, wounded like he was. Look here, Gonzales, did you see the bridle?"

"No bridle. Just a kind of headstall, same as a Hopi will make outa horsehair."

The chief thought a minute. "That don't look so good," he said. "It's my opinion that that gun-shootin' feller met up with a wanderin' Injun somewhere and got his horse."

"What's so bad about that, chief? Why worry where he got the horse?"

"Because—if he got it from an Injun, he most likely got a gun at the same time."

"I figured he had a gun," Gonzales said. "He wouldn't've been so all-fired cocksure of the game he was rollin', if he didn't have somethin' up his sleeve to win."

Gonzales had laid Ned's offer before them and while the gang was absorbed in the contemplation of that beautiful

little slug of metal, the chief was considering every angle of the proposed transaction. If he could be sure that Ned was still without a gun, the whole plan would be simple. All that was necessary would be to send a man up that canyon with the two prisoners, turn them over, get the gold hoard and then shoot down all three before any tricks could be played. But suppose the man had a gun. He had already shown himself a past master in the use of one. And to send some one up there to duel with him might be a very unpleasant experiment.

"I ain't acceptin' his terms," the chief said finally.

"But the gold——" Several of them urged in one voice.

"I know. I'm goin' to get that gold. Don't worry about that." He looked over his shoulder at the two prisoners, who were listening breathlessly to this whole conversation. Then he nodded to Gonzales, bidding him come behind a rock, where his plan would not be heard.

"You know what the ground looks like up there," he said in a low voice. "You just been there. You know just where the horses is at."

"Sure. She was tethered to a tree bole, and her foal——"

"Never mind the foal. It's the horse we want."

"If you think you can get that horse," Gonzales exclaimed, "you're crazy, chief. The hombre wouldn't go through with his game if he thought you was goin' to touch that cayuse!"

"I know he wouldn't. But he won't know! You say he's goin' to climb down the cliff so's to meet us halfway? Good. While he's doin' that you'll be creepin' up to the head of this here canyon, climb up to the rim of them cliffs, sneak along 'em, and get his horse. We'll give you plenty of time. Once we have his horse it don't matter what kind of tricks he plays. He can still keep the gold—and his prisoners, too. But a lot of good it will do him. The three of 'em without mounts would have a swell chance gettin' anywhere, while we was ridin' around on our ponies!"

"It sounds all right, chief, but——"

"But what?"

The other whimpered pleadingly. "I dassen't sneak up there."

"You're the dassentest coot that I ever had in my gang!" the chief exploded. "You start crawlin' through this brush now. Keep on the shady side of the canyon. Don't get in the moonlight once. They ain't a chanct in a thousand of his seein' you. Meanwhile, we'll take our time sendin' his two prisoners up. You got them two guns? All right now, git!"

The half-breed sneaked off, muttering and swearing. "Always pickin' on me for the worst jobs. A lot of call you have sendin' me every time. I'm through with this here gang as soon as I get my part of that swag. Tired of bein' the goat for a bunch of skunks. I'm through——"

The chief paid no attention to the growling of his disgruntled henchman. He knew that Gonzales would obey his command. The breed was a cowardly hombre, but that made him all the more valuable when it came to delicate tasks of this sort. He could crawl through the mesquite like a lizard, without rustling a twig. And although he was afraid of all men, all enemies, all danger, the man he feared most was his own leader.

Up there on the rim of the cliffs, Ned Carson waited. He had expected to wait some time while the outlaws conferred about his terms. But he began to be impatient with the length of time they were taking. There they were, down in the stream bed below him, huddled together in a group.

Their two prisoners were sitting in the sand a few yards away, erect, alert,

their heads inclined in a tense attitude of listening. At a farther distance was the bunch of saddle ponies, including the two stolen pack horses and Ned's own pinto. The cavy was under guard of an old *mozo*, who sat upon a rock, sending up puffs of smoke. In the dim moonlight Ned could discern the tiny spark of his cigarette. It looked like a firefly which had roved apart from the group of fireflies hanging about the hands of the huddled crowd.

The conference seemed to last forever. The men separated in groups of twos and threes, coming together intermittently to feast their eyes upon something which the smallest figure of the group held in his hand.

Ned paced up and down the rim in a fever of uncertainty. Would they accept his terms, or would they send an envoy and make terms of their own? Would they play some ruse upon him for the purpose of finding out whether or not he was armed? If they could satisfy themselves on that point, Ned knew that all negotiations would be over.

These were the thoughts that were torturing him, when abruptly the conference came to an end.

The prisoners were yanked to their feet, and the whole gang came waddling across the canyon. Ned could hear a distant, almost imperceptible, jingle of spurs. He could not recognize any individuals of the gang at that distance and in that light—except the dwarfish leader and the two bound prisoners.

Ned watched them, his heart pounding. Then when he saw the leader separate himself from the others and lead the two prisoners up the steeper slope of the cliff, he ran back to his horse.

In a clump of thick chaparral close to where he had tethered the calico mare, Ned had secreted the two precious bags. He yanked them from their temporary hiding place, dragged them across the sand toward the rim of the cliffs, and then looked down to see what was happening.

The cliffs sloped off below him, bare of any brush, and although there were huge patches of shadow, the moon glow from the surrounding expanse of quartz gave him sufficient light to see. The two prisoners were coming up a zigzag trail, with a single outlaw, the chief, behind them. When the trail grew steeper and it was no longer possible for them to walk, the outlaw cast off their bonds and, with his gun drawn, followed them at a safe distance.

As they came close to a point midway up the canyon wall, Ned threw over the first rawhide bag. It landed with a thud upon an outcropping ledge of rock thirty feet below. Throwing over the second bag, he climbed down the steep bank to reach the ledge below. He then began to drag the bags one at a time down a steep washout which led like a chute to another ledge some distance farther down. When he returned and repeated the process with the second bag, the prisoners and their guard were almost midway up the cliff.

Far down at its base a group of ragged men were waiting, their sombreros tipped back on their heads, their faces lifted up expectantly. They were watching this drama in an attitude of feverish eagerness.

They saw the man hurling those bags over the moonlit crest of the cliff. They saw him climbing down, and then dragging them along the narrow, rocky defile until he came out once more on a shelf of ground. They saw the two prisoners hastening their arduous climb when they were within sight of the man who had come to purchase their freedom. They saw their chief, with gun drawn, pause in the ascent and bark out an order.

"Throw down them bags! No talk, now, or I'll drill these two prisoners in the back." He was hiding behind the two prisoners as he said it. That, in

fact, was Spud Hazen's method of playing a game in which the odds were supposed to be fifty-fifty.

There was an instant of hesitation on the part of Ned Carson, as if he wanted to give the two prisoners just time enough to leap up on the ledge of rock beside him before surrendering the treasure. Then one of the bags came over the ledge, crashed down on a sloping bank of adobe far below, bounded off, rolled, and landed finally almost at the very feet of the gang of men waiting far below.

As it landed it burst. There was a shower of nuggets and tiny yellow pebbles—a small cloud of yellow dust that twinkled in a thousand faint sparks in the moonlight.

The second bag came hurtling over the cliff in the same fashion. And while it was still rolling over jagged rocks and humps of adobe, the chief turned and fled.

He came down the bank in big leaps like a frightened gorilla, sliding in a shower of sticks and stones and sand, then racing like mad down the gentler slope of the trail. He was a wild beast, gripped with a sudden fear for his life, fleeing down the steep descent, reckless of broken bones or a broken neck.

He got to the base of the cliffs barely a few seconds after that last bag had crashed to the canyon bottom and burst open.

And when he got there he found his henchmen hurling themselves upon that gold hoard like a pack of hungry wolves upon the carcass of a steer.

CHAPTER XIV.

LONGHORN LAUGHS.

ALL this time a man had been slinking through the shadows of the gulch, prowling up through the boulders and brush of a crevice that led to the rim, then creeping like a cautious coyote through the mesquite of the divide.

It was the half-breed, Gonzales, who had been sent to steal Ned Carson's horse.

He had taken a long time to perform this dangerous task. This was due partly to his cowardice and caution, partly to the fact that he had to wait until Ned Carson got out of the way. As soon as Carson climbed down over the edge of the cliff, disappearing in the dim shadows below, the breed emerged from a deep fissure of rock where he had hidden, and then headed straight for the calico mare.

He advanced as noiselessly as possible, rustling scarcely a twig as he crawled. He did not want to scare that mare before he was ready to leap upon her.

When he heard the sharp snarl of the chief midway down the canyon wall, he knew that the exchange of prisoners and gold was about to be effected. It was at this moment that he broke out of the mesquite and darted like a slim, black shadow toward that mare.

The mare had already caught his scent. But inasmuch as she was a wild horse, the scent of all human beings was alike to her. This new creature was of the same species as the one that had broken and ridden her. Naturally, she shied off when she saw him break through the brush. But her halter rope held fast, and before she knew it the man had her by the nose.

She circled about, whinnying to her foal to watch its step. Meanwhile, the man was fumbling with the knot by which the rope was tied to the tree bole.

A panic gripped his fingers. They fumbled. He heard a sound of hurried scrambling coming up over the cliff edge. The knot would not untie. Ned Carson had taken chances in tethering that precious horse.

And now just as a sombrero tip was poked over the rim rock, the half-breed grabbed his bowie knife and hacked frantically at the rope.

He did not pause to fire at the man

swinging over the rim of the cliff. He was in too much of a hurry. He leaped to the back of the circling mare, kicked his heels into her flanks, and headed off at a gallop. And as he fled, he turned and hurled a parting shot at the man running toward him.

The shot went wild, but the pursuer stopped in his tracks and ducked behind a rock.

Gonzales kept going. He crouched low over his horse's withers, confidently expecting a fusillade of lead to come ripping across his back.

But the fusillade did not come!

And that was the most astonishing thing that happened in this night of baffling mysteries. At least that was how it struck the panic-stricken breed as he galloped his horse along the flat top of the canyon rim. When he was out of six-gun range, however, and could analyze the situation without expecting to be riddled with shots, he did not think it was so astonishing after all. The man would have murdered him, there was no doubt about that, for Gonzales was stealing the most precious thing that a desert traveler possesses—his horse. But there was a very good reason for his not firing:

He did not have a gun!

Gonzales felt elation grip him when he made this discovery. It was the most satisfying discovery that he had ever made. He had been crawling like a reptile through the mesquite, in desperate fear for his life, and as he crawled he was armed with two loaded guns, while his enemy was without even a bowie knife to protect himself!

The irony of the situation irritated the breed. If he had only known the truth when he first came up that cliff to confer with Carson he could have put an end to the whole transaction right there. He could have taken this horse, and the gold as well! That entire hoard of gold nuggets would have been his, and his alone, whereas, now he would have to be content with whatever the avaricious Spud Hazen apportioned to him, as the "goat" of the outfit.

His irritation grew to anger, then to an insensate rage. Fate had played a trick on him. Or, rather, that wounded and exhausted hombre back there had played the trick.

Gonzales checked his galloping horse. It was easy to do, for the mare was beginning to worry about her foal anyway. She seemed to be possessed with a sudden desire to go back toward the tree bole where she had been a prisoner.

And Gonzales was possessed by the same desire. He let the mare have her way.

He headed back again, firmly resolved to find out how a disarmed and wounded man proposed to fight in the face of two loaded six-guns.

But as he turned back he heard a rather startling sound. It was a sound for which Hazen and his henchmen always kept their ears very delicately attuned—the sound of galloping hoofs.

It came from the direction of a washout which led up from one of the deep gulches below the divide.

Gonzales' natural deduction was that his companions had mounted their horses and were already riding up to the divide to recapture the prisoners they had given up. He headed straight for the washout, for it lay almost directly in his path. He did not propose to stop there, however. He wanted to commit murder first. The man he intended to murder was still behind the rock where he had crouched for protection when Gonzales fired at him.

And now the two prisoners had climbed up over the edge of the cliffs and upon a shout of warning from Ned Carson they dropped to the nearest cover.

"Looks like we're goin' to have a little show-down, hombre!" Gonzales called out in gleeful triumph. "Maybe

you'll have another trick card up your sleeve, and if you have, you better play it now, because the show-down's comin' fast." He made a wide circle about the rock, laughing uproariously as he rode. But then his laughter broke to a venomous snarl. "Thought you could trick me, did you! Trick 'Longhorn' Gonzales, who's pretty slick at sharpshootin' hisself, when he has a mind! Two guns in my hands—see? Six shots for you for trickin' me out of that gold. And six for the kid over there—because he's a white man. And as for the señorita—I take her down to the chief. Maybe the chief will give Longhorn a good slice of the swag for what he is about to do right here and now——"

He fired, and Ned Carson felt the loud *ping* of the slug flattening itself against the boulder.

Ned leaped like a jack rabbit for the protection of an adjacent rock. There he was, on hands and knees, at the mercy of an armed horseman who was circling about him, guffawing at his helplessness, deliberately taking his time. The breed enjoyed this game so much that he seemed loath to finish it.

The girl and her brother were standing waist-deep in the mesquite, looking with horror upon this scene. Their protector was about to be shot down like a dog. The boy picked up a rock and hurled it with all his might at the laughing horseman.

The rock caught the mare on the flank, and she whirled, going off in a series of buck jumps. When her rider got her under control again, he headed her back, transferring his attention from Ned Carson to the rash boy.

"Oh, so you're settin' in on this showdown, too, little hombre!" he snarled. "Well, maybe I'd better finish you first!"

The boy dropped to the ground and flattened himself out, just as a slug zipped through his sombrero tip. The girl sank to her knees, and as the killer galloped up toward them she clung, screaming, to her brother. The brother shoved her away. "Let him finish me first, sis! Glad of it! Couldn't bear to see him murder that poor——"

He did not complete what he wanted to say. He was about to die with a word of praise for Ned Carson on his lips. But just then something happened. A murder was accomplished.

But it was not the murder that the frenzied Gonzales or his three helpless victims expected.

CHAPTER XV.

UNITED.

THE Boss of Skull Mesa led his remuda of wild horses across the alkaline plain and headed up into the nearest canyon at a gallop. He had a well-founded conviction that he would find his calico mare somewhere in this little range of mesas—not in the gulches, but high up on the flat stretches. For there are two things a wild horse loves—the high country, and the free horizon.

When he climbed up the steep banks of that gulch toward a divide, he caught the scent of a band of horses. They were the Mexican plugs that belonged to the bandits, and their scent was anything but pleasant in the delicate nostrils of the desert king.

It was the scent of horses mingled with the scent of man—a combination that was inherently distasteful to the wild stallion. In his philosophy, men and horses did not mix well. They should never be together. He had always found that the mares in his brood which had transgressed this rule were only makeshift personalities. They lacked something that characterized the wild, desert-bred mustangs. A horse that has lived among men is not a horse at all, but a plug. Perhaps his own calico mare was down there in that miserable company!

The Boss raced along the crest of the

divide, his black mane tossing in the desert wind, his remuda trailing along behind him in a rhythmic crescendo of galloping hoofs.

But before he got to the rim of the gulch from whence that scent of plugs and derelict men drifted up to him, he came to a sudden stop, sliding to his haunches as if some unseen rider had curbed him in with a violent yank. His search was over. Off there, perilously close to the edge of the cliffs, he saw his beloved calico!

It would have been an ecstatic moment—this culmination of his frenzied hunt for his lost consort—except that there were complicating circumstances. The Boss experienced not ecstasy, but a demoniacal rage.

A miserable wretch with puny arms, ragged clothes, and a head topped by something that looked like half a barrel cactus, was actually riding his mare! And the unspeakable part of it all was that she was not even buckjumping! She was actually submitting to his yanking her head about, kicking her flanks, and barking at her like a coyote.

A shot rang out. It was the call of man, which of all sounds struck terror into the Boss' soul. But this time terror had no grip upon him. Besides, the tongue of flame did not leap out toward him. It darted at something lying on the ground.

The Boss' ears flattened back. His eyes rolled. His nostrils sniffed in fury as he took in deep whiffs of that hated scent—the scent of men, of human blood, and of powder!

He galloped into a shallow arroyo and raced up the opposite side, crashing through mesquite, leaping over big boulders, thundering along the crest of the divide.

The human wretch was whirling his calico mare about, waving his arms, and once more spitting a white stream of fire.

The two shots had warned the wild remuda to stay back. But the Boss himself came on.

His victim turned about just in time to see the giant horse leap toward him over a boulder. There was the picture of a black stallion standing on his hind feet; of a man holding up one arm to protect his head from the forestriking hoofs; of the bark of a gun belching a streak of fire and lead which cut harmlessly into the wind-tossed mane.

Then the forestriking hoofs came down. The man fell to the earth. The hoofs descended again, like sledge hammers, like the stamps in a mill crushing a chunk of ore.

A moment later two men and a woman, crouching low behind the boulders, saw an abrupt change come over the giant stallion. He had loomed up before them, a massive black shadow, the incarnation of rage and power. But now his arched neck came down and he thrust forth his head, curving it back and casting a proud glance toward his mare. His flattened ears pricked up, his mouth opened in a gentle whinny.

The mare was standing a little way off in the mesquite, rubbing her nose against a foal. It was as if she were pretending that she was not interested in the stallion's exhibition.

The black horse neighed again, then swung about and reached the mare in two leaps. He gave her a nip on the neck, probably intending to impress upon her the fact that she had caused him no end of trouble. But the mare interpreted the act for what it actually was—a love bite.

The Boss wheeled off again, raced along the crest of the divide, and started rounding up his scattered brood. The mare and the foal raced after him.

Ned Carson was the first to come from cover. He ran to the heap of bones and clothes lying out there in the sand, extracted one gun from the holster, and groped around in the brush for the other.

"Hey, there, kid!" he called to the girl's brother. "Come over here!"

The youth obeyed.

"Did that slug get you?" Ned asked.

The boy's face was white. The scene he had witnessed had shocked him. But he pulled himself together and said: "I felt the shot go through my sombrero. Thought I was a dead man——"

"So did I," Ned said quickly. "But if you can fight——"

"Sure I can fight. Give me one of them gats."

Ned loaded both guns from the dead man's cartridge belt.

"You aren't going down to fight that gang!" the girl exclaimed. "How much more bloodshed——"

"We've got to have horses to get out of this desert," Ned interrupted. "Don't worry now, little woman. We've got 'em easy!" He turned to the brother. "You attack 'em from the upper end of the gulch, see, kid? I'll crawl up on 'em from the lower end. And then—bingo!"

"Count on me to get six of 'em!" the brother said eagerly. "You stay up here, sis, and watch the obsequies."

Then the two men separated, prowling along the rim of the gulch in opposite directions and each seeking a brush-filled draw by which to descend.

CHAPTER XVI.

BETTER THAN GOLD.

DOWN in the bed of the canyon a gang of men were huddled together over the spilled hoard. In the moonlight the scattered dust gleamed in the patches of sand, and smoldered among the stones and sage sticks like the embers of a fire. The sight worked the outlaws into a frenzy. They clawed at the ground, sweeping up the nuggets, scooping piles of sand into their pockets, elbowing each other out of the way, threatening, snarling like beasts.

"Now, wait a minute!" the voice of their chief snapped out. "What you think this is? A bunch of Mex kids scramblin' for pennies! This swag gets divied up the way I say. You snivelin' coyotes dump the stuff outa your pockets, or you'll get dumped yourselves. Heap it altogether out here on this flat rock. And if I find a grain of dust in any of your clothes you get drilled!"

"Come on, men," one of the older renegades said placatingly. "Let the chief divide it. They's enough here for us all. Every man of us is rich from this night on."

This seemed to calm the crowd for a moment. They came to their senses. It would not be wise, after what their chief had said, to be found with any nuggets or dust. They knew Spud Hazen.

"One nugget to each man and we could go on a year's toot!" one of them said hilariously.

"And they's twenty nuggets to each," another said. "I'm through with trailin' in these here bad lands! Mexico for me!"

"Frisco for me!" another cried. "I'm goin' to buy a ship and sail around the world. I'm goin' to have water around me for the rest of my days. No more alkali!"

"That goes for me, too," another roared. "Come on, chief! Give me my fortune!"

It was at the climax of their frenzied revelry that they heard the shooting up on the rim of the canyon.

Every man stood up, his head cocked, his hand to his holster.

"Gonzales—he's in trouble!" some one said.

"That makes one less!" another laughed. "Come on, chief—my fortune!"

"We'd better get out of here, good and pronto!" the chief said. "With a gold hoard like this, them varmints up there won't take their lickin' any too easy."

"Most like Gonzales is dumpin' all three of them," one of the gang suggested. "He's a slick one—that breed!"

"Too slick to stop for a gun fight," another objected.

"It wasn't a gun fight," some one said confidently. "It was an execution. Gonzales finished 'em."

"He's only fired twice," an old man objected.

"That proves it was an execution. He killed the two men and he's took the girl prisoner."

"Let's hurry up, chief," another cried. "Give me my fortune and leave me get out of this."

Spud Hazen was separating the dust and nuggets into little piles. The men stood around, their heads craned forward. For a moment they forgot the problematical adventure of their companion, Gonzales. If he came late, that was his lookout. If he got dumped, that was his lookout also.

"All right, Suggs, you get this pile. This is yourn, Pedro. And these piles gets dealt to 'Crafty,' 'Snort' Williams, Tondo, 'Bimbo'——" The chief named them all. "You got it straight? All right, then, come on, we're linin' out of this place good and pronto!"

The horses had been kept on the other side of the gulch, and they were still under the care of an old *mozo*. But as the last man finished stuffing his pockets with the gold, the *mozo* leaped to one of the horses and came galloping across the stream bed.

The chief thought that the old fellow had become impatient concerning his part of the swag, and had suddenly forsaken his post.

"Why in tarnation are you leavin' your post, 'Black Jack'!" he cried. "Get down offn that horse, or I'll blow you off!"

"Somethin's happenin' out there on the plain, chief!" the old man yelled: "We're tricked. They's a posse there. Heard 'em gallopin' their horses like mad. A big band of horsemen, fifty if they was one, or I'm a caterwopous Injun!"

This announcement threw the gang into a panic. It was a big jump to make in their excited minds—a jump from a life of imagined luxury to a fight with a posse.

The chief said nothing in answer to the dreadful news. He started out like a scared rabbit, leaping over boulders and brush, and heading for the horse cavy. His gang stampeded after him like a bunch of terrified steers.

As soon as the chief got within a few yards of the first horse, a shot rang out, sending a series of echoes from one rock wall to the other. Another shot followed. It sounded like a Gatling gun. The chief fell. The man racing along behind him stumbled over the prostrate body, lurched to the sand, and remained there. The cavy was thrown into a stampede almost equalling the panic of their renegade masters. They went clattering up the gulch, and the outlaws turned, racing to head them off.

As they plunged toward the upper end of the canyon two more shots barked out, and the two men in the lead dropped in their tracks.

The rest stopped. Their mounts went stampeding on to the upper reach of the canyon, leaving their masters out there in the stream bed, caught between two fires.

A dreadful fear gripped the bandits. A posse must have come. Its members had separated and entered the gulch from each end. The horses which the old *mozo* had heard were probably the mounts of one detachment being ridden off to cover. And now the outlaws were caught, believing confidently that a crowd of men were crawling through the brush from both sides.

One or two headed off for the side of the gulch, with the frantic hope of climbing up to the rim. But as the foremost reached the cliffs and started

scrambling up a steep trail, a shot barked out from somewhere in the thick brush, and he fell, hurtling down the slope.

The man directly behind him, knowing full well that he would be next if he took another step upward, stood stock-still. He was in the open, exposed to the view of every man in the gulch bed. Wisely enough, he threw his gun to the ground and lifted both hands.

His companions, scattered through the brush of the stream bed, saw plainly enough that this gesture had saved him from immediate execution. His presence of mind, standing still and lifting his hands, seemed like a Heaven-sent inspiration.

The whole gang followed his example.

"Every man who don't want to be killed on the spot, walk down into yon open space of sand!"

Gonzales, the breed, if he had been alive, might have recognized that voice.

Spud Hazen, the chief, lying off there in the brush, mortally wounded, did recognize it, and he uttered a doleful cry. But what he said could not be understood by the others. It sounded merely like the last groan of a dying man.

None of the others knew that it was Ned Carson who was assuming the power of sheriff, of a leader of an imaginary posse. They obeyed the command.

"Stand in line out yonder, and keep clawin' the air!"

A few ragged scarecrows formed themselves into an awkward squad.

"All right, kid. You keep 'em covered, while I find out if they're totin' any hidden weapons."

Ned came toward the line of prisoners, and for the first time they realized what had happened. They had been cornered, not by a posse, but by two men!

"They've thrown their guns away," Ned called out triumphantly as he examined them. "But every man jack of 'em has his pockets bulgin' with gold nuggets!"

"Make 'em cough up, pard!" the boy cried excitedly. "We'll weigh the stuff, and if they's a grain of it lost they'll pay with their lives! Mind what I say!"

"Plenty of time for that!" Ned laughed. "What we need now is a reata so's we can hitch 'em back to back."

"I'll get you a reata, pard. The horses have all herded themselves up yonder at the end of the gulch. We got all the horses we need for to ride home."

"All right; go get 'em. But don't scare 'em," Ned said. "My pinto's up there with them, and he's been scared enough for one night."

A little later the boy returned with the cavy of saddle mounts, Ned's pinto, and the two old pack horses. He then helped Ned bind the prisoners; each man's arms were secured tightly behind his back. It was not until this had been accomplished that they waved to some one up on the canyon rim.

The girl had seen the whole capture from the opening shot. She came down the steep trail which she had climbed a short while before. It was the trail down which those bags of gold had been rolled; the trail up which the chief had climbed to consummate the barter. It was a steep, rocky trail, which had been the scene of woe, of double crossing, of trickery—a trail of misfortune. But now as the girl traveled it, she came down singing.

While she was on her way down her brother turned to Ned Carson. "Pard," he said, "me and the little girl yonder owe a heap lot to you for what you've done. I'd admire to have you belong to this little outfit. And to make you feel you're a real partner, why, I'm goin' to give you anything you ask, up to half my share of the gold."

"That's right generous of you," Ned replied. "But all I'm askin' for is that

you stay here and mind these prisoners while I run up yonder and meet that little girl!"

He was gone before the brother could reply.

He reached the base of the cliffs just as the girl finished the descent.

They ran to each other, arms outstretched.

"We've captured what's left of 'em, girl," Ned Carson announced jubilantly. "And we've got horses to pack us out —and we've got your nuggets."

"The nuggets belong to you!" she answered, her eyes suddenly brimming with tears. "All my share is yours—and it isn't half enough to reward you for what you've done!"

Perhaps that gold hoard could be deemed a just payment for Ned Carson's heroism, but he did not accept it. He wanted something else. And as the girl threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, he had a premonition that he was going to receive a reward worth more than all the gold in the world.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Spotted Sandpiper

(Actitis macularia)

TRIPPING along the shore, nervously jerking this way and that, runs the spindle-legged spotted sandpiper. All over the smooth, hard sand may be seen the tracks of this bird. He is fairly tame for all his nervousness, allowing one to approach within a few feet without taking alarm. His eyes are far too bright to let anything escape his notice or come too near for his own safety.

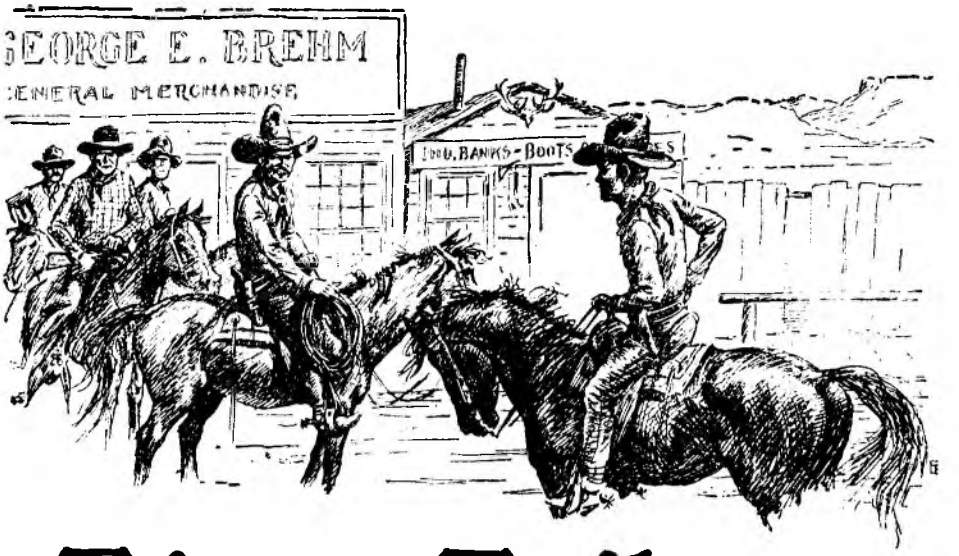
Not only on the beaches and long, sandy stretches, but also in swamps and salt marshes, in wet farmlands, and tiny pools, this particular breed of sandpiper is found. He is fond of travel and stays but a short time in one place, perhaps only long enough to start a nestful of young sandpipers on their way in life. The Northern States may entice the sandpipers to stay until October, but seldom do they return to these haunts until the first of the following May. In the meantime, they are bobbing and jerking over the marshes and sands of the West Indies, Venezuela, and Mexico.

The young sandpiper of this species is dressed in the youthful attire of plain brown and white, not taking the spots of its parents' garb until later. Brown spots not only decorate the white breast of the adult birds but also the back, head, and tail.

During the last of May the spotted sandpiper selects for its home a suitable spot under some thick foliage or in a tuft of coarse grass. Even if the site is not particularly well protected, the grayish-brown back of the mother bird covers the eggs and adequately blends with the earth so that only by careful observation can she be seen, unless the intruder walks close to the nest, which will frighten the mother bird sufficiently to cause her to fly from her charge with sharp cries of distress. The eggs are usually four in number and rather large considering the size of the bird. They are of a creamy-white, spotted plentifully with brown.

When an enemy approaches after the young are hatched, the parents will droop a wing and appear to be wounded in order to attract attention from their young. A number of birds use this trick, however, so it cannot be specially attributed to the spotted sandpiper.

Not only does the sandpiper feed upon aquatic insects, like the rest of his tribe, but since he inhabits fields and other moist pasture lands, his diet includes locusts and grasshoppers. For this reason the farmer is greatly indebted to him.



Trigger Trailers

By George Gilbert

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

HARDY THAMES and Claus Winston are rivals. Both are sure shots, but Thames has a mean nature. At an all-round shooting match, Claus' injured finger prevents his competing, but Thames excels. However, to his chagrin, he is beaten by Lucille "Frank" Brisette, a girl from the Cow Thief range. Her bridle rein breaks and she falls, but is unhurt. The rein seems to have been burned by acid.

Thames' follower, Griston, notes that his chief avoids the subject and that he carefully rubs his hands in the earth. The prizes awarded, the crowd disperses to celebrate. Thames rallies his discomfited band, hinting at a possible mix-up later with the outlawed Cow Thief crowd.

Winston's lasso rope has been taken by Thames. Warned by Sheriff Cadwold that no private shooting must mar the festival day, Claus contents himself with telling Thames that his rope must be returned by sundown.

CHAPTER V.

"THEY'RE COW THIEVES!"

BACK toward town the crowd went, the major part of it. Some outfits were to camp at the shooting grounds for the night before returning to distant ranches; others at once started for their homes. The afternoon had pretty well worn away in the pleasures and excitements of the shooting match. Thames kept his cronies with him and let the townward movement get well under way before he started. He kept slyly counseling some sort of vengeance upon the Cow Thief crowd, pointing out their bad reputation as an incitement thereto:

"Look at that girl! She an amateur? Then I'm General Custer. She is some ringer they've worked in onto us and used t' trim us," he blustered; "no actual, back-range girl is goin' t' come out of her hole of a sudden and shoot that a way, boys. She's a trained professional, that's what she is. She's a ringer. Why, she did things Annie Oakley never did."

"I think breakin' that bridle was just a trick t' get sympathy," Griston backed up his chief. "It made it look hard for her, but it got her the sympathy of

the crowd. I think Thames had the verdict before that."

Thames answered his leering wink.

This was received with approval by the disgruntled losers. Thames' friends had been so hard hit financially that they were willing to believe almost anything against his conqueror. They had prepared for the match with the idea that Thames would shoot against Claus Winston, and when he had been pitted against and lost to a girl, it had cut them to the bone.

Thames had his guns in a leather case, tied to his saddle, the light rifle in his hand, and the big rifle in his saddle scabbard. Late comers toward town passed the crowd hurriedly, calling back humorous references to Thames having lost to a girl. These remarks did not assist Thames any in keeping his temper. And now, too, some one reminded him that Claus Winston had said that his "borrowed" rope must be returned by sundown.

Once in town the Thames band scattered, under instructions to mix with the crowd and stir up feeling against the Cow Thief folks as much as possible. Old rumors, Thames told them, were to be revamped, and hints cast that the more recent lawless acts in that region must have been committed by the Cow Thief crowd, or at least by some of the hard characters that made their place a hangout in passing through that section.

The Cow Thief contingent enjoyed the ride back to town. Lucy was the center of admiration. Sheriff Cadwold rode with her, with Old Brisette at his side. The citizens generally mingled with the Cow Thief clan on even terms. Once Lucy managed to get her uncle aside and whispered to him as she leaned over in her saddle:

"Isn't it better this a way, than to have every one scowling at the Cow Thief crowd?"

"Sure is, but will it last, Lucy? This is a holiday and they have let all bars down. To-morrow those old stories about us will be revived and then Cow Thief folks won't be welcome in this man's town. Yo' ain't lived with us only a few months and don't understand what we're up against."

A cloud of disappointment went over the face of the girl. Then riders drifted between the old man with the harsh features and big beard, and the slender, beautiful girl of magic trigger-fingers and steady nerve.

The Cow Thief crowd all bunched for a moment in the town's center. Admiring knots of folk wanted another look at Lucy. People who had started later from the shooting grounds were streaming past. It was rumored that there would be a dance in the open, with a Mexican orchestra hastily assembled. No dance had been planned, but the town's leaders, sensing that it would give a pleasing, neighborly finish to the successful shooting match, decided upon it in a hurry and unanimously appointed Sheriff Cadwold master of ceremonies.

"Be a nice moon," the official said; "that orchestra can play under the gallery of the Golden Horn Ho-tel. Every one welcome." This last to Old Brisette.

"All right, we'll stay," Brisette announced, for his party.

"And no funny plays," Cadwold warned in a loud voice: "any one that starts any will have t' reckon with me. Any one that draws a gun will have t' talk t' me afterward."

Just then Thames and his crowd clattered by. The former leaned over as he passed Winston, who was at the edge of the Cow Thief group. Thames patted the coil of rope on his saddle and laughed at Winston. Claus seemed not to mind, but he looked toward the sun, yet an hour high, and smiled.

"I guess yo' run a bluff onto him then," Griston remarked.

"Ye-ah," agreed Thames.

"Cadwold has ordered no rough stuff t'night, and Winston has given out cold that he wants that rope. If he starts anything, he jams with Cadwold, who is the law; if he doesn't start, he's marked as a yallow-back," another of Thames' followers summed it up, as they drew up a little farther down the street. "His havin' a sprained finger may let him out, though."

"Winston won't stop for that," Thames replied; "he's plumb foolish that a way, Appleton." Unlike Griston, this man had a jaw like a rock and his eyes were hard as agate. He was known as one of the town's hard characters.

They now scattered, as ordered. Appleton and Griston remained with Thames, who continued to loaf about the town's center. The coiled rope at his saddle horn he patted or rearranged from time to time, so that people could take note that he still had the "borrowed" rope. Thames' temper was growing more and more ugly as the time passed. Cow Thief men went by him from time to time and each one grinned knowingly. Lucy had disappeared, whisked into the home of one of the town's old-time frontier housewives, with Ace Burdelle and Clel Mullins hanging about the door, each hoping to claim the promised dance from the belle of the outlands. Lucy had managed to let each think he was due for at least one dance with her on the moonlit street of the town that night.

Claus Winston was nowhere to be seen. The sun was sinking well toward the horizon by now. Thames' friends were coming back to center, glancing about, looking for signs of coming trouble. Appleton now had taken the lead among the backers of Thames, directing them in a campaign they now began, with the idea of slandering the Cow Thief clan. As they went here and there they dropped the word:

"It's all right maybe t' let in range wolves for a day of fun, and no questions asked, but this keepin' them all night and makin' common cause with them against settled citizens is too much. After all, they're only a lot of cow thieves, and that's whatever."

These sly hints found many echoes in the hearts of townsmen who had had their wallets pretty well flattened because the slim girl from Cow Thief had defeated the town's best fancy gun artist, and the Thames crowd kept up their work of irritation, while Thames himself rode about town, backed by Griston and Appleton, with the "borrowed" rope on his saddle.

The sun now seemed to be right at the horizon.

"I guess that about fades Winston," Appleton remarked, pointing toward the sinking luminary. They were before the Golden Horn now. Cadwold was not in sight. A great many people had disappeared, but there still remained a large number of townsmen of the Thames persuasion in view. Thames leaned over and patted the coiled rope that he held as the gage of his seeming victory over Winston, and as he did so he grinned meanly:

"Ye-ah, I guess that about does fade him."

"That's his coyote now," warned Griston.

Sure enough, from between two buildings came the nippy-stepping coyote of Claus Winston. At once every one became very still. Claus held the coyote well in hand, and he rode quietly toward Thames. Griston and Appleton ranged behind their leader, who sat at ease on his bay, his teeth bared in a wolf grin.

The sun touched the horizon and rode, a red ball, peering like a fiery eye down the length of the main street. Somewhere a gamecock in a barn crowed and a dog barked, ending his barking in a strident howl as when a

hound hints that death is near in a lonely homestead clearing.

Claus held his coyote steadily on. Thames continued to watch his every move. His two pals in the background waited for the break. Their ponies were backed around till they faced the street's center and that put their backs to the crowded front of the hotel. They heard a hoarse growl from behind:

"Winston and Thames plays this—alone."

It was Old Brisette's voice.

"Understand?"

They nodded and let their hands fall idle by their sides.

Now the coyote was right opposite the bay. Slowly, Claus kneed him around till he faced Thames' horse, which stood with his hindquarters to the setting sun. Thames watched Claus' hands, which were held high over the horn, the reins in both. Claus had one gun on, in a high-placed holster tightly strapped on the left side.

"It's sundown, Thames," Claus challenged ringingly.

"And I still got th' rope," Thames gloated, and in his exultation he could not resist reaching over to pat the coiled strand.

There seemed no danger. Claus' best hand was out of it, due to the injury to his right trigger-finger. Behind Thames were his two friends, ready to act in a pinch, he thought. So he made a bit of bravado out of his defiance. He felt perfectly secure in this. There was Cadwold to be reckoned with, too.

He glanced at Claus.

That holster had swung up; Claus had his hand, as if by magic on the butt of that high-hung gun. The end of the holster was open.

"I'll take my rope," Claus spoke, low and clear.

Thames stiffened in his saddle.

"I guess yo——"

"It's sundown—yo'r last unless yo' hand me that rope."

The eye of the sun seemed to wink and some warmth departed as the fiery ball touched the earth's rim far out of the west.

A chill struck at Thames' heart.

In the eyes of Claus was a steely recklessness.

"Cadwold said——"

"I ain't depending on him," Claus flung back. "Yo' needn't."

Not a sound came from the men behind Thames. The gamecock crowed out in the barn; the dog howled again, and yet again, and the sunlight seemed to diminish. The chill grew in the heart of Thames. That open-end holster hypnotized him. It was a trick he had used in killing. Claus had an edge that he could not overcome, Thames figured. Slowly, he reached his hand down, lifted the rope, and handed it over. As Claus took it in his right hand, a sigh went over the crowd. The cock crowed again. Thames hung his head. Claus held the rope in his right hand. Some one whispered that Cadwold was coming back.

"What's goin' on he'e?" the sheriff demanded.

"Thames has been givin' me back this rope," Claus answered mildly. "Haven't yo', Thames?"

Thames did not reply. One of his friends roared from the hotel front:

"Winston held him up with a gun and forced him t' give it up."

"Didn't I say that any man that drew a gun t'night had t' answer t' me?" Cadwold demanded.

"I done heard yo'," Claus replied smilingly; "I didn't draw no gun, and I haven't any gun."

"He drew a gun, sure he did," the man at the hotel repeated excitedly; "we all saw him."

Griston and Appleton ventured a look around. Griston said:

"And Old Brisette horned in, too; said *we* mustn't horn in."

Brisette was a long way behind them.

He had nimbly stepped back as soon as Cadwold appeared.

Cadwold turned toward the bearded old-timer:

"How is this, Brisette?"

"I never horned in. I spoke t' a friend he'e and said that Thames and Winston would play it out alone, which they did."

Cadwold was baffled there. A friend to whom Brisette appealed nodded that this statement was correct.

"If those horned toads misunderstood what I said t' a friend, how'm I t' blame?" Brisette asked in his mildest voice.

"Winston held Thames up t' get the rope," Griston insisted, now that he was sure there would be no Cow Thief bullets coming from the rear.

Cadwold looked to Winston, who smiled as he said:

"I never drew a gun on him."

"Yo' threatened me by pointing that gun at me, in the holster, and every one knows that a man can be killed by shootin' through the open end of a holster," Thames insisted.

"How about that, Claus?" Cadwold demanded, his eyes holding those of the young rancher.

"Yo' said no one was t' draw a gun or shoot. I didn't draw a gun or shoot."

"But yo' made a bluff and——"

"It worked," Claus interrupted with quiet force.

Thames' face clouded with greater wrath still. It seemed as if the purple veins on his forehead would burst.

"But," spluttered Cadwold, "yo' ran on the rope against my express orders."

"I didn't shoot, I didn't draw a gun."

"But yo' went through the motions," Thames sent back.

"Yes, and motions got yo' buffaloed. Lookit this weapon."

Claus jerked the thing from the holster.

It was only the butt of a gun; the barrel was gone; the cylinder missing. It consisted of butt, part of the frame, and hammer.

"Borrowed it from Matt, the gunsmith; he used a lot of the parts makin' repairs on old guns," Claus drawled. "Not much of a gun, but enough for friend Thames."

A great laugh swept over the crowd. The booming of the Cow Thief laughter dominated all. Thames' friends hung their heads.

Darkness settled suddenly, it seemed. The sun had gone.

"Thanks for obligin' me," Claus said pointedly to Thames. "I'm all caught up for now."

And he rode slowly away, whistling as he went.

Caldwold began to laugh. He turned away, too. The joke was too good to follow by official action.

Thames and his friends gathered in a knot down the street, discussing the incident angrily. It had put them all down a peg, along with their leader. Now, more than ever, Thames urged, they must circulate among the town people and urge upon them the undesirability of Cow Thief society.

"We've got t' do something t' get even," Thames urged. "We cain't let all these blazers be run onto us and not come back. Prime them all up against the Cow Thief gang. Just keep remindin' folks that they're cow thieves and not t' be trusted. I think something will bust loose t'night that will prove it, too."

CHAPTER VI.

"WHERE IS CADWOLD?"

MYSTICALLY wonderful, the full moon came up with serene face to peer down on the frontier town all ready for the impromptu fiesta. Tawny hair and dark was waved and beribboned, combed and coiled, for the adornment of women strong and beautiful. Best shirts and boots and other togs were donned by range and townsmen. The

women and girls put on their best apparel. By common consent, all "hardware" was removed and left in the public room of the Golden Horn, where the proprietor, Nate Percy, an old-time cowman, issued checks for it and kept it in order. The big safe in the office of the hotel swung open its doors and closed them on many a goodly roll of bills, or pouch of hard money, left, with other valuables, in that common deposit box. There was no bank in the town. Merchants kept valuables for people, and the Golden Horn accommodated all who cared to put their stuff in envelopes, indorse them, and leave them. The hotel, according to the custom, accepted no responsibility; it merely acted as caretaker, pro tempore. Thames did not put his guns with the other weapons; he left them where he had his horse stabled, near the Golden Horn.

On a hastily improvised platform, six Mexicans strummed mandolins and guitars effectively. A fiddle, and a horse fiddle or double bass, were coming later. People began to stroll about, after satisfying their hunger, enjoying, in anticipation, the pleasures of the night.

Thames and his followers had about vanished. Their poison remained, however, for many townsmen were keeping away from the Cow Thief contingent. Claus Winston still chummed around with the Cow Thief folks, keeping pretty close to Jason Brisette, who, in turn, managed to be wherever Lucy Frank Brisette happened to be. Old Brisette viewed this emulation in squiring complacently. Sheriff Cadwold twitted him on it good naturedly:

"Look-it that drawlin' Texas boy buildin' right up t' that shootin' star, Brisette. Better look out, or there'll be sparks flyin'."

"Oh, our Lucy can take ca'e o' herse'f, sheriff."

"Sure, she can; but how about those two gamecocks shinin' up t' one pretty pullet?"

"Well, we Brisettes have a proverb: 'Every gent looks after his own.' If that Texas boy that's strayed out in this region can take care of himse'f all right; if he cain't, all right. Same with Jason."

They were on a bench close to an open space reserved for those who wished to watch the dance that was to come later. "Bull" Terk passed and called a greeting to Cadwold, who remarked:

"Better get rid of that concession money and other loose change yo've been carryin' for the committee, Bull."

"I'm putting it in the Golden Horn safe right now; on my way."

He passed importantly. It was a big day for Bull, and it would be a bigger night when he began to call off the dances.

The twanging of the mandolins and guitars had dropped to a crooning waltz of old Spain. The moon was in full view.

The sheriff, wise and canny, leaned forward and tapped Old Brisette's knee for attention:

"Brisette?"

"Shoot."

"Why wouldn't it be a good thing if yo' could come into town this a way every night? Let that nice girl have a chance at home society, instead of being a sort of wild-wood princess t' yo'r lot of hide-outs."

Brisette breathed deep.

"Well, that's straight from the shoulder. And it agrees with what she says herse'f."

"The girl's got sense, savvy, and sagaciousness."

"Sure. Well, Cadwold, I'm not entirely free."

"Old habits cling. The'e's nothin' on the books against yo'-all. Been a lot of talk. I can get word passed that yo're all right and all that talk will die down. I don't want t' have t' organize a posse some day and go around shootin' at yo'-

all. Lookit Jason, what a whale of a man he's got t' be! Why waste him for buzzard meat some time? Folks cain't buck the law forever."

"Let the law let us alone, then!" exclaimed Brisette peevishly.

"Yes, that might do, but——"

"Cadwold, yo're white. Yo're sworn t' uphold the law. I wouldn't think anything of yo' if yo' didn't do yo'r part as a man. Is that square?"

"Sure."

"Yo've not noticed anything wrong with us in the past year?"

"No, not since Harson Brisette went off into the Panhandle and got shot up, with his sons, when that train holdup was tried out."

"I'm not squawkin' on my brother and his sons. But I'll say that gun fight over in the Panhandle did us other Brisettes a service. I wouldn't deny my brother and his big sons refuge when they came in from time t' time. I'd give shelter t' any one that came and no questions asked. That's the old Western code, ain't it?"

"Sure."

"Well, I'm not sayin' a word. Our Lucy isn't our near kin. But since she came, we've pulled down a lot. I'm not sayin' we're perfect yet."

"Things keep happening, though. Nothin' we can prove on yo' it's true."

"That's just it. Things keep happening. We're blamed. That's why I'm hangin' out here, with our hard-fisted crowd. When this baile's over and Lucy's had her fun, we'll drift again, over onto Cow Thief. Let the law keep off our doorstep. I'm not botherin' the law and I don't aim t' have it bother me any."

"Yo've never paid taxes. So yo' cain't get good title t' that good Cow Thief range in a way that yo' could sell it."

"It ain't settled which county we're in," defiantly. "And we carry guns that make our title clear, if it's questioned."

"I'm goin' t' send a deputy over t' collect on a year or two back taxes. Judge Atherton will fix an order canceling the rest, if yo' recognize jurisdiction and come in and be good. Think it over."

"Those back taxes been runnin' till we were afraid they'd eat us up if we recognized jurisdiction. I'll think that part over."

"All right. Yo'd better come in out of the wet. I've got a tip that there'll be a clean-up of all hide-out men and hard-boiled outfits next year, with the Rangers on the job. Yo' know what that means."

"That straight, sheriff?"

"Surest thing! The governor's tipped all the old-time sheriffs off on that play. Big move on by business interests t' bring in investors in range lands and stock. It'll mean a big boom, but the money men hang off, because we've got a bad name for lawlessness yet. Why, Brisette, that big Cow Thief range that yo' claim would fotch a fortune, if proved up proper and got free of all back-tax tangles and the like. Yo'd have enough for every man jack t' have a small ranch, well stocked, too. Better than ridin' around and gettin' shot up tryin' t' rob a train or blow a bank, I'm a-tellin' yo'."

The wise old sheriff ceased his talk. There was silence for the moment.

The Mexicans were looking for a new inspiration before tuning up again. A dog barked, and a mule brayed. Heels, hitting the side of a box stall in the hotel barn, told of a horse working off temper or exuberance of spirits. Old Brisette sighed.

"Thanks, sheriff. Yo've spoken like a man."

"When this baile's over, yo' get yo'r votin' irons again and ride. No one molests yo'."

"Thanks; we're trustin' yo'."

Lucy strolled by, on the arm of Claus Winston. Her face, turned up to him in

the bright moonlight, glowed with the full glory of radiant, womanly perfection. Her dress was a simple white silk, and in her coronet braid of tawny hair was a white rose. White slippers twinkled as she walked. Claus was talking in low, eager tones. Not far behind them Jason Brisette strolled. The grizzled chief of the wild clan bade him sit down beside Cadwold.

"Jason, the sheriff says we'd oughta put off our war paint and recognize jurisdiction on taxes and come in and be good."

Jason tilted his chair back and hooked his thumbs into his belt:

"Man t' man?"

"Yes, square-shootin' he is."

Jason rocked on the legs of his chair a moment, then he said:

"I was born outside the law and I'd rather remain out."

"That's an honest answer, but it won't save yo'," Cadwold reminded him rather sharply.

"No, Jason, it won't," the old leader agreed. "We'll talk this over later, and I'll tell yo' what-all else he said."

"Talk don't hurt any," said Jason, starting after Claus and Lucy.

"Yo' see what I've got on my hands; all those wild lads of mine, and a lot of other kin, all sassy as a lot of tit birds," Old Brisette mourned plaintively.

"Too dern bad about them!" Cadwold got up, rather nettled at the opposition he was meeting in his well-meant missionary work on these big-framed, hard-bitten folk. "They tell me that, over in Cow Thief, when yo' whistle they all bleat. Well, it's up t' yo', Brisette. I've sure done my best."

"Which yo' sure have, and I'm thankin' yo'," and Old Brisette came afoot spryly and shook the sheriff's hand warmly. "And I'll do my best t' fotch my young men around. I give my word on that. We'll come under the law soon."

Now a new air was tried tentatively by the first mandolin, and taken up by the other players. The horse fiddle and the first fiddle, now on hand, joined in, and the grand march was begun. Lucy gave her hand to Claus Winston. Cadwold, made happy by Old Brisette's promise, yet noticed, with astonishment, that Thames and his friends were not in sight. He began to move about the rim of the crowd to see if he could discover why they were absent. Finally, he saw several of them, but not Thames. He dismissed them from his mind, when some one spoke to him and he was included in the chat of a group of cowmen. He sat down and began to talk with them about range conditions. The march ended, and the opening waltz was announced. Jason claimed it from Lucy, and Claus was left to watch them float through the mazes together.

The wave of good feeling mounted. The Thames men kept out of it, and the good opinions Lucy was winning by her correct deportment and impartial acceptance of invitations to dance from cowboys and young town lads made their force in favor of Cow Thief in general. The moon swung up, shortening the deep shadows she cast; the big horse fiddle boomed out its bass, the little fiddle sang soprano, and the other instruments sobbed and thrummed their harmonic accompaniment.

The attention of all seemed on the dance. A feeling of joy pervaded the town. Cadwold felt at peace with the world. He had accomplished a good work, it seemed. He had known that the Cow Thief crowd had been living quietly at home for the past year. The killing of Harson Brisette and his fast-shooting sons had put a pause to the other Cow Thief plans, if any there had been, for lawless forays. Cadwold had been hoping for a chance to talk with Old Brisette, man to man, on the folly of his life. The coming of Lucy had given the wise old sheriff the needed

leverage, he thought. He had made the attempt, at least, and he had the old he-wolf's promise to "come in and be good" soon.

Cadwold felt something slipped into his hand. He glanced about. A lad was slipping off between the ranks of spectators after delivering the note thus secretly. Used to getting warnings and hints from Mexicans afraid to be seen openly informing the law of illicit matters, Cadwold strolled over to where a light from a store could fall on the sheet. He read:

Queer hoss in Barzeel's stable; may be stolen, señor.

Cadwold stuffed the note into his pocket and started into a slot between two buildings. This led him to the open space behind the stores. He sighted the light in the office of Barzeel's stable and lounged toward it. He tapped at the door and it was opened. The person who opened it was in the shadow of a pile of bags of feed, kept thus thriftily in the office to make sure each measureful would be duly paid for when doled out to particular customers who wanted horses grained. Some one at the door leading out into the stall alley beckoned. Cadwold thought he knew the man, but the big hat shaded his features. Cadwold stepped right out of the office into the alley behind the stalls. He stepped aside as the door closed and thus he was right before a big oats box. The heavy cover of the box was up; the cutaway portion where the cover came down was right at his knees. Some one staggered against Cadwold. He fell against the box, clawed oats in trying to keep upright. Then a man shoved him; he toppled over into the box, and the big cover came down and a padlock was snapped. The box was built of heavy boards, well-timbered, for many the peck of oats had Barzeel lost to needy folk who had borrowed and not returned to pay. Cadwold reflected that he himself had advised the building of the new, heavy box.

"Some derned joke," he reflected. He was unhurt; the oats were soft and cool, and fragrant to a man who loved horses, as he did.

Cadwold hammered on the box.

A horse stamped in the stable and whickered. Otherwise there was no response.

"I wonder if they took me for some one else?" Cadwold's thoughts flew to find some possible reason for what looked like a joke. "I'll bet when I clawed those oats back, I gave him an eye full of them, for fair, dern him!"

He humped his back and tried to force the big lid up. No result.

He hammered again on the box. No result. He then decided that he would wait a while and see what would happen.

The oats were softer yet. Cadwold had not been jarred by his fall into them. He had partaken of a corking lot of barbecued beef and fixings for supper. He reflected that if it were not for the indignity of his situation, as affecting his official position, he would be almost comfortable.

The oats felt more comfortable still and it was nice and cool in the box. Cadwold sighed and stretched out at full length, reflecting on the iniquity of all players of fancy and plain jokes of that sort.

That beef had tasted good. He had eaten a lot of it——

Out on the street, the dance went on. The guitars and mandolins thrummed; the fiddles sang or grunted, according to size. Bull Terk was having the time of his life, calling "The Cowboys' Ball."

Lucy and Claus were sitting out the set, near a refreshment stand.

Everything seemed peaceful.

A woman screamed—or the scream sounded like that of a woman. The sound came from up the street. A shot

was fired. Some one yelled for Cadwold:

"Where is Cadwold?"

The music ceased. Another scream and shot, a cry: "He's killin' me!"

The crowd broke and ran toward what seemed the center of disturbance. Nate Percy, strolling out from the office of the Golden Horn to see what was up, merely turned the day lock on the big safe. He went out, leaving the office vacant, and looked up to where folks were milling around at the far end of town. Impelled by deep curiosity, he started up the street, too, and thus left the big safe without a guardian.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE SAFE IS OPEN!"

AT the scene of the disturbance was now to be heard the sound of voices, in loud and diverse inquiry:

"Who hit that woman?"

"Is she hurt?"

"Whe'e is she?"

"Who got shot?"

"Who fired that six-gun?"

"Say, any one seen the sheriff?"

No one had seen him, it seemed.

Nate Percy sauntered up that way and was waylaid by a dozen citizens, who asked him if he had seen anything of the sheriff. He had not.

Even the Mexican orchestra had followed the crowd.

The Cow Thief contingent kept together. Claus Winston and Lucy were with them. Jason Brisette was not to be seen. Hardy Thames' friends seemed to be pretty much everywhere, and he voiced loud opinions that the disturbance was for some cause not helpful to the public good.

"How come it breaks out of a sudden, drawin' us all up in this end of the town?" he asked.

Not a sign of anything to explain the screams and shots was to be found. All the people who lived up there had been downtown, either dancing or watching the fun.

Nate Percy reached the outer edge of the milling mob. Thames spied him and shouted:

"Funny about this rokus! It starts and it ends, and no one knows why. I hope it's not the start of some funny play, like was pulled off over in Baileyville last fall when the store was robbed."

Percy thought of the big safe in the Golden Horn. He started back slowly, but as he walked, an uneasy feeling possessed him and he quickened his steps. The crowd was drifting back to dance again, tongues wagging over the queer alarm and its negative outcome.

Hardy Thames headed the crowd on its way back to the dancing space before the main stores. The Cow Thief contingent was well in the rear. Jason Brisette was seen to join them, coming from between two buildings. He went at once to Old Brisette and spoke to him, and the old-timer nodded.

Nate Percy disappeared in the Golden Horn. The Mexican orchestra was shoved forward, man by man, and was ordered to begin to play.

A yell from the Golden Horn split the air.

Nate Percy was in the doorway, shouting like mad:

"The big safe's robbed!"

A storming tide of humanity surged toward the Golden Horn and through the door, sweeping Percy back as if he were a chip riding on a cloud-burst.

"About every one had something valuable in that safe," an old cattleman yowled. "I had a nice roll in her, myse'f."

"Here, too," Claus Winston snapped out.

"I left her locked and started t' see what that racket was about," Nate Percy made himself heard over the hubbub; "when I got back she was open, like yo' can see, and the cash box rifled.

Everybody had their stuff in separate envelopes, each marked with his own initials or name. No tellin' how much was in her, but it was no small sum, with all this holiday crowd in, and the shooting-match committee had their receipts from concessions and what was thrown into the hat as a free-will offering t' pay expenses, prizes, and such-like."

"About five hundred dollars in our pot," Bull Terk announced, rolling his voice in his best public manner. "And half a thousand plunks is no small sum, lemme say."

"Where is Cadwold?" some one demanded.

No one had seen the sheriff for some time. Nate Percy danced up and down in sheer anger. There were muttered threats of a lynching, if the guilty one could be caught. Men began to estimate what they had lost. The feeling became uglier, the more so as there seemed to be no immediate hope of unraveling the mystery. Percy bewailed his folly in going away and leaving the safe unguarded, "but," he said, "I thought she was safe, locked that a way."

"But was that safe really locked?" Winston demanded.

"Why, sure," emphatically.

"Mightn't it have been just on day lock—the bolts shot, and the combination knob not turned?" Winston insisted. "When I put my envelope in, yo' said to just turn the handle and it would open, that yo'd set the combination later, when every one was through puttin' stuff in."

"Well," Nate admitted, "I guess it was on day lock and the combination knob wasn't turned."

"About every one knows that's what yo' do half the time," Tate Hunker, who kept the best store across the way, accused.

Percy had nothing to say for, indeed, it was his habit to carelessly shoot the safe's bolts and not turn the combination knob until he finally shut up for the night.

"It was schemed up by some one that knows what's what," Thames said accusingly, eying Claus Winston. Jason Brisette was not far from Claus, Lucy was close to the door. Old Brisette was peering into the big interior of the old-fashioned safe, wagging his beard and muttering deep in his big, arched chest. Griston and Appleton came in, announcing that they had looked all around for Sheriff Cadwold, without result.

"Why, it's queer where he's hived up," Nate Percy remarked.

"Sure is," Hunker agreed.

Griston and Appleton came toward Thames, who looked toward Jason Brisette sharply. At once the two changed their course and edged toward the Cow Thief group. Loud discussion was going on by groups all about the big public room as to what should be done. Some suggested forming a posse, but there was no trail to follow. Others wanted to search the barns and see if any one's horse was missing. Thames objected that perhaps the thief or thieves had just remained in town on the "chance that they'd not be suspected if they put on a bold face and didn't run away in a hurry."

Griston and Appleton passed the Cow Thief party, going toward the cigar case, where they each took some matches from the open box always kept on top of that small counter in the corner.

They got their matches and started back. Thames was saying:

"If they open up the envelopes they took, with each man's individual roll in them, they'll leave something, because every one knows those blue envelopes that Nate uses for that purpose."

"How much did yo' have in hotel money?" Old Brisette asked of Nate Percy.

"Oh, about a thousand, mo'e or less. I never keep exact count."

"What's that in that Cow Thief man's pocket?" Thames demanded, pointing toward Jason Brisette.

All eyes were fixed upon the Cow Thief man's side pocket. He slapped his hand to it involuntarily. His hand came away clutching at a blue envelope that he stared at as if it were a snake.

"That's one of them—whose name is on it?" Thames demanded.

Some one grabbed the blue telltale and read off the name:

"Claus Winston!"

Winston stared at Brisette.

"Brisette came out from between those buildings up whe'e that rokus took place," Thames went on, with a ringing challenge in his voice. "I saw him. Was he gettin' back into the crowd then, after pryin' into the safe——"

"I guess that let's yo' out," Jason cut into the stream of accusation. "We came in under a safeguard from the sheriff, and we were on honor not t' do anything raw. We Cow Thief men keep our words, whatever else we may do."

"That's whatever," Old Brisette insisted, leaving the safe and going quickly to where his own clan was grouped. Every one had drawn away from them of a sudden, except Claus Winston. He was standing beside Lucy, who was staring at the blue envelope that a townsman was holding on high for all to see. She looked firmly at Jason and in her glance was a query that he answered with a decided shake of the head. The girl seemed somewhat bewildered.

"I'd be likely t' rob that safe, then go around with one of the envelopes sticking out of my pocket, wouldn't I?" Jason asked.

"That envelope wasn't meant t' be seen," Thames came back harshly, and this evoked a murmur from his friends.

"I can tell whe'e Jason went, between the buildings," Old Brisette spoke up.

"Yes, I suppose yo' can," Thames said tauntingly.

"I said yo' was let out," Jason snarled, his hand slapping his thigh.

"No use; the guns are all hung up. I guess yo' forgot that?" Thames insistently plied his insulting taunts. "That move shows how much a Cow Thief man can be trusted. If yo'd had a gun on, yo'd shot me then."

"Jason, yo' acted like a fool," Old Brisette interposed.

"More ways than one," next came Thames' flicking lash of hate on the raw of each Cow Thief man's wounded pride.

"I done sent Jason t' look see if our hosses were all cared for," Old Brisette declared.

"Whe'e yo' send him?"

"We got part of them in the Golden Horn barn, part in Barzeel's stable."

"I went t' Barzeel's first, then I intended going t' the Golden Horn after a minute," Jason stated.

"Of course, yo' never went near the Golden Horn, but how about that blue envelope? Yo' might've got the loot, cached it, and somehow failed t' get rid of that envelope that came off Claus Winston's roll," Thames insisted.

"Yo've got a magic way of putting this and that t'gether, ain't yo'?" asked Jason gratingly.

"Sure have. Explain that envelope, if yo' can."

Claus Winston left the Cow Thief group and began to edge around the room, as if going toward the door leading to the street. Thames volleyed accusations, urging the townsfolk to close with the Cow Thief gang and search them all.

"And that girl, too," he went on; "she's no better'n the rest, chummin' in with them and skinnin' us out of money by professional shootin' against us amateurs."

"They ain't got any guns; now we can rush them proper," Griston sided with his friend. "They've always frightened folks with those big cannon

they hang onto themselves when they come into a town. Now they've none atall, and one man's as good as another in a rough-and-tumble. Come on and let's get them, folks."

The Cow Thief group bunched for defense. Thames yelled for action against them. Jason, standing before his crowd, gave back defiance.

"We relied on this town's hospitality once to often, I guess."

"And we relied on Cow Thief honesty once too often," Thames returned to the charge. "How about that blue envelope? How come yo' had it?"

"We got t' fight our way out, boys," Old Brisette bawled, now keyed up to forcing his way out of what looked like a trap. "Take care of Miss Lucy Frank, boys, when they hit into us."

The girl was huddled into their midst. Fists were balled and big arms swung threateningly. Thames called for a charge. Men tensed, all ready for the leap that would start a deadly free-for-all.

"Every one stick 'em up," came the drawling voice of Claus Winston. They wheeled to face him. He was standing before the corner where the guns of all were laid away for safe-keeping, in obedience to Cadwold's orders for every one to disarm during the fiesta. Winston had a big .45 in his left hand. The trigger was squeezed; his big thumb held the hammer half up.

"This is a real gun, not a half chick like I used bluffin' Thames," Claus said quietly. "The'e's goin' t' be no fightin', unless I say it with lead, first. Yo' Cow Thief folks come up and get yo'r guns, all except Jason. He stays with me, till we find Cadwold."

"I guess not," Thames objected. "Rush him, boys."

"Do yo'r own rushin', Thames," Claus cut him short.

The Cow Thief men came forward. Old Brisette got his guns first and Claus then handed out the weapons of the others. The citizens in general murmured objections. Outside, a milling mob yelled for vengeance.

"We'll take Jason t' the jail and guard him, ourselves; this is going t' be settled, but without any lynchin'," Old Brisette declared.

"That don't go in this man's town, after what's happened," Thames objected.

"Yo' forget we've got our guns now," the old range warrior retorted blusteringly.

"No, but outside a lot of men have got guns, citizens that had theirs home, not in the hotel," Thames reminded him, pointing toward the window. In fact, a dozen armed men were out there, calling for vengeance upon the thieves. They had hastened home to arm, at the first word of the forming of a posse, and now were ready for any move promising recovery of the loot, or satisfaction on the person or persons of the thief or thieves.

Things had indeed assumed a very threatening aspect.

Claus, with his one gun, could not be expected to overawe a room full of angry men very long. If a single Cow Thief man lost his head and shot, it would be a fight to a finish with the aroused citizens outside. Griston and Appleton began to join Thames in their attempt to force a break leading to open fighting. Several men had begun to work their way along the walls toward Claus, using other men as shields as they crept forward. Under the stress of the excitement men who ordinarily would not have paid the least attention to Hardy Thames or his talk, now were very angry and in danger of losing their heads in the mounting fervor of public indignation against the Brisette clan.

"Winston must be mighty yallow. Jason had his money, but Claus don't want t' throw down on him. Why?" Thames let drip more acid of strife.

"What little I had doesn't count

against public good," Claus shot back at him.

"Maybe he was goin' t' slip it back later; yo've been mighty thick with them all day. Takin' yore money would lift suspicion off yo', and yo'd get it back again. The'e was no Cow Thief money in the safe, either; must be those ducks thought it wasn't wo'th while putting it in and having Jason take it out again ——" So far Thames got with his accusation of Winston's complicity in the theft from the safe when Claus lost control of himself and threw his gun into a corner, leaping for Thames. They crashed together.

The room was in an uproar immediately.

Griston and Appleton surged forward to assist their friend. A man dived for Claus' gun and got it; two others reached the accumulated weapons in the corner and yelled encouragement to the others. Citizens outside came surging in from the street, flourishing weapons. Nate Percy leaped onto the cigar counter and in his hand was a big peacemaker. The Cow Thief clan, at a word from Old Brisette, drew back into a corner. Jason leaped back with them. Lucy, pressed in the very corner itself, was walled in by big forms. Old Brisette bellowed defiance.

Meanwhile, Claus and Thames struggled, writhed. Then Thames shot up into the air, coming down with a crash, cleanly thrown. He was very still.

"Kill the friend of the Cow Thiefers and the Cow Thief gang entire," Griston shouted. He had secured a gun and now flashed it up, ready for a throw-down. Old Brisette shouted a defiance. The air was electric with peril. It seemed that the room was to be a shambles in another instant.

"Put up those guns," a heavy voice thundered over the sounds of menace, "or I'll cut loose with my scattergun!"

In the street door was Sheriff Cadwold. In his big hands was a sawed-off shotgun, 10-gauge. They knew it was loaded full of buckshot. The old man's eyes blazed with wrath.

"What's goin' on he'e? Cain't I be gone a minute without a row startin'?" he demanded hoarsely. The armed citizens bulged in after him, jamming the room and leaving the street outside deserted.

Guns disappeared. Claus, panting and with heaving breast, faced the sheriff.

"I had t' throw Thames t' stop bloodshed, sheriff."

"Thames is too numerous! What's this all about? If I can get the lopsided coyote that lured me up t' Barzeel's stable t' see a hoss supposed t've been stole, and then locked me in the oats box, I'll naturally salivate him with buckshot."

"That explains it all. It was a plan t' get yo' away till some one could rob the hotel safe and get away with it. They robbed the safe and stole all the stuff folks left in it. Thames says it was the Brisette crowd, and he has been tryin' t' start a riot against them," Winston informed the law officer.

Cadwold glared at the recumbent Thames, who was just coming back to real knowledge of passing events after a partial eclipse, due to his crashing down onto the floor.

"What proof have yo' got against the Brisettes?" the sheriff demanded.

"Proof enough," and Thames scrambled up stiffly, glaring at Winston with malevolence plainly to be seen. "We found one of Nate Percy's blue deposit envelopes in Jason Brisette's pocket—the envelop that Winston used t' cache his roll in, when he came into town t'day. Ask him."

Winston nodded to this. Cadwold turned to the Cow Thief men. "How about this, Brisette?"

"I don't know how that blue envelope got into my pocket," Jason replied; "I never put it the'e. I'd be a fool, if I'd

got away with all that loot, t' let one of the blue envelopes be seen on me, wouldn't I?"

"Yo' made a mistake, that's all," Griston accused, coming forward to shake his fist at Jason. His back was to Cadwold; he was almost between Jason and the sheriff.

"Furthermore," Thames went on, "Jason has admitted that he left the crowd, went down between the buildings above, and t' Barzeel's stable some time before the safe was robbed. First, yo' disappeared, sheriff; then a rokus broke out up at the end of town. We-all rushed up t' see what was up. That left this end of the town deserted for a moment. Nate Percy heard the row and went out t' see what it was all about. When he came back the door of the safe was open——"

"Was it locked?" Cadwold demanded, eying Griston's back keenly.

"It was on day lock, the bolts shot, but the combination not turned," Percy admitted, sitting down on his cigar counter. He still had his big peacemaker in full view and was eying the Cow Thief crowd belligerently.

"Hum," Cadwold commented, relaxing a bit. "So yo' found a blue envelope on Jason and he admits he was down t' Barzeel's just before the robbery. I wonder if he pushed me into the oats box?"

"Of course, he did!" Griston spoke up promptly. "Who else did it? He was in Barzeel's joint and he had that blue envelope, too. He's the lame duck."

"That bein' the case," Cadwold said, as if considering the matter carefully, "I'll have t'——"

Men held their breath. The Cow Thief contingent tensed, evidently determined to protect Jason. Lucy, in her corner, shivered.

"Take him down t' the calaboose, sheriff," a citizen yelled.

"I'll have t' "—Cadwold repeated, and his gun was shifted over like lightning to the crook of his left hand and his big right crashed down onto Griston's shoulder—"arrest this man. When I was topplin' into the oats box and tryin' t' keep my balance, I clawed pecks of oats backward, and my hunch has been that a lot of them went onto whoever pushed me over. I'd been in the'e yet, only Juan, the Mexican hostler, came into the stable and heard me hammering on the box. He suspected it was more than a joke, grabbed the guard's sawed-off cannon off the stage, and came looking for trouble and, I guess, found it."

"What's all that got t' do with me?" Griston growled, trying to get away from the sheriff's bear-paw grip.

"Yo've got a lot of oats still clingin' in yo'r back hair. I'm goin' t' search yo', anyway."

"I wasn't near Barzeel's," Griston spluttered.

"We all know those round, plump oats that Barzeel has, not like those long, fuzzy-tailed oats the other stables sell. Open up that coat, and le's see what makes it bulge so."

Appleton, suddenly bolting for the door, was stopped by Winston. Thames got, unnoticed, into the corner where the guns had been, and slipped behind hanging slickers to the door. Griston began to mutter. Appleton, under Claus, promptly roared a threat at Griston:

"Don't turn yallow, now—remember what happens!"

With every one watching Griston, no one noticed Thames' going.

Winston's big hand went over Appleton's mouth. Men seized Griston and ripped open his coat. Others began to search Appleton. On the two the loot was found. Griston, whimpering and showing his yellow streak, blurted out a story of how he and Appleton had robbed the safe, under the direction of Thames, who had made up the plot and

raised the racket that had drawn all the people away from the hotel.

"We had it figured that we'd come right back among the crowd, if we got away without being seen, and so do away with suspicion against us, and plant an empty blue envelope on one of the Cow Thief men," Griston admitted, while Appleton glared at him angrily. "So when I came in Thames tipped me, with a wink and a jerk of the haid, that Jason was the man t' frame up that a way, and as we walked past him, as if t' get a match at the cigar case, I slipped an empty blue envelope into his pocket."

The sound of a horse walking was heard outside.

Appleton began to berate his weak-hearted accomplice fiercely. Griston shrank close to the bulky sheriff, as if for protection, and went on haltingtly:

"And if yo'-all will scratch the soil, right before whe'e Thames' table sot at the shootin' match, yo'-all will find a bottle of acid, like gunsmiths use for etchin' designs onto guns, hid up right whe'e Thames was. It was acid out of that bottle that ate Miss Brisette's bridle rein so that it broke——"

A bullet crashed through the window. Griston crumpled down.

Appleton shouted in sheer delight: "That's what squealers get!"

A jam of men trying to get out of the door all at once gave the shooter time to disappear at a high lope at the other end of town. When the crowd did come bulging out onto the street, it was deserted, and only the faint beat of speeding hoofs told of the flight of the slayer. The moon had gone; the night had turned suddenly black; a damp wind was rising moaningly.

"Must've been Thames," was the decision of Cadwold, and the crowd agreed with him. He gave orders for immediate pursuit and started to drag Appleton away to the town jail. Griston was dead, with a hole right in the center of his forehead. When this was spoken of, Appleton laughed harshly.

As the posse gathered, there came a spatter of rain and in ten minutes it was a steady downpour.

"Mighty poor time t' read sign," Claus Winston remarked. He was heading the posse. Jason and several other younger Brisettes had volunteered. Lucy, with Old Brisette, had remained in town.

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

KOOTENAY RECLAMATION PROJECT

A MAN who could make two blades of grass grow where only one grew before was formerly looked upon as something of a magician, but the scientists and the agriculturists do such marvelous things nowadays that the wonders they perform have almost ceased to thrill us. However, the reclamation of arid land has always its appeal, and it is interesting to learn that a plan for reclaiming ten thousand acres of such land along the Kootenay River in British Columbia was recently approved by the American and Canadian International Joint Commission.

Any projects which affect rivers flowing across the international boundary come within the jurisdiction of this commission and have to be approved by it. The plan is to build a levee along the Kootenay River and divert Goat River into it. This will make possible the irrigation of the land, which hitherto could not be used. We have long heard of bringing up children in the way they should go, but this method of turning rivers into the way they should flow seems decidedly to show the triumph of mind over matter.

Windy's Fowl Play

By Robert Ormond Case

Author of "Ridin' Luck," etc.

IT was at sundown that "Windy" DeLong and "Lonesome" McQuirk, partners, rode down into the sheltered canyon that guarded the scattered buildings of their homestead. Quiet lay upon the familiar scene and upon the world. The memory of sweltering day had passed. Heat waves no longer shimmered and danced athwart the rolling hills that stretched like a vast, motionless ocean to the far Cascades; and already the dun and purple sage that crowned the higher ridges was rustling to a faint breeze that would presently pour like a cooling tide across the slumbering world.

The scene below breathed the very spirit of tranquillity. Horses dozed at the water hole, heads hanging, tails switching lazily. Fat cattle grouped on the flats, white faces turned toward the approaching riders. Even the chattering of barnyard fowls was hushed at the approach of evening. Save the ring of steel on stone, no sound was abroad on the premises.

Lonesome's tawny mustache drooped complacently across his fighting jaw as he studied the familiar details of the quiet homestead. He slumped contentedly in the saddle. But Windy's black eyes glittered and his black mustache bristled.

"McQuirk," he averred, "there's my idea of a penny-ante, haywire, chin-whiskered outfit located in a fleabitten wilderness. Just to look at that motionless layout riles me. Take note of them mangy steers givin' us the once-over, kind of languid, like the effort of rollin' their blasted eyes plumb wore 'em out. See that pot-bellied Baldy hoss, so restful he can't wiggle his ears, an' who'd collapse like the wreck of a china factory if he wasn't propped up on four corners. Yeah, an' take note of that shack. Does it look like the hang-out of two energetic gents who're in the habit of blazin' a trail an' jumpin' four ways at once? Would any simple-

minded an' onprejudiced observer claim it's a wild cat's nest? No, by gravy, it looks just what it is—a home for long-whiskered an' indigent optimists who're just all burned up with a yearnin' ambition to lean up against somethin' an' think."

Lonesome stared at his partner with a pretense of ludicrous amazement and edged his mount a little away.

"Son of a gun," he breathed. "How long's this particular fit been sneakin' up on you, cowboy? You'd ought to give me a little warnin' when you feel yoreself slippin'. It's the heat, I reckon." He shook his head dolefully. "I hadn't ought to have allowed you to go gallivantin' round in frying-pan weather like to-day. It's ruined you."

"You an' me is different that a way," said Windy with some asperity. "Which shorely bolsters up my self-respect. This said senile decay has made a monkey out of you, McQuirk. Time was when you an' me loomed up in any crowd where hairy-chested gents foregathered. When an argument was in prospect our holsters was empty an' our guns done the talkin'. Dust follered our trail. Now, look at us. Workin' like greasers on a picayune two-by-four ranch. Sinkin' post-holes in fryin'-pan weather. Chambermaids to wall-eyed steers. Forking pot-bellied hosses which would make one of them Arabian knights bust down an' howl like a wolf. Spendin' our lives in a motionless region where swattin' flies is a roarin' activity. You can look around this superheated lay-out an' grin like a blasted bull-owl in the dark of the moon if you feel that a way, but it gives me the screamin', Siberian willies, an' I don't mean maybe. It riles me."

"Now, now," Lonesome soothed, his pale blue eyes twinkling. "Get a holt of yoreself, DeLong. Smooth down them bristles. Let's look the facts in the face. Time was when maybe you undertook to pass yoreself off as a range king, an' when you strutted yore stuff you cast a shadow. But now you're fifty years old, lean as a snake, an' hostile as a cornered badger——"

"You're likewise fifty," Windy cut in with considerable spirit, "handsome as a Missouri mule, an' with the social instincts of a underfed wart hog. But what have them specifications got to do with the price of beef?"

"Point is," said Lonesome, unruffled, "havin' wasted our youth an' substance in riotous livin', in a manner of speakin', we're lucky to rate a break like this. This here's deeded ground, Windy. We own it. That livestock's ours. We got an A-1 spring, an' a shack that keeps us warm in winter, an' chickens, an' a garden. We eat three square meals a day. We sleep in comfortable bunks. What more could lowly wranglers ask? We're settin' pretty."

"You're like a blasted angleworm, McQuirk," said Windy scornfully. "All stummick. No mentality a-tall. Them creature comforts ain't what I'm referrin' to. Yeah, an' we ain't wallerin' in the fat of the land, if you get down to cases. All the coin of the realm we got between us at the present time is one lowly five-spot. Five simoleons, by gravy, an' paper money, at that!"

"Which you're carryin' in yore jeans," Lonesome pointed out. "Figger your benighted condition if I was totin' them iron men an' all you had was your hands in your pockets. But I'm leavin' you carry that loot, knowin' yore nature requires them artificial stimulants."

"Our lives," Windy insisted, "has done degenerated into a plumb wearyin' wilderness in which Tuesdays is likewise Thursdays, to-morrow has got the same earmarks as yesterday, an' each sun-up is just another one of them things. We're disintegratin' with dry rot, senile decay, an' rickets. If something don't happen pretty pronto, the squirrels'll be runnin' us ragged, figger-

in' there's a hard winter ahead an' a couple more over-size nuts in the warehouse wouldn't do any harm. We're so motionless, it's painful."

Lonesome eyed his partner with a sidelong glance, his tawny mustache curling. He knew by the signs that one of Windy's periodic fits of restlessness was upon him. Both, even as Lonesome had suggested, were products of a harsh environment, graduates of a hard school. In lurid years of the past they had eaten the dust of bitter trails along the Rio Grande, the Panhandle, and points north. Now, their quiet homestead in the peaceful Condon country hills represented a species of backwater sheltered from the swirl of the main current, a quiet eddy in the hurry and roar of life, where they could relax, take their royal ease, and enjoy to the full the benefits of an orderly existence that had been denied to them so long. Each man treasured those benefits, and it was only at intervals that the placid routine of the ranch, by its very tranquillity, bore upon Windy's energetic spirit and blinded him to certain ultimate truths.

Knowing his partner thoroughly, Lonesome said nothing further at the moment. In due time, according to his nature, Windy would find some trail leading to an emotional outburst of more or less bizarre proportions which would act as an escape valve for his stored-up energy.

Thinking of these things, Lonesome all but chuckled aloud when, after they had cared for their mounts at the feed racks and were approaching the cabin, Windy halted in his tracks, fairly bristling with belligerence and suspicion.

"Look, McQuirk," he proclaimed, pointing to the trampled dust of the lane. "A wagon outfit's been prowlin' around since noon."

"What of it?" retorted Lonesome. "More than one benighted pilgrim has gotten off the highway figgerin' this was the glory trail. But they slunk away pronto when they found it only led to a lowly boars' nest."

"Here's where they turned around," continued Windy, baying, as it were, on the trail. "Yonder's where the hosses stood for quite a spell. Yeah, an' they watered the critters at the trough. They shorely made themselves to home an' no mistake. Good grief, McQuirk, look at the hoofprints around these premises. Kids, by gravy, millions of 'em, an' all of 'em barefooted! What kind of a menagerie's been swarmin' over this landscape whilst we was gone? We'd best look over our live stock, cowboy. An' do you reckon they lined up this army an' fed 'em in squads on our beans an' bacon? What the Sam Hill's goin' on when we can't be gone from the ranch three-four hours without the whole world an' their blasted offspring movin' in on us?"

"Tut, tut," Lonesome admonished. "Outside of waterin' their hosses at the water trough an' leavin' that herd of young ones sprint around the premises, I reckon they ain't done any harm. Keep yore shirt on, Windy. If it was to rain, you'd start yellin' for a lifeboat, you're that nervous an' skittish."

Nevertheless, he too was watchful as they threw open the cabin door and Windy's black, glittering gaze darted about the interior. Of late, there had been a considerable migration of nesters from the south permeating the Condon country in search of free land, free grass, and other benefits of the great Northwest. Many members of this somewhat vagabond colony were indigent but upright persons, future community-builders, and stalwart citizens. But there were also among their ranks certain shiftless ones who were vagrants at heart and had the vagabond's loose regard for property rights and their obligation to the community.

The cabin, however, was orderly as ever. It revealed no evidence that

prowlers had entered. The floor was spotless. The neat bunks made up with military precision stood side by side. Kitchen utensils shone above the sink. But even as Lonesome breathed a sigh of relief, Windy started back suddenly as from a snake, and pointed at the floor. A folded, bulging wad of paper, having evidently been thrust beneath the door, lay hard by the threshold.

Stooping, Lonesome picked up this packet. Unwrapping it, he was mildly surprised to discover a quantity of loose coin. He emptied these into his hand and as he smoothed out the paper, a brief note was disclosed, which read:

One chicken..... 50c.

The coins in Lonesome's hand, when counted, totaled that amount. It was made up of worn dimes and nickels and a number of pennies.

"Now what's the meaning of this?" demanded Windy. But as they stared at each other, comprehension dawned in the eyes of each.

Lonesome grinned. "Put the chicken feed along with them five iron men, Windy," he chuckled, emptying the coins into the other's pocket. "We're gettin' rich fast. We've done a land-office business in live stock whilst we was away."

This referred to one of Windy's recent financial inspirations, which had resulted in the posting of a rudely scrawled sign at the highway, calling attention to the fact that chickens could be purchased at the McQuirk-DeLong establishment at fifty cents per fowl, on the hoof. This had resulted, during the past week, in some little business activity, and a consequent reduction in the number of fowls that had been overrunning the premises. In this instance, it was apparent that their unknown callers had been attracted thither by the sign. Finding no one at home, they had caught a chicken, left the money specified, and gone on their way.

"Now that's what I call an enlightened marketing system," averred Lonesome, "providin' we're dealin' with honest folks. We don't have to stay home to take care of our customers. They can just leave the cash and carry them away. Whilst we dash about on our various enterprises, the said filthy lucre comes rollin' in."

But Windy, far from being uplifted by this thought, scowled anew.

"They's something about these gymnastics I don't cotton to," he growled. "It riles me. We got a license to sell all the livestock we've a mind to at four bits a throw. But to have these optimistic pilgrims move in and take their pick is a horse of another color. Pretty pronto, under that kind of a haywire arrangement, all we'd have left would be the squawkers and the staggerers and the long-legged fowls that have run mostly to rawhide sprintin' after grasshoppers. But the pick of the flock would be gone. Yeah, and as far as these nervy customers are concerned, how do we know how many hens they took with them? It might as well be half a dozen as one, with nobody on hand to cramp their style that a way."

"Sho," said Lonesome, "if they wasn't honest, they wouldn't have left no four bits. You're too danged anxious to oncover something to hang an argument on, DeLong. You're gettin' to be a lone wolf, that a way, plumb soured and savage."

"No, I ain't," said Windy, darkly. "But I shorely aim to set up as an adjuster of things that ain't right. If these pilgrims have done us any dirt, I'll foller 'em to the ends of the earth. By gravy, McQuirk!" Under the impact of a new and enraging suspicion, Windy stared at his partner, his lean jaw set. "Just you start wranglin' some victuals, cowboy, whilst I step out and give them fowls the once over."

He turned on his heel and strode forth, pulling his hat lower over his

eyes. Lonesome shook his head, grinning, and turned toward the kitchen door. Whatever Windy's survey of his feathered flock revealed, he knew it would be sufficient, in his partner's present mood, to lead to a wrathful upheaval.

But even Lonesome was unprepared for the dimensions of the discovery that presently sent Windy striding back to the cabin in the grip of a rage that was neither synthetic nor studied. Watching him approach, Lonesome laid his skillet aside, and faced his partner, his own eyes intent.

"McQuirk," said Windy, revealing a kind of stony calm, "you know which fowl them polecats took?"

Lonesome shook his head.

"The Battler," said Windy simply.

"No!" Lonesome breathed. "You mean to say, out of that entire flock of A-1 hens and noble roosters, they done took old Battlin' Nelson? It don't seem reasonable."

"Which they shorely did," said Windy. "He's gone."

This was news indeed. Under its impact Lonesome reached for his plug of tobacco and tore off a generous chew.

Battling Nelson had been Windy's pride and delight. He was a huge, ungainly rooster, tremendously long of limb and broad of breast, with huge, dignified wattles, arrogant comb, and a haughty red-rimmed eye. He was a chesty fowl, given to much strutting and parading before the admiring gaze of the demure barnyard hens, raising a terrific clattering uproar on the slightest provocation, and of mornings his clarion call echoed defiantly across the sleeping range.

Windy had early been intrigued by certain characteristics of this feathered behemoth. He had raised him from a chick, observed with pride and awe his tremendous development in weight, size, and gangling height. With his ponderous, ungainly dimensions, the giant rooster had acquired a vast and grandiose egotism, a strutting, superior complacence that tickled Windy's fancy.

"McQuirk," he had averred on one occasion, "take note of that overgrown four-flusher. If he isn't the biggest grandstander in seven States, I ain't entitled to credit. He's stalking through the garden, stepping high, chortling and talking to himself real dignified and superior, whilst them sensible hens is scratching industrious and tending to business.

"He finds him an angleworm, and what does he do? He walks around it and sizes it up. He lays hold of the critter, braces himself, and drags it out. Then he raises a most ungodly hullabaloo.

" 'Come and get it,' he yells. 'Come and get it. Front and center, slaves, and observe the biggest angleworm ever seen in these parts. Come a-running. They's enough here for everybody.'

"And when them fool hens, which ought to know better on account of the strutting maverick having pulled this play a hundred times before, come galloping up all set for a feast, what does he do? He shoulders them out of the way, struts around this said angleworm, and after they've all had a look at it, he calmly lays hold on it and gobbles it down. Whereupon he throws out his chest and gives 'em a knowing look as much as to say:

" 'Wasn't that a prize angleworm? They don't come no heftier. Yeah, I found it. Now scratch, you slaves, and if you're lucky you'll find one maybe half as big.' "

But it was the discovery that beneath the vast rooster's brazen exterior beat a lionlike heart that delighted Windy beyond measure, and caused him to dub him Battling Nelson, after the gamest fighter that ever stepped into the squared circle.

Unquestionably, the chesty fowl was a grandstander, a four-flusher, a bluffer

beyond parallel; yet he was also ironlike of soul, and displayed more than a bloodthirsty disposition to back up his bluff when called. Thus, other feathered males of the species, though of equal or greater weight and size, were outslugged, outspurred, and utterly demoralized, hawks and other winged menaces were put to rout, and once, investigating a terrific commotion in an angle of the chicken run fence, Windy found a half-grown raccoon at bay, overawed and outbluffed by the squawking Battler.

With an enthusiasm and patience worthy of a better cause, Windy had developed the rooster's truculent qualities to unusual lengths. Noting one day when he approached his protégé that the pompous fowl gave ground unwillingly and eyed him with a pugnacious intentness which, among gun fighters, would usually have preceded a massacre, Windy pretended to draw back in affright. Somewhat warily, at first, but later with an abandon that was paralyzing to beholders, the Battler had learned to charge upon Windy, hackles rampant, powerful wings beating, and long, vicious spurs brought into play. The self-confidence engendered by this procedure had caused the short-tempered fowl to enlarge his sphere of activity so that strangers were sometimes set upon without warning, to their amusement or consternation, and to Windy's delight.

Thus between Windy and the hard-bitten Battler had arisen a species of attachment, founded on mutual respect and esteem, a recognition, as it were, of certain qualities and interests in common. In this, Lonesome had no part. He was an outsider. At first, with the pitying tolerance of one observing the innocent activities of a subnormal intellect, he had noted Windy's efforts to inculcate a vast hatred toward all mankind in the rooster's feathered breast. He had viewed their sparring matches with sardonic amusement. But later, between him and Windy's protégé had arisen a sort of feud. The big fowl irritated him. Its strutting egotism and pompous bearing enraged him. He had grown to gaze upon it with smoldering resentment; and the knowledge that the Battler himself reciprocated this low esteem added nothing to the lack of harmony.

Open animosity had flared up on one occasion when Lonesome, bending over the grindstone engaged in putting a new edge on the splitting ax, became the target of an undisguised assault. The Battler, watching his chance, had leaped suddenly upon his back and with vicious spurs had raked him, in a manner of speaking, fore and aft. Justly enraged at this cowardly attack, Lonesome had shaken off his adversary and, whirling, had swung the ax with murderous intent; but the Battler was gone. When Lonesome had cast down his weapon and leaped in pursuit, the Battler had sprinted away, outdistancing him with nonchalant ease, one red-rimmed, knowing eye looking back over his shoulder as he ran; and Windy, watching, had rolled on the ground in a paroxysm of glee.

On the surface, as a result of this incident, it had appeared that Lonesome harbored a great resentment toward the obnoxious fowl. He openly predicted a swift end to the Battler's career and hinted darkly of an early date when the giant rooster would grace their table in the form of chicken dumplings and stew. He had complained bitterly of the Battler's energetic habit of greeting the first pale suggestions of dawn with a hoarse baritone challenge which, Lonesome swore, wakened their neighbors for miles around. But while he breathed profane maledictions upon Windy's irascible pet and apparently was merely awaiting the logical hour to strike, in secret, Lonesome eyed the feathered behemoth with unwilling admiration and a grudging respect.

Thus the realization that the Battler was gone, that the misguided strangers in their absence had singled him out from the score of fowls running at large about the establishment, came as a distinct shock. The partners peered at each other unwinkingly as they faced the fact; then Lonesome wagged his head in solemn sympathy.

"Tough break, Windy," he averred. "Yore overgrown pet's gone to the pot. They've et him by now. Life's full of problems, an' in this vale of tears they's always somethin' worse waitin' in the cards. Just to think we'll never see that hefty four-flusher struttin' around the premises no more! When we'd ought to be diggin' post holes or mendin' harness or some other useful activity, you won't have no excuse to waste time by teachin' that useless maverick how to hang on in the clinches, or the correct way to lead off with his right. Just to figger that leather-lunged yodeler ain't ever goin' to wake us up in the middle of the night that a way, nor he ain't goin' to ride me roughshod no more, plumb bears me down." He shook his head and clucked sympathetically. "'Sawful."

"He's gone," Windy agreed, his glittering eyes roving toward his guns on the wall, "but he ain't forgotten, McQuirk."

"Whaddye mean?" Lonesome demanded. "What's to be done about it?"

"Plenty," said Windy. "It's moonlight to-night. When I've throwed some vittles under my belt, I aim to take my artillery an' start gunnin' for them pilgrims. Dirt's been done me, an' I aim to square it if I got to foller them optimists clean to the Rio Grande."

"But how?" Lonesome insisted. "You can't fetch that no-account Battler back to life. He's gone. In whatever happy huntin' grounds is prepared for him, the bulgin' grandstander is prob'ly chortlin' over an angleworm as big as a bullsnake. He's passed out of the picture. An' you can't scalp them pilgrims for inadvertently rounding up yore particular pet. It ain't reasonable. They didn't do nothin' wrong, according to their lights."

"Their lights will be dimmed when I'm through with 'em," Windy promised. "I aim to impress 'em with the fact that they didn't take no average, ordinary, four-bit fowl, but an onusual rooster whose superior attainments an' intelligence, not to mention the sentiment involved, is goin' to cost 'em all of five bucks."

"Blood money!" Lonesome jeered. "You wouldn't touch it, Windy."

"I would indeed," said Windy grimly. "You'd be surprised. I'll salt that said blood money alongside the five-spot we got, which will double our capital to the tune of a hundred per cent. As a matter of fact, McQuirk, I wouldn't have taken a hundred simoleons for that said Battler, an' you know it."

"But suppose these pilgrims ain't got the five bucks?"

"I'll put 'em through such a course of sprouts as they'll recollect for quite some spell," Windy vowed. "Mangy as they are, their hides had ought to fetch something in the open market. When I'm done with 'em, they'll know they've been somewhere. They'll be so chicken shy, the next time they see a rooster they'll run like a coyote."

Lonesome did not attempt to dissuade him further. It was obvious that his hard-bitten partner was fully aroused over the demise of his ungainly pet. He was cut to the heart and determined to wreak a full measure of vengeance.

Supper was prepared and eaten in silence. Windy brooded over his wrongs, morose and glowering. Later, when the moon had risen above the eastern pinnacles, he rose, tightened his belt, strapped on his weapons, saddled his horse, and turned down the canyon toward the highway that threaded the mighty gorge of the John Day.

It was close to midnight when Lonesome was roused from sleep by the sound of his partner's return. He leaned from his bunk, lighted the bracket lamp, and was propped up on the pillow in a wakeful and expectant attitude when Windy entered, closed the door softly behind him, and hung his hat on its accustomed peg.

There was something about Windy's bearing, Lonesome noted instantly, that was utterly at odds with his truculent mood of early evening. A few short hours before he had thundered forth from the homestead armed to the teeth, in a manner of speaking, and breathing fire and brimstone. Encountering him, even one unskilled in these matters might have known with certainty that here was a man who purposed to blaze a sinister trail. His lean, saturnine features had been grim and forbidding, his black eyes glittering with menace.

But now, as he advanced almost diffidently into the circle of light, blinking, Lonesome saw that he was clothed in an affable, somewhat furtive, and altogether puzzling air of bland complacence. In his deep-set eyes was the look of one who has ridden through the silvery calm of the high moon in the company of beautiful thoughts. His walk had in it more than a suggestion of ponderous swagger, as of a lately indigent prospector whose pockets bulge with gold nuggets. He presented, in fact, such an unusual picture that Lonesome eyed him with an amazement tinged with suspicion.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Well," said Windy, with a sheepish grin, as he seated himself on his bunk. "Nice night, ain't it?"

Lonesome glared. Beneath his gaze, Windy squirmed, scratched his head, and unloosed a hoarse and nervous cough.

"DeLong," Lonesome accused, "you're such a spectacle, it's painful. What you been up to? Give an account of yoreself. You run down them pilgrims which got away with the Battler, huh?"

"Which I shorely did," Windy agreed. "Met up with 'em down in the John Day Canyon where they was making camp."

"An' they admitted takin' the Battler? You had considerable of an argument, huh? Any gun play? Son of a gun, DeLong," Lonesome burst forth irritably, "get a holt of yoreself. Give us the low-down on this business."

"Well," said Windy, pulling himself together. "It was this a way, McQuirk. I trailed them buzzards down into the John Day and come onto them where they'd made camp. Two—three big bruisers squattin' around a fire. They was a hard-boiled outfit an' was real hostile. But I rode in an' snapped 'em to attention an' questioned 'em some. Yeah, they'd taken the Battler an' left four bits accordin' to Hoyle, an' where was the argument? Well, I told them, pointed, and the upshot of it was they was a free-for-all in which I plastered 'em plenty. Laid two of 'em out cold, an' the blubberin' an' bawlin' of the other two kind of ruined me. So I up an' left."

"A massacre, huh?" Lonesome eyed the other intently. "That's how come you strutted home like a bulgin' hobo staggerin' away from a pie house. Cleaned up on four tough jaspers single-handed, thereby revengin' yoreself for the demise of the said Battler. Also, havin' yore little work-out this a way has put you in the proper mood so you can struggle along for a spell longer. Is that it?"

"That's it," Windy agreed, nodding. "Gimme a chew, McQuirk."

Lonesome silently indicated his clothes, piled neatly on the chair. Windy delved among them, extricated a plug of tobacco, and grinned as his teeth sank into the weed.

"Yeah, them bozos knew they'd been a riot in the vicinity," he averred.

"When all their other memories is growin' dim, they'll shorely remember me."

"H'm," said Lonesome, tugging at his mustache.

There was something about the lurid episode that did not ring true. Lonesome was a student of men, and also, through long association, knew Windy's temperament thoroughly. It was well within the bounds of reason that his truculent partner had indeed, single-handed, and with the energetic enthusiasm of one whose cause is just, put four hard-bitten persons to rout. Also, such an imbroglio might easily explain his present blandness and smug self-satisfaction.

And yet there were certain aspects to the situation which, as Lonesome pondered them, became more and more puzzling.

"What's the idea?" questioned Windy, aggrieved. "What you lookin' at me that a way for?"

"Because, Windy," said Lonesome softly, "that haywire yarn sounds like assorted an' fancy apple sauce to this lowly cowboy."

"Whaddye mean?" demanded Windy, bristling.

"In that said free-for-all," said Lonesome, "you demolished four hard-boiled bozos—without losin' the part in yore hair. It was a knock-down an' drag-out, you understand, an' you didn't get a black eye nor nothin'. Not a mark on you. Not a scratch. Not a button missin' off yore shirt. You're still the model of elegance you was when you left. Laugh that off, cowboy."

"I worked fast," Windy explained, glibly, hunching his shoulders. "A right an' a left, an' two of 'em was down. The other two was so scairt they was plumb ruined that a way."

"When we looked the signs over tonight," Lonesome continued, "we both took note of the fact that a herd of young ones had overrun the premises. In yore flight of fancy you ain't mentioned them, Windy. Those hard-boiled jaspers you speak of couldn't have left them yearlin' tracks, old hoss."

Windy was obviously taken aback by this loophole in his story. He hesitated, and Lonesome transfixed him with a pointed finger.

"DeLong," he challenged, "when you left here you had in yore hip pocket a slab of tobacco as big as a splittin' wedge. What happened to it?"

"Well," said Windy, averting his gaze. "I lost it. In that said free-for-all," he continued, with more confidence, "it must have shook out. When I rode away an' reached in my pocket for it, the maverick was gone."

"Yeah. Yeah, sure." Lonesome nodded sagely. "Lose anything else, DeLong?"

This random shot obviously struck home. Windy started and a dark flush rose in his bony cheeks. He stared at Lonesome in apprehension tinged with awe.

"What'd you lose?" that worthy insisted, puzzled but pressing his advantage. He swept the other's person with a brief glance. "You still got yore eyeteeth, an' yore guns. Listen, did you collect that five bucks off those pilgrims?"

"They didn't have it," Windy muttered. "So I earnestly endeavored to take it outa their hides. I got action a-plenty."

"But no coin of the realm," Lonesome decided. He leaned forward, his pale blue eyes intent. "DeLong, you had five iron men in yore pocket when you started out. Still got 'em?"

At this specific question, Windy endeavored to glare without comprehension. He knitted his brows; his mustache bristled; but his glittering eyes became furtive, wavered, and fell. He muttered sulphurously beneath his breath, drew out a huge bandanna, and wiped his forehead. Then he raised his

hands in an eloquent gesture of surrender.

"You win, McQuirk," he growled. "I'm through. I'm finished. I'm out on my feet. You've done missed yore calling, cowboy. As a prosecutin' attorney, you'd make an innocent jasper admit he'd stolen his own eyeteeth. Aimin' to side-step yore blasted questions is like tryin' to outrun yore conscience. What's it to you, anyway? You worried about that chawin' tobacco an' that five bucks? If I figger I'm square on this evening's activities, it had ought to be jake with you. How come you're snappin' an' growlin' an' champin' on my heels this a way?"

But Lonesome brushed aside this brief flare of belligerence. He sank back with a restful sigh.

"Now," he announced, "we'll get the straight of this business. Proceed, DeLong. Forget those four hairy-chested bozos which you tied into fancy knots an' et cetera. Them pilgrims of imagination has passed out of the picture. We're startin' in fresh an' clean. All right, old hoss, let's go. An' don't you attempt to dress up the facts with none of yore assorted misinformation. The truth will be plenty, if I'm any judge."

"Which it shorely is," Windy agreed. He shook a menacing fist at his partner, his black eyes glittering. "An' don't let me hear any bright cracks, McQuirk, about no fire-spittin' monster who starts out prepared to blaze a trail an' later comes sneakin' home cooing like a blasted dove. One grin starts a massacre. Laugh just once, an' when that said dawn flames in the sky there'll be a fresh cowboy hide stretched on the fence. With the ears missin'."

"Shoot," Lonesome directed.

Though his leathery cheek was already bulging, Windy tore off another chew. Thus fortified, he eyed Lonesome fixedly and began his narrative.

"I'll make it short an' sweet," he stated. "They was homesteaders, lookin' for the promised land. I trailed 'em down into the John Day an' run 'em to earth this side of the Big Bend. It was late, but their campfire was still smolderin'. Nobody was up. The hosses was grazin' in the flats. It was kind of a haywire outfit. A prairie schooner that was patched an' sway-backed. A mess of faded kids' clothes spread on the bushes.

"A couple of young ones set up a hullabaloo as I lopes into camp, an' here's this homesteader projectin' out of the wagon with his rifle in his hand. But I had the drop on him, an' he comes crawlin' out, whilst his woman sets up a squallin' an' begs me not to do them no harm.

"'Listen, Jesse James,' says this homesteader, who's a bulky hombre with a lot of whiskers an' a mean eye, 'if you figger on cashin' in on anything this lay-out's got, you're sure one optimistic citizen. Stick around, though, if you want to,' he says, hopeful. 'Maybe you'll lose something.'

"'I don't want nothin' but some choice information,' I says. 'Tell yore woman they's no danger of this outfit losin' their scalps if you talk straight.'

"'Key down,' he says to his woman. 'He's loco, but harmless.'

"'Where you from?' I says. 'Where you headin'? What you got in that wagon?'

"'Cinch,' says this bewhiskered party. 'I'm from Oklahoma. I'm headin' for the high desert. In that wagon I got all my haywire worldly goods, includin' a woman an' eight kids.'

"'Jehoshaphat!' I says. 'Did you say *eight*, friend?'

"'Count 'em!' he says. An' sure enough that there wagon was festooned with heads like warts on a toad as them wakeful kids stretched their necks to see what was goin' on. They was projectin' out the back, an' from under the side flaps, an' a ganglin' one was peerin'

over the top: an' a woman in a faded kimono is leanin' out with a yearling on her arm which is howlin' blue blazes.

"'It's a harvest crew an' no mistake,' I says, and when the infant unlooses another wail of the kind that reaches inside a feller an' takes holt, I says to the woman: 'What's torturin' that young Schumann-Heink? She acts like she's done acquired a spite against the world?'

"'He's ailin',' she whimpers. 'Couldn't buy enough fresh milk. We're broke.'

"'Which ain't nobody's business but ours,' says this homesteader, hard-boiled. 'Fellow, I don't know yore game, and you got the drop on me, but it's time for a new deal. This funny business has gone far enough. If you're a census taker, I shorely aim to locate elsewhere. Is the population increasin' so fast you got to work day and night?'

"'Dismiss the company, sergeant,' I says, and after the woman an' the children has done retreated, I continues, 'You're probably wonderin', friend, how come I got such an interest in world affairs?'

"'I can see you ain't bashful or retirin',' says this hombre, 'but that's as far as my luck goes. How come we're the goats of yore disordered fancy is one of them mysterious things.'

"'I'm sleuthin',' I says, 'an' the trail ends here. I've done tracked you down, friend. If you can persuade that young Caruso to key down for a spell we'll get down to cases,' I suggests, for the infant havin' gotten warmed up, in a manner of speakin', is demonstratin' to all an' sundry that as a yodeler he knows his onions.

"'Can't be done,' says this hombre. 'I can see you ain't any family man, or you'd know that the only play an infant's got left when his stummick is empty is to yell like blazes. It's his last privilege an' he clings to it.'

"'It cramps my style,' I complains. 'Makes me forget I'm a hard citizen who's got a duty to perform. Sounds like he's yellin' for help.'

"'He is,' he says, grinnin' like a lone wolf who's got his young ones backed into the cave behind him an' is makin' his stand. 'Yellin' for help which ain't in sight. If it cramps yore style, an' you only a spectator, you can figger how it burns me up who's his paw an' supposed to see to it that his stummick ain't raspin' together this a way but who's fallen down on the job. Which is neither here nor there,' he says, kind of grittin' his teeth. 'Let's go. We've had the chaff. Let's get at the wheat. What's on yore mind?'

"'Hold on,' I says, soothing. 'Before we turn our attention to more important details, we'll foller this infant's trail for a spell. Seems like he's the goat in this layout. Bein' a yearlin' that a way, his stummick still requires fresh milk. You mean to say in this man's country that you ain't been able to get it from the ranches along the way?'

"'While our cash held out,' he says, 'we was jake. When we was broke, we were out of luck. Seems like folks in these parts has been pestered by no-account drifters till they can't be bothered no more. We ain't pore white trash, an' we ain't begged none. But we done traded ourselves clean down to the bone. No cash, an' nothin' to trade, so we've lived on corn meal for the past week figgerin' maybe we could make it to the high desert. The young ones stood up under it, but it seems like it throwed a couple half hitches into the infant's insides. He ain't et nothin' for a couple days. If I get a break of luck, he'll get milk to-morrow. I dunno why I'm telling you this. Only a blind man could figger you got a kind face.'

"'Just a kind of a face,' I says. 'That's all I claim. Listen, how you figger you rate some milk to-morrow, havin' no cash an' nothin' to trade?'

"'Because yore mental affliction has

led you to take an interest in my progeny,' he says, 'I'll tell you. We got somethin' to trade. We had a kind of a break to-day. We made camp twice since this mornin' to fodder the critters, once by a creek where the mosquitoes was holdin' a reunion, an' once by a spring where the hoss-flies was travelin' in platoons. When we et this mornin' an' at noon the young ones yelled for somethin' more in the line of vittles than co'n meal. I got desperate this afternoon when the dust was thickest. Seemed like I was surrounded by my starvin' offspring; an' just about that time my woman dragged out the kids' bank in which they had put pennies ever since they was infants back in Oklahoma. I'd forgotten about the critter, but she'd kept it hid on account of the young ones' birthday money bein' in it, an' a penny for the baby; an' there it was, just like findin' it.

"'So I took the splittin' ax an' chopped the said bank open. It assayed fifty cents, an' just about that time we come to a sign sayin' that here was chickens for sale at four bits on the hoof. Me an' the woman done some hasty figgerin' whilst the young ones was yellin' for food. The infant was asleep at the time, an' we figgered maybe it had gotten the bulge on its appetite an' when it woke up it would eat something. It turned out it wasn't asleep because it was feelin' better, but it was just plumb wore out; it waked up later yellin' blue blazes an' wouldn't touch the mush the woman had fixed for it. But at the time it looked like our best play was to buy one of them chickens an' give the young ones a taste of somethin' different which would enable them to take holt of the corn meal again for three-four days, which would put us over the hump.

"'So we turned in where this sign was. An' I want to tell you, mister, there was a reg'lar homestead. Comfortable buildin's an' an A-1 spring. Hosses in good flesh restin' in the shade. Fat cattle grazin' in the flats. Fat shotes takin' their ease in the hawg waller, an' the whole landscape cluttered with busy, cacklin' fowls. Just such a layout as we'd dreamt about down in Oklahoma. My woman blubbered right out loud when she seen it, an' I had to get hostile with the young ones to keep 'em from stampedin' into the garden patch, which was smothered with roastin' ears an' rutabagas an' squash.

"'They was nobody to home, so we corralled a overgrown, ganglin' rooster that had the instincts of a wild cat. A great big fowl with a chest like a barrel, an' laigs like gin poles. You should have seen the critter, an' them young ones roundin' him up! It gimme the first laugh I'd had in weeks. You wouldn't believe it, but the maverick fought 'em to a finish—spurred 'em an' slugged 'em, flappin' his wings an' yellin' all the while like an Injun on the warpath. He had 'em buffaloed at first, but they finally surrounded him, an' got him down. So I left that four bits under the door an' took that feathered wild cat along. Mister, that there was a fightin' fowl an' no mistake.'

"'Yeah,' I says, sorrowful. 'You don't have to describe him to me, friend. That's why I'm here now. That ranch you turned in to belongs to me an' my pardner. That rooster was mine.'

"'No!' he says, real surprised.

"'Yes,' I says, 'I called that wolf Battlin' Nelson. I reckon you've et him by now, huh?'

"'Mister,' he says, 'just step over this a way,' an' he motions me over by the wagon where we squat down together an' squint under. I light a match to get a better look, an' there, roostin' on the reach an' attached thereto by a piece of string on his ankle, is ol' Battlin' Nelson. He gives us the once-over with one eye, an' cranes his neck an' squints at us with the other. He don't look surprised nor shocked nor pleased.

He's the same ol' hard-boiled fowl. Whilst we look him over, he settles himself more comfortable where he sits an' kind of mutters under his breath.

"'I'll tell you why we ain't et him,' this hombre whispers so the kids won't hear. 'You'd be surprised. When we pulled out of yore ranch I was all for makin' camp an' stewin' this fowl pronto. But the young ones set up an awful roar. Bellered their heads off. Claimed they could eat corn meal an' get along fine if I'd leave 'em keep this fowl for a pet an' take him along with us to the high desert. Think of that, an' them so ga'nt their ribs was raspin' together! So I weakened, an' we rolled on our way.

"'An' leave me tell you something else,' he says, his whiskers splittin' into a grin that's dang' near human. 'That fowl put new heart into this whole outfit this afternoon. The young ones cottoned to him so they forgot their misery. My woman perked up because the kids felt better. Now me, I ain't a critter that's loaded down with this said imagination. But just watchin' that hard-boiled critter wrastlin' with the kids as we went along give me a new slant on things. He's only a blasted rooster with the brains of a peanut; but he's got a heart like a lion. When he's outnumbered an' bore down an' surrounded by hostile circumstances, he's still a fightin' fool. He's sluggin' an' spurrin' an' squawkin' his warwhoop whilst there's breath in his body, an' he never gives up. An' I ain't given up, either, mister. I've learnt my lesson from that fowl. This outfit's goin' to get to the high desert, or bust.'

"'What's yore hurry to get to the high desert?' I inquires. 'Seems like you'd take a little time out to work along the way.'

"'They's no work,' he says. 'An' every day counts. I'm locatin' south of Mitchell, where my woman's cousin's got a homestead. They's a quarter next to him that ain't been filed on yet. It's got a spring an' better than an eighty of good farm land; but the nesters are swarmin' in. It's li'ble to be gone 'less we get there right away. It's the last one left except out in the sand hills! so our gettin' there pronto may mean considerable to me an' the kids. I can't stop to work, if they was work. It's the home stretch.'

"'Yeah,' I says. 'But what about the infant?'

"We're still squattin' by the wagon, you understand, McQuirk. This bewhiskered party's dang' near human an' genial talkin' things over, whilst we're lookin' at Battlin' Nelson mutterin' there on his perch; but when I mention the infant it's just like hittin' him in the face. He gets up an' walks back to the fire. I foller him, an' he stands there lookin' down into the coals; an' back in the wagon the infant is wailin' again.

"'You'd think of that, wouldn't you?' he says. 'That's a tough chore starin' me in the face. It'll tear my heart out an' plumb ruin the kids. But I got to take that fightin', feathered wild cat to-morrow an' stop at the first ranch. I'll trade him for a no-account fowl that ain't so hefty,' he says, 'an' take the difference in milk.'

"Well, sir, McQuirk, listenin' to this maverick's story I'd been weakenin' all the while. He'd trailed north more than a thousand miles aimin' to better his hand an' do right by his offspring, an' this was the home stretch. It had come to me before that I didn't have no business here in the canyon arguin' with a hombre about a rooster to purchase which he'd split open his young ones' bank an' took their last penny. Yeah, an' he'd come right through our ranch. They was food all around him an' he hadn't touched nothin' except what he paid for accordin' to Hoyle. He was the real beef.

"But the thing that struck me all of a heap was this, McQuirk. You an' me

is settin' pretty. Our stummicks is always full. Sometimes we're rotten with cash, an' sometimes we ain't; but what's the odds? We're surrounded by the fat of the land. But here's this jasper whose kids is actually hungry, an' his infant ain't holdin' out more than a couple days longer; an' to meet this jack pot he's figgerin' on tradin' the Battler for a fowl that ain't so hefty, an' take the difference in milk!

"It plumb ruined me; so I says to this hombre, 'Listen,' I says, diggin' down. 'Here's a five spot,' an' I puts it in his hand. 'Don't you trade off that Battler,' I says. 'It's a heck of an idea. Keep him for the kids. An' keep that infant in fresh milk till you get to the high desert,' I says, an' hurriedly backs away before he can tell me to go to blazes.

"'Wait,' he says, pop-eyed. He turns that five spot over an' over, lookin' at it; an' he looked at me, an' over his shoulder at the wagon; an' his hand shook. 'You're crazy, mister,' he says, 'one of them loco fellers with a heart as big as a house. I can't take it,' he says. But he don't hold out that five spot for me to take back. He strives to, but the flesh is weak. His hand clings to it that a way, like a drownin' sailor clingin' to a life belt. He's lookin' at it; an' it ain't no mere paper money he's holdin' in his hand, but gallons of fresh milk for which his infant is makin' his last play, vegetables an' beefsteak for his young ones an' his woman, an' the promised land.

"'Keep it,' I says, 'an' I don't want this four bits either, which you done extracted from yore offspring's bank,' I says, shovin' that chicken feed into his pocket. 'It'd haunt me.' In the stress of the moment, you might say, I fetched out my plug of tobacco an' tore off a chew. I passed the plug to him. He didn't say nothin', but sunk his teeth into it like a wolf; an' I knew right then the maverick had been spittin' dust for the past week or more on account of not havin' the price of chawin' tobacco, so I told him to put that slab in his pocket an' no back talk; an' he done so at once.

"'Don't you try to make me take the shirt off yore back,' he says. 'It wouldn't fit. No foolin', mister,' he says, kind of hunchin' his shoulders an' diggin' his toe into the ground. 'You've done dealt me a royal flush. When I've made my stake I'll come slopin' back an' make it right with you. Five fifty,' he says, 'an' one plug of tobacco, an' an appreciation which ain't to be measured in coin——'

"'That's a-plenty,' I cuts in. 'Adios, friend. Strength to yore arm. Take good care of the Battler.'

"'Which we shorely will,' he promises. 'Up on the high desert he'll be king of the roost.'

"I climbed on my critter an' rode up the canyon; an' from way up yonder I looked back an' caught a glimpse of this hombre. He was settin' cross-legged by the fire, lookin' down into the coals; an', probably thinkin' I was clean out of sight by that time, he wiped his eyes on the sleeve of his shirt, fetched out that plug from his hip pocket, an' took another chaw.

"An' so," Windy concluded, "I clapped spurs to my critter an' sloped for home."

There ensued, within the cabin, a considerable silence. Windy stared unseeingly at the floor. Eying his partner, taking note of his bristling mustache, his hawklike, sardonic, ruthless profile, the pugnacious cast of his lean jaw, Lonesome's own tawny mustache curled in a tolerant and understanding grin.

"Well, McQuirk," Windy demanded, looking up like one reaching belatedly for protective armor, "how about it? What wise cracks you got to make, if any?"

"None whatever." Lonesome yawned

and settled himself more comfortably, pulling the blankets up about his chin. "Except a thought which you'd probably figger was downright insultin'."

"Let's have it," Windy challenged with some truculence.

"You're a sheep," Lonesome stated. "A blasted sheep in wolf's clothin'. Sink whatever teeth you got in that, DeLong."

Windy glared, his black eyes glittering. But beneath Lonesome's quizzical gaze his own glance wavered. He squirmed, hunched his shoulders, and scratched his head. It was one of the few times in their career that Windy had been at a loss for a fitting retort.

"Blow out the blasted light," he growled at length, "it's time to hit the hay. I'm so sleepy I'm out on my feet."

Lonesome blew out the light and grinned anew in the darkness as he composed himself for slumber. His partner, he knew, would not immediately sleep, despite his assertions to the contrary; but for a long time would lie relaxed in the restful tranquillity of one who, having eased less fortunate pilgrims along the rocky way, is wrapped in pleasant reflections.

TREASURE ISLANDS OF ALASKA

THIS spring over eight hundred thousand seals, worth close to thirty million dollars to the United States, migrated along the Pacific coast, from the vicinity of southern California to the Pribilof Islands, three hundred miles west of Alaska in the Bering Sea. On St. Paul and St. George Islands, the largest of the five Pribilof Islands, are located the breeding grounds of the seals. These small islands, only a few miles square, have so far more than doubly repaid the United States the seven million dollars which she paid for all of Alaska. They are indeed our "treasure islands."

Such a valuable herd is naturally well guarded. Every year, from early spring until June, the seals migrate northward, under the watchful eyes of the coast guard and the Federal Bureau of Fisheries. By international agreement, the only sealing permitted during this migration period is that done by Indians, at least three miles from shore, and with primitive weapons and boats. Even the few thousand seals—mostly females, which swim nearer the shore and are easier to catch—which the Indians kill each year tend to impede the increase of seals.

However, under the conscientious guardianship of their government protectors, seals had increased to over eight hundred thousand in 1927. In the late eighteenth century, before sealing on the high seas commenced, there were more than five million seals in existence, but when this practice was outlawed by treaty in 1911, only two hundred and fifty thousand survived. Strictest measures were necessary, in order to prevent the complete extinction of this valuable breed.

Another measure of conservation which the government uses is to kill only a certain number of the three-year-old males each year, leaving enough three year olds to insure the herd's increase.

Chester

MILD *enough for anybody*

What a cigarette meant *there*

20 degrees below, and no tobacco, through lonely weeks of glittering silence. Then a speck on the hard, bright horizon; another musher, outward-bound . . . and *cigarettes!* What price cold or Arctic hardship then!

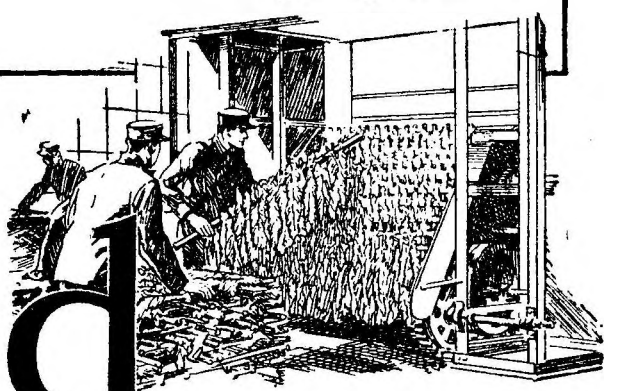
What a cigarette means *here*

220 degrees above, as endless belts carry the choice tobacco for Chesterfield inch by inch through the great steel ovens.

Here, in penetrating heat, science corrects and perfects the curing commenced in the farmer's barn. Dried, then cooled, then steamed to exact and uniform heat and moisture, the tobacco is ready for the final mellowing—two long years ageing in wood—that only Nature can give.

Man, Science, Nature—all work together on Chesterfield. And in the bland, satisfying smoothness of Chesterfield itself is ample proof that their patient, costly team-work is good!

Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.



Through long steam-heated ovens, new tobacco passes in slow endless procession for drying and "conditioning."

field

. . . . *and yet* THEY SATISFY

The Stranger

By Max Brand

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

OLIVER WILTON, a wealthy man who lives in terror of sailors, and also fears his niece, Beatrice, is shot dead in his garden. Beatrice, of whose riches he is to assume guardianship, is found near by with a smoking gun in her hand. She says repeatedly that she "did not do it." Lewis Sherry and his friend, Pete Lang, cow-punchers who have been hired to guard Wilton, find a handful of pearls in his pocket.

Doctor Layman, a friend of Wilton, and Fennel, a drunken fellow supposed to be a sailor, also figure in the story. Wilton, when shot, was going to meet Fennel, who has since disappeared. A letter from Fennel, demanding the pearls, is also found on Wilton.

Sheriff Moon decides that Beatrice must be held for trial. Sherry, who loves her, is in despair.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BLAST AND THE BUGLE.

THE town of Clayrock was filled for the trial days before it was due to be called. The town was put on the map, in a way, and the three hotels did big business. Prices for all things rose.

In the first place, there were the reporters who swarmed in. Newspapers in these days have to have their thrills to give hungry readers, and what is there better for this purpose than the case of a young and beautiful girl accused of murder? To make it better still, suppose the girl to be well raised, well educated, of good family! To cap the climax make the victim a blood relation—her father's own brother!

It was all that the newspapers could wish for, and they sent their reporters on long before the trial to work up the ground.

They found something to work. In the first place, there was the question, still wide open: "Did Fennel perform the murder, or is Beatrice Wilton guilty?"

Of course, the papers took sides. To some Beatrice Wilton was plainly guilty and the reporters almost said so. The man Fennel was an elusive shadow. He was hardly to be called a man; certainly, he had disappeared from Clayrock with as much thoroughness as though the wind had blown him through the town to be dissolved in air. So one faction seemed to doubt that Fennel ever existed. His battered shoes, his ragged overcoat—still whisky-tainted

according to some—and his old hat, were in evidence, of course, but they were discounted heavily. He had no motives. His past was unknown. His relations with Oliver Wilton were yet to be established. In the meantime, here was Beatrice Wilton, young and beautiful, to be sure. But when has beauty not meant trouble? And behind her lay the dark background of the Wilton family. Into the dim past, they traced its sources. They listed down upon the account a blockade runner in the Civil War; a pair of brothers who had joined the '49ers and only one of whom had come home, well-to-do, but streaked with silver scars. They followed the Wiltons into older days still. There was a Wilton-Durham feud in the first part of the nineteenth century. Some said that three had been killed. Some said thirty. There had been duels, too—there was a story of a Wilton who had fought with an enemy across a dining-room table, the muzzles of their outstretched pistols overlapping. And in the times of swords, still one found that the Wiltons had been involved in violence!

Then, what more natural than that this "proud, keen, vigorous, fearless girl" should have taken her affairs into her own hands? She wanted possession of her own fortune. She did not want it to pass into the hands of her uncle even for a moment. That was motive sufficient—for a Wilton!

So the newspapers of the hostile faction printed photographs of Beatrice that showed her unsmiling, straight-eyed, keen as any man.

To the other reporters—and theirs was the larger faction—it appeared that she would make better copy as the beautiful and tragic form involved in mysterious danger, innocent, but entangled! They loved to print pictures of Beatrice Wilton in her softer humors, to show the exquisite delicacy of her profile, to show her smile, and the large eyes looking down! They combed her past and found it fragrant. Scandal never had touched her. They hunted down her schoolfellows and interviewed them, and learned from them all that was kind and good about their old school companion. They picked up little anecdotes. They printed columns and columns. They stole from one another. They invented, refurbished, borrowed, redyed, trimmed, decorated, and gilded these tales of Beatrice Wilton. They loaded the telegraph lines with the tidings of her. They photographed her house, her room, her garden—particularly that dark spot where her uncle had been found dead—her horse, her dog, her saddle. Nothing was too minute to deserve attention if it had once belonged to Beatrice Wilton. If she had but looked on a thing, it became of value.

That was not all. They could not very well stop short with Beatrice, but they went on to all the other figures in the case, and made them interesting enough. There was the story of Everett Wilton, of course, rich, happy, young—as men of affairs go—and yet a suicide. Perhaps a suicide because of the blow that had fallen upon his fortune when the *Princess Marie* sank. Could it be that in the mind of Beatrice Wilton there had been some motive of sheer revenge for the same reason? At least, it helped to make one side of the case stronger.

Furthermore, they could take up Doctor Layman, the betrothed of the girl. He was a great help to her. The hostile sheets made little of him, and refused to give him much space, but the friendly journals dwelt at length upon his steadfast devotion. The hours he spent near the jail. His constant visits to the prisoner. His hours of consultation with the lawyer. And, above all, his calm, aloof, aristocratic manner. He was the soul of honor; his straight, steady eyes told what this man was. And could it be dreamed that he would

cling to a murderess? Stuff and nonsense! A gentleman of breeding and of position has better taste and better fortune, let us hope! So they spread the doctor at large across their sheets. He made an excellent figure for the photographers. His lean face and pronounced, handsome features always reproduced well, and he was the more desired because he had courteously and firmly requested the reporters to take and print no more pictures of him. Of course, that made the shutters click far more busily than ever.

Then there was the quiet sheriff, he who was known to be the force behind the arrest and the prosecution of the girl. He had collected terrible, deadly facts. He was a man of flawless repute. He could not be accused of partisanship. And yet he stood indubitably against Beatrice Wilton, a vast weight upon the side of her guilt. He no longer even pretended that he was hunting the trail of Fennel—which was mute proof that he believed the girl was the criminal!

Pete Lang, also, came in for his share of notoriety. First of all, he was a rough fellow of the range; and, secondly, he had been the first at the side of the murdered man.

Some newspapers even suggested that, since he had been the first at the dead body—since no one had seen the dead man fall—why might not Peter Lang be the guilty man?

Consider, for instance, that he was a marksman of skill, and that the bullet had been planted squarely, fairly, between the eyes of Wilton. As for motive? Well, motives are rarely known until they are confessed, and being employed by Wilton, it might well be that a testy word had been enough to bring the cow-puncher's revolver out of his pocket! And then he had caught the fancy of the reporters by saying bluntly: "I hope I'm nearer to guilty than she is!"

But not even the fine form of Peter Lang, or the murdered man, or Layman, or the famous sheriff, or the mysterious Fennel, or even Beatrice Wilton herself, so seized upon the imagination of the public press as did another, unaccused figure. And that was Lewis Sherry.

As for photographs, they flooded the papers with pictures of him. They showed him mounting and dismounting. "He makes every horse look small." They showed him walking down the street, towering above Pete Lang. "And yet Lang is nearly six feet tall." They gave the dimensions of his shoulders, the span of his hand, and his weight.

He became in a few days as physically well known as the person of the world's champion pugilist, and his handsome head was nearly always included on the same page with Beatrice Wilton. They made both a harmony and a contrast; lion and panther, as some reporter suggested.

And when they came to delving into the past of this man of the range, the reporters found enough to glut their typewriters and crowd the telegraph wires. He was the hero of many fights; he was the hero of many deaths. And every fight was set down in detail, and every wound was recounted.

He, too, they said, was a hearty advocate of the girl's.

And was he not more than that? And, suppose that she were condemned, would not the giant strike in her behalf, even if it brought about his own ruin?

To big Lew Sherry they could apply all the pet terms of Western literature. He was the "desperado," the "gun fighter," the "killer," this "brave and reckless man," this "outlaw." And they went on and coined other terms of their own.

Lew Sherry tried not to notice these things, but he could not help it. Clayrock was simply littered with copies of Eastern newspapers containing these accounts; and the home journals also be-

gan to boom the issue with all their might. The *Bugle* was on the side of Beatrice Wilton, and therefore, Lew Sherry was a gentle hero. The *Morning Blast* was against the girl, and therefore, to it Lew Sherry was a probable villain.

He called on the editor one day. People fled before him. Doors slammed and crashed. Many footfalls scurried up and down. But when he came to the editor's office he found a little squint-eyed man who wore dark-cloth guards over the sleeves of his shirt, like a grocery clerk, and who peered up to him from beneath a green eye shade.

"What do you want of me, Sherry?" he asked.

"I want you to stop this nonsense," said Sherry.

"Do you?" said the editor. "And can you tell me any reason why I ought to stop it?"

"For the sake of common sense and decency, for one thing," said Sherry.

"Common sense and decency are all very well," said the editor, "but I wish you would point out a time when they were worth balancing against a growing circulation. I've trebled this paper's circulation inside of the last week. I've made it the biggest sheet in the county. And I'm going to keep it there—as long as Lew Sherry will furnish me with good copy, as he's doing to-day!"

And suddenly a pair of cameras clicked in the corner of the room and Sherry, with wild words, turned and fled more swiftly than from the mouths of cannon.

He went to the sheriff, even, and dourly demanded that these libels should be stopped.

"I'm a peaceful man!" said Sherry. "They're making me out a crook and a general all-around bad actor."

"Steady, steady!" said the sheriff. "After a few more days of this, you'll know what it means to run for office, for instance!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PEARL OF PRICE.

LET crime increase and follies spread, the press must still be free. And when Sherry had mastered that slogan and understood it might not be altered, he gritted his teeth and made no further protest. But, when a camera man one day pointed a machine too closely at him, he picked up the heavy and expensive offender and heaved it after the artist. Man and machine rolled in the dust, and Sherry stood over them.

"The next time I'll use a quirt on you," said Sherry. "And the time after that—I'll use my hands!"

It almost frightened the camera man to death, but it did not prevent others from clicking pictures of him as busily as ever. It furnished much grist to the papers, moreover. "I'll use my hands!" said a caption beneath an actual photograph of the big paws of Lew Sherry.

A weight of care descended upon Sherry as he saw this tide of publicity flowing in his direction, day after day.

"Trouble is going to come out of it," he assured his friend Lang. "Some young fools are going to come up here to make a reputation out of me. A short cut to headlines is what I offer to anybody who can drop me! And a bullet from behind wouldn't be wasted, either!"

"Sure," agreed Lang. "When you go out, I'll go along with you every time. I'll watch your back for you. But I figure the same as you. The more that's said about a man, the nearer he is to his last picture! But hang the newspapers, say I. Did you see the last lingo that they printed about me? About me having a busted heart because of a long-lost sweetheart, and a lot of stuff that would've made you creep only to read it, old-timer."

The giant grinned broadly.

"I half believe that you sent 'em up that trail," growled Pete Lang. "Come

on with me. We're going to finish the house to-day."

They had searched it from the top downward. To the room of Oliver Wilton, of course, they devoted their utmost care.

"Of course, he made it like a safe, because he had it lined with stuff that was worth getting!" said Sherry; therefore, they spent two days going over every crevice of the place and tapping every inch of the walls.

But they discovered nothing.

Then they worked down through the other chambers of the house. No one disturbed them. The servants had been discharged, according to Layman's plan, and Layman himself, coming out to the place now and again for books or papers for Beatrice Wilton, was the only one they encountered. He was curious, at first, as to the reason of their stay in the house. But when they evaded his questions rather pointedly, he did not press them. Only he said to Sherry, one day: "Do you think, my friend, that you are doing any good for Beatrice Wilton by tying her name to all your old adventures?"

"Am I dragging her through the dust?" asked Sherry with some sharpness.

"Come, come," said the doctor with perfect good humor. "You understand what I mean, of course. I know that you boys want to do nothing that isn't for her good, but the fact is that you are making a whale of a lot of talk, and the more talk the worse for Beatrice. It's openly said that you're hired by me to be on hand in case we want to beat the law at the last moment. Of course, that is going to be a weight on the minds of the lawyers who will fight for her."

"You want me to hit the trail?" asked Sherry.

"Exactly," said the doctor, who was the most frank of men.

"If I could," said Sherry, "I'd do it. But the fact is that I have to stay. I can't break away. I've tried to before, and it's against my nature."

So the doctor no longer pressed upon that point. To Pete Lang he was rather an offensive personality. But Sherry liked him for the very coldness of mind which troubled Lang. Whatever else the doctor might be, he was a man.

On this day, they had no interruption from any one, even from Lang. They had worked from the top of the house down, leaving the cellar to the last. It had been their major hope from the moment they gave up the room of Wilton as a possibility, and now they attacked it with the greatest care. There was a large wood room under the house, two big storage chambers for the stowage of supplies, and in the front of the house, where the slope of the land allowed windows to be placed, there were two empty rooms—for servants, no doubt—which never had been used. The windows were stuck shut by the strength of the first and last coat of paint which had been applied to them.

Through these chambers, and through the corridors connecting them, they went with methodical attention, searching, rummaging, tapping.

"You don't have to have a barrel to hide half a million dollars' worth of pearls!" Pete Lang was never tired of cautioning his friend.

But when darkness came in the cellar and they had finished the wood room by dint of moving at least a cord of piled firewood, Pete Lang himself confessed that they were wrong. The pearls were not in the house!

It was a great blow to them. As Lang said, the logic all pointed to one conclusion. If the pearls were not in the house, then where were they? Certainly, Wilton had not left his room to secure the supply which was in his pocket when he met Fennel.

"You remember," suggested Sherry, "the talk that Beatrice Wilton said she overheard in the wood between her

uncle and a man whose voice sounded like Layman's? Wilton said that he hadn't 'them.' He was excited and angry about it. What did he mean by 'them' unless he meant the pearls?"

"You talk, kid, like a book," admitted the other. "Wilton lost 'em, then? All except a few that he had handy about him, sort of like keepsakes. Is that it?"

"That's the sense of it."

"And what would Layman know about them?"

"He's an old friend of the family."

"How old?"

"Some years at least. He was doctor for both the Wiltons."

"It may not have been Layman's voice at all," said Sherry at last. "If it had been, she wouldn't have merely guessed. She would have known. The things that we *think* we recognize are a long way from the reality. We never have any real doubt about the truth!"

To this Lang agreed, and it was not hard to furnish another character to the man who had conversed with Wilton in the forest behind the house.

It seemed apparent, of course, that Wilton had in his possession—or had had until he lost them—a quantity of pearls or other things of price to which some one besides himself could lay claim. At least, he had not more than a partial interest in the treasure. The strange demeanor of Harry Capper, for instance, could be explained in this manner, as also the odd demands of Fennel, the drunkard and sham.

"If ever we could know the true story of what happened aboard the *Princess Marie,*" said Lang, "then we'd be a lot nearer home. But the next thing for us to think about is how we're going to get funds. We can't very well beg them from Beatrice Wilton."

Sherry flushed at the mere thought.

"We have the pearls that were meant for Fennel," he suggested.

"That's State property, by rights," objected Lang.

"We can take one of them. How many are there altogether?"

"Five good-sized ones, eleven smaller ones, and eighteen little pearls," said Lang.

"You've counted them pretty well, Pete."

"I've spent some time looking at them, son. They're worth it!"

"I'll take one of the bigger ones," said Sherry, "and hock it at one of the pawnshops. D'you know what one of these things is worth?"

They selected a pearl together.

"I dunno," said Lang. "I sort of remember Sam Hulman having a pearl that looked about that size in a scarf-pin. Sam, he paid down a hundred and fifty dollars for it. I suppose that you ought to get about a hundred, for this one.

"A hundred it is," answered Sherry. "It's stealing from something or some one—but not altogether from Wilton. So here goes!"

With that, he went straight down to Clayrock and entered beneath the sign of the Three Moons which showed over the entrance of a shop on the main street. It was littered with the usual assortment of cheap watches and good ones, flashy, huge jewelry of paste, and smaller stones of price. Lumbermen and miners had left some of the gilt of their flooding boom days here in the dark shop. There were even jeweled revolvers, pawned at last by some hungry dandy of the frontier!

The place was run by a brisk, young man with an open, frank eye, and a fearless cheerful demeanor. He greeted Sherry with a broad smile.

"Evening, Mr. Sherry. Haven't been expecting you, but I never know when the big men of town may pay me a call. Are you buying or selling, Mr. Sherry?"

Sherry looked at him in some hesitation. He was much inclined to find a pawnshop where his name was not so well known, but after a moment of

thought he realized that his picture and his name had been spread so thoroughly through Clayrock that it would be impossible for him to remain in the dark.

"I've come to sell," said he, and laid the pearl on the counter.

"And the price?"

"Suppose I leave that to you?"

The pawnbroker took the jewel, passed it under a magnifying glass, and turned it quickly. Then he replaced the pearl gently on the counter.

"Not a bad one," said he. "Suppose I say a hundred dollars?"

The price was exactly what Sherry had been led to expect he might get, and now the closeness of Lang's guess made him exclaim with a broad smile: "Well, I'm dashed!"

But the pawnbroker started.

"Hold on," he said, growing a little red and hurried, "maybe there isn't such a flaw as I thought, and——"

He examined the pearl again. This time he carefully weighed it on a slender scale.

"Matter of fact," he said candidly, "I've made a mistake. I can pay you two fifty, for that."

Sherry scowled.

"I'll take not a cent under five hundred!" said he.

The youth sighed, opened a cash drawer, and laid a bundle of bills before him.

"Well," said he, "I can't drive sharp bargains with you, Mr. Sherry."

CHAPTER XXIV.

BUD AND JERRY.

THE largeness of this price still half-stunned Sherry; the value of all the pearls in his pocket suddenly was enhanced; he was carrying about with him what would be a tidy little fortune to many a man. Moreover, the broker did not seem at all displeased with the bargain he had struck, but spread his hands upon the counter and beamed on Sherry as the latter stuffed the bills into his wallet.

"If I'd asked a thousand," said Sherry, "you'd have paid it just as willingly!"

"There's pearls and pearls," answered the other. "Most of 'em that size wouldn't be worth five hundred, even. But this is a beauty. I'll send it East. And maybe the selling price of it even in the trade will scare a thousand dollars to death!"

His frankness made Sherry smile, and the broker smiled back. He was an extraordinary young man, who seemed to make no attempt to cover his pride in his own shrewdness.

"You and Oliver Wilton keep the same sort of pearls in your pockets, I see!" said he.

"Wilton?" exclaimed Sherry.

The pawnbroker narrowed his eyes ever so little.

"Does that surprise you a lot?" he asked.

"Why," said Sherry, "I don't see why Wilton should want to be selling pearls down here!"

"Pawning, not selling. There's a pair of 'em."

He took out a small tray, lined with blue velvet, and upon it were scattered pearls of several sizes. Two big ones lay in the middle.

"That's the couple." He added: "Wilton knew their value, too!"

"Wilton's not apt to redeem the tickets," said Sherry dryly.

And he went out into the blast of the sun's light and heat still blinking and wondering. Why should Wilton have needed money? A good deal of money, at that! For the pair of pearls were both much larger, and fully as fine, it appeared, as the one which he had just sold.

With that in his mind, he hurried back to find Lang, and to him he confided the truth about the price of the pearl. It staggered the man of the range. To-

gether, they laid out the pearls and examined them afresh. If one of them had been sold for five hundred and was worth closer to a thousand, the whole of the little collection was now worth a greatly enhanced price.

"If there are many more of these, somewhere," said Lang, "it's a treasure, 'Tiny.' Trouble has popped on account of them. Trouble is going to pop again! But where could Wilton have put the things—or lost 'em?"

They were wandering through the garden of the Wilton house as they talked, for the house was hot, and in the garden a breeze stirred beneath the trees.

"This stuff is worth too much to be carted around in a pocket," said Sherry. "I'll take it back to our room and stow it away. Be somewhere around here, and I'll come back."

Going back to their room, he chose a simple hiding place. A handkerchief made a pouch; he secured the loose edges with a bit of string, thrown over in a pair of half hitches, and he simply dropped the handkerchief into the pocket of an old raincoat which he used on cold, windy days, riding herd. If a search was made for any object of value, it would be a clever man indeed who thought of dipping his hand into the pocket of a dusty old coat. And even if a hand reached into that pocket, the handkerchief might not be examined.

Contented with his own cleverness, Sherry went out into the garden and hurried to find Lang again; he would make that keen fellow guess at the hiding place he had chosen and then enjoy some sort of a small triumph, for Lang was apt to smile with superior wisdom at the simplicity of his big friend. So, in his haste, Sherry cut straight for the point at which he had left Lang, and leaving the path and its crunching gravel, he headed across a stretch of lawn and came in under the shadow of the trees in time to hear a voice growl:

"Back him up against that tree, Jerry. Watch him. He's got his weather eye peeled on you. That's better!"

Sherry slipped like a great cat among the big trunks of the pines, and so he came on a view of Pete Lang, backed against a large tree, his hands above his head, while one man covered him with a short-nosed revolver, and a second was in the act of reaching for Lang's gun.

"Drop your guns," said Sherry in his deep, booming voice. "And shove up your hands!"

The two started violently. Half sheltered behind a tree, Sherry waited, ready with bullets if they were needed; but neither of the pair attempted to turn upon him.

"He's got the wind of us, 'Bud,' " said Jerry.

"He has," said Jerry. "It's the big boy, at that. We gotta strike our sails, Bud, to this squall!"

And, with that, he dropped his gun and raised his powerful arms unwillingly above his head.

Bud followed that good example, and Lang, relieved of pressure, instantly covered them with his own pair of weapons. Steadied and helpless beneath the noses of those big Colts, the strangers remained calmly enough while Sherry searched them. He took from each a dangerous-looking sheath knife, and from Bud another short-nosed gun, which was in a hip pocket.

"These are town guns, boys," said Sherry. "You shouldn't carry them out into the big open spaces! Back up there against that bank," he added. "You can put your hands down, if you want to. But mind you, we mean business. If you try to make a break, I'd have as little hesitation in dropping you as in shooting at a pair of tree stumps."

"Aw," said Bud, "we know you! Everybody knows you. I'm gunna make no break!"

He was a little square-made man, with

a bright, cheerful face and small eyes that were filled with life. His friend was in exact contrast—a chinless, lean fellow, with a kink in his neck, and an Adam's apple which worked prominently up and down. He allowed Bud to do the talking; indeed, his eyes were constantly seeking the face of his stubbier companion as though to win inspiration.

"We'll get on, then," agreed Sherry. "You two fellows were sent here by who?"

"By no one," said Bud.

"Bud," said Sherry, "are you going to try to pull the wool over our eyes?"

Lang broke in: "There's a mighty tight little jail here in Clayrock, and a sheriff that ain't partial to holdup men. You may've heard of Sheriff Bert Moon? Try to come one on us, and you hit the trail for jail and the pen afterward. Come clean, and we turn you off."

"Hold on," protested Sherry. "We have them now. We may wish like anything that we had them later."

"What do they matter?" asked Lang sternly. "They'll never bother either of us again, I have an idea. And we want to get at what sent them here. Bud, who sent you along?"

"We sent ourselves," declared Bud.

"That," said Lang bluntly, "is a lie. I never saw either of you before. You can't have anything against me."

"We got nothing against you," agreed Bud, "but you got something of ours on you."

"And what's that, Bud?"

"What did you leave down in the pawnshop?" asked Bud.

Lang stared at Sherry.

"You're a pair of 'em, are you?" he asked.

"From the *Princess Marie?* Sure we are!" said Bud.

"This gets richer and richer," said Sherry. "You're off the *Princess Marie,* then?"

"We are."

"You sailed under Captain Wilton."

"Yes, he was the skipper."

"And no one sent you here?"

"Nobody. Who would? Lord knows we hunted far enough before we spotted the place where Wilton lived, and we come along too late to find him alive—the sneakin' low hound! That's what he was, a dead beat and a hound!"

That speech was from the heart; there was no doubt of that. And the face of Jerry, as he listened, wrinkled in savage disgust and sympathy.

"You sent yourselves here?" asked Lang, beginning to take charge of the conversation.

"We done just that. It took time. We was clean broke. Working a short job, here and there, picking up what coin we could, we've had a long beat to windward, but just when we'd weathered the point—here comes the big boy with his pair of gats and sticks us up on a reef again. It's tough, I say."

"It's tough," agreed Jerry sadly.

"You came for what's your own?"

"I came for that."

"And what goes to each of you?"

"Five of the big boys, like you pawned; eleven of the middle-sized ones and a bunch of the little fellers," said Bud with instant readiness."

Sherry glanced at Lang, and Lang returned the look with interest.

"What would that come to in cash?"

"About seven thousand iron men," said Bud.

He sighed and rolled up his eyes at the thought of such a fortune.

"How many were aboard the *Princess Marie?*" asked Lang.

"Outside of the chief engineer and Capper—he was actin' first—and the skipper, there was seventeen of us."

"Seventeen times seven makes about a hundred and twenty thousand dollars."

"Or more, according to how good a market we could find," insisted Bud.

"Look here, you and big boy. We got no grudge agin' you. You got the stuff. All right! Let it go at that. All we ask for is our right share. We done our work, didn't we? Look at me! It was me that was the last man aboard the boats! By rights, I'd ought to have something extra. Well, I ain't yelling for that. Only, we want our square cut. Nothin' more! Is that fair?"

"What made you think that we had the pearls?" asked Sherry.

"Would a pair of punchers off of the range be sporting pearls like that?" asked Bud bluntly.

"Sit down, old son," invited Lang. "We want to hear your yarn about the *Princess Marie*."

"Sure," said Bud willingly. "I'll tell you. Not as if you didn't know!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A STRANGE STORY.

THE account of Bud was straightforward enough, though filled with a good many inconsequential details such as a sailor cannot free his tongue of. He told how he and his companion, Jerry, had shipped on board the *Princess Marie* in San Francisco harbor.

"She was a fine-lookin' hooker," said Bud. "I never ask no better. A good fo'c's'le—roomy enough, and airy enough to keep your duds dry in wet weather, buckin' head winds. We never had no kick, to speak of. The skipper was a gent that kept aft and let the men keep forward. We wasn't undermanned. Overmanned, if anything. The chuck was prime. The watches was regular. Only Capper was a brute. He sailed second, but the first was sick most of the way and he died before the voyage was over. Then Capper, he got the run of the ship, pretty much."

At Hongkong they discharged their cargo and ran down to Singapore looking for another. A week was wasted, sweltering at Singapore, before they went on to Colombo. Here and at Madras, they picked up a cargo and started for Kuching in Sarawak, Borneo, where they discharged part of it and took on some more.

And here it was, apparently, that the captain received his grand idea. Manila was given out as the next port of call, and they bucked up the north Borneo coast into the teeth of a heavy gale. Instead of holding on their course north of Palawan, and straight for Manila harbor, the *Princess Marie* now was turned through Balabac Strait and went humming south for the Sulu Islands.

That same day, a number of boxes, small but heavy, which had been taken aboard at Kuching, were brought up on the deck and opened. They proved to contain fine new rifles and two machine guns.

Then Capper went forward and exposed the boxes and their contents to the whole assembled crew. He made a speech in which he pointed out that he had been for years about the Sulu Islands; he knew the people and he knew the pearl fisheries, and of one in particular he had heard that it was ripe for investigation. Great stacks of oysters were now in the sheds; the place was manned by not more than three or four whites, and the natives would never stand up to gunfire. For that matter, it was doubtful if there were more than half a dozen rifles at that station.

The proposal of Capper was simple and to the point. He suggested that they come up toward the fishery, anchor behind a masking point of land, and under cover of the dark, go in with two of the boats and raid the place. They could capture it at the first rush, shooting into the air. After that, twenty-four hours of brisk work would place in their hands the cream of the spoils of the fishery.

The crew agreed readily. It was Capper himself who had selected the men in San Francisco, and he had taken

aboard a choice gang of hardy fellows, who would stop at nothing. They were offered, now, one half of the total haul; the other half was to be split up among the officers, the share of Wilton, as skipper, being a quarter of the whole—not too large a portion, taking into account the fact that he was handling the ship and assuming the responsibility.

The first mate, still very ill, now gathered strength enough to come on deck, and there before the men he made a hot appeal to them all to pay no more attention to the captain and the second, so far as this raid was concerned, but to remember that these waters were alive with revenue cutters, and that there was very small chance that they could ever get away with their loot in the face of wireless and telegraphs, which would soon give out the alarm.

However, the captain ordered the mate into his cabin, and none of the crew were shaken in their resolve. They looked upon this expedition more or less as the buccaneers looked in the old days upon an incursion into the Spanish Main. It was partly piracy, of course, but chiefly it was a grand old lark!

A note of seriousness was struck the very next morning, when it was discovered that the mate was no longer aboard. Capper stirred about among the men and pointed out that the mate had been sick for a long time, that his mind had been upset by the plan to raid the pearl fishery, and that he must have stepped to the rail and dived over during the night.

However, there was a dark feeling among the men that Capper must have taken the affair in hand and tapped the mate upon the head, and then passed him over the rail. There was no suspicion attached to the skipper on this occasion.

However, it was noticeable that Capper, from this day forward, had almost as much control over the ship as the skipper himself. He gave orders. He even argued with Wilton before the men, and the captain put up with it, as though perforce!

In the meantime, they were logging south in the most leisurely fashion, the engines barely turning over enough to give steerage way, and the ship rolling heavily and sluggishly while the crew hastily worked a coat of paint over her. Her color was completely altered, the bands upon the smokestack were changed, and the big letters of the name on the stern were painted out and replaced by *The Dove, of Bristol.*

This name, for a ship which was about to make such a predatory swoop, amused the men highly. At length, the painting was completed, and very late in the afternoon of the next day they ducked inside a coral reef and came to anchor in smooth water to the south of a jutting point of land.

With the darkness, the two boats put off. Only three men were left on board, under command of the boatswain. The rest, sixteen in number, with the captain in the sheets of the larger boat, rowed in around the point, with muffled oars. In the bow of each boat there was a machine gun. Capper was handling one. Bud himself, had the other. In case the station developed unexpected strength, the machine guns were to cover a retreat.

The landing was perfectly simple. That night the sea was almost totally quiet, and with silent oars they pushed on until the prows quenched their speed in the white sand which gleamed faintly under the tropic stars.

They made straight to the station, unchallenged, and then charged in with devilish yells, shooting into the air, as Capper had suggested. Not a hand was raised to oppose them!

By midday of the following day, they had finished their work and were lugging at the oars on the way back to the ship which, having been flagged in the meantime, had worked up steam. And

yet they made no great haste away from the island.

As they were tuning to come out through the gap between the reefs, a few riflemen came down to the shore and, hiding behind rocks, opened a desultory fire—not as though hoping to delay the ship, but simply in blind anger, to inflict some loss upon her.

However, a few bursts of fire from the machine guns quieted the marksmen ashore, and *The Dove, of Bristol* drew slowly away.

However, they had barely made offing from the island when smoke appeared on the horizon and came up toward them, hand over hand. At full speed, *The Dove, of Bristol* rushed north. The other vessel instantly changed course. There was no doubt that she was pursuing!

Full speed for the *Princess Marie* made little difference. The lookout presently descried a long, low hull beneath the smoke cloud of the other ship; it was a government cutter slicing the water like a knife and literally walking over them.

Capper, pale, and stern, and despairing, stood on the bridge and cursed with helpless rage. The captain retired to the chart house; every one thought that he had funked the issue.

But presently he altered the course due east.

The pursuer was hull up, by this time. It was late afternoon. The sun hung not twice its own breadth above the horizon; and then a mutter ran through the crew that they were heading straight for a nest of reefs through which no ship in the world could possibly find a passage.

This murmur grew. The boatswain was made spokesman to go aft and complain to the skipper about the madness of the present course. At which Wilton came out and made a quiet speech. He pointed out that they were totally lost. They could not escape from the government boat by holding straight on their course. Darkness was about to drop over them, but, shortly after, the searchlight of the pursuer would pick them out, and soon a shell would whistle over their heads and thus force them to heave to.

He proposed to head the ship straight on toward the reefs, and as soon as the the darkness came, he would open the cocks of the ship, and as she sank, steaming ahead, the boats would be manned. True, the reefs could not be passed by a large ship, but it would be child's play to get through them with the boats.

The crew, astonished by this bold suggestion, cheered their skipper. And all was done as he had conceived the scheme. Darkness dropped. The searchlight of the cutter began to fumble vaguely at the blackness, the *Princess Marie* settled low in the water, and when her decks were almost awash, the boats were shoved off and the oars swept them away. They had not gone a hundred yards, when the *Princess Marie* put her stern in the air and dived from view.

That same night a tremendous storm blew up; they landed to escape the force of a hurricane out of the north. When it had blown over the next morning, they pursued their way and finally made a port, with a sad story of how the hurricane had overwhelmed the *Princess Marie* on a sunken reef, on which she had broken up as the boats were taken off in the falling of the wind.

But now, while they waited for the coming of the ship which would take them back to civilization, the captain, with the brown satchel in which the pearls were stowed by him, suddenly disappeared from the town.

It was suggested that he might have headed for the far side of the island. A searching party failed to bring him in, and so the fruit of the pearl raid was gathered into his own hands.

The lips of the sailors were sealed.

They could not very well confess that they had been robbers before they were robbed; but the prize which had been stolen from them was sufficiently large to make every one of them desire to take vengeance into his own hands. Others, no doubt, would follow the trail of Bud, and Jerry, and Capper, to Clayrock, and trouble was bound to continue until the men had got their dues.

Such was the strange story of the sinking of the *Princess Marie*.

"Wilton's gone," said Bud in conclusion. "He had a brain, but he was a crook. And finally he got his! And now, big boy, we want to know where we come in?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

STRAIGHT TALK.

IT was necessary for the two confederates to stare at one another again, as in consultation, after which Sherry said: "This fellow is square, Lang."

"He's square," admitted Pete Lang, "but I don't see what difference that makes."

"I'm going to come clean to him," said Sherry.

He said suddenly to the sailors: "You fellows can hear what I have to say. I don't think you'll believe me, but here goes: When Lang, here, found that Wilton lay dead in the grass, he discovered a handful of pearls in Wilton's pocket. There were five big pearls, and eleven of a middle size, and a number —seventeen, I think—of little ones. He took those pearls and didn't turn them in to the sheriff. For a good many reasons."

"You fool!" barked Lang at his friend. "Do you realize what you're saying?"

"I know what I'm saying," said Sherry. "But what's the use? Are we going to murder these fellows! I think not! And as long as they're alive they'll keep on troubling us—they and the rest of the crew behind them. Let me talk straight out."

"You see what you've got to say?" muttered Lang.

"I see, and I'll say it," retorted Sherry.

He continued to the two sailors, who now were as keen as lynxes.

"I'm not going into the thing any more in detail. I'm simply going to ask you to believe that we weren't stealing for ourselves. We were——"

"Hold on," said Lang. "I dunno that I shouldn't have my say about that. Why haven't we as good a right to the stuff as any other man?"

"Hey!" put in Jerry, his voice ringing with indignation. "Did you go to all the trouble of swiping 'em? Did you have a ship sink under you? Did you have a typhoon blow up over your heads? Did you go wanderin' around broke for months, tryin' to locate the snake that had double crossed you? And here you come up sayin' that you got an equal right to them pearls! Is that logic, partners?"

He spread out his lank hands. Jerry was wounded to the heart.

"You swiped 'em," said Lang brutally. "I swipe 'em back. What you gotta say about that? Nobody owns 'em but the fishery. That's the straight of it. Where do you come in? If you steal a hoss does that make you have any claim to the hoss—or to a rope to stretch your neck with? How's that for logic?"

It was such convincing logic that Jerry sat back and bit his lips nervously. His eyes worked this way and that, but troubled though his soul might be, he could not find for it any relief in words.

Both the sailors sat bolt upright and stared at the pair—silenced but deeply hostile.

"Logic's not what we want here," said Sherry. "We want friendliness. And here's where I bid for it."

"If you didn't swipe the stuff," asked

Bud angrily, "how come that you sold one of the pearls and shoved the money in your wallet?"

"Because we had to have something to live on while we're working on this case."

"And what call have you got to work on this here case?"

"To prove that Beatrice Wilton is not guilty," said Sherry with much earnestness.

"Say, Bud," said Jerry in some disgust. "Ain't you heard nothin'? Don't you know nothin'?"

With this, he nodded at Sherry in a good deal of friendly sympathy, and the big man flushed darkly. His secret was known, then. Well, for that matter he had seen a thousand hints in the newspapers. He was "the knight of Beatrice Wilton," among other titles showered upon him.

"But we couldn't draw down pay for sitting still, could we?" asked Sherry; "you understand, boys, that we had to live if we were to help. So we soaked one of the pearls. I'll do more. I'll show you the rest of the ones that we have."

"Sure!" said lean-and-lank Jerry.

"It ain't necessary," put in Bud with dignity. "I can tell when a gent is comin' clean with me. I'll take your word, big boy!"

"I don't see where all of this rigmarole is heading for!" exclaimed Lang. "It beats me what you got in your head, Tiny!"

"Of course it does," said Sherry with a superior air. "I'll let you in on it now. Do you believe that these fellows were a part of the crew of the *Princess Marie?*"

"Aw, I believe that, well enough."

"Then they'd know the rest of the crew?"

"I suppose so."

"Then they can tell us—and the sheriff—something about Fennel, can't they?"

"Ah, now I foller your drift. But I aim to say that Fennel never was a sailor at all!"

"You're wrong, and you have to be wrong," insisted Sherry. "Fennel was one of the crew; he wanted his split of the pearls; he hated Wilton so badly that when he was close to him, he didn't wait for the split, but murdered him."

"That would be nacheral enough," declared Bud. "But tell me about this Fennel. I've read something about him. Was there any Fennel in the crew, Jerry?"

"There was not, that I knowed of. But we went by front monikers, not the family names. How did he look?"

"Long and thin. A good, big head covered with ratty, ragged-looking hair. Unshaved most of the time. Very fond of his liquor. Clever, too. A sneaking sort of cleverness, I'd say."

The sailors looked gravely at one another, as though reading in books.

"That's Davisson," said Jerry.

"Did he have a scar across his forehead?" asked Bud.

"No. Not a sign of a scar."

"It's not Davisson, then. And if it ain't Davisson, it's nobody from the *Princess Marie.*"

"And there you are," said Lang sourly. "You'll be helped on your way a long distance by this, Tiny Lew!"

"Shut up!" answered Sherry angrily. "We've finally established one point: Fennel was *not* a member of the crew. If not, then he was an outside worker. Is that right?"

"And where does that lead you?"

"I don't know. But everything that we learn is something that we know," said Sherry, with a rather childish stubbornness. "What I suggest is this: Get these boys on our side of the fence. If we don't, then when other members of the *Princess Marie* crew hit this town, as they're sure to do, they'll all be waiting for us in a mob, thinking that we have the loot."

"And how'll you get 'em on our side?" asked Lang, still skeptical.

"This way. Boys," he said to the sailors, "I'll offer you a bargain. It may not suit you, but here it is, the best that I can do. You know that the pair of us are doing what we can to help Miss Wilton out of jail, where she doesn't belong. But as sure as there's a Heaven, what we do will be no good unless we find this fellow Fennel—or whatever his real name is—and prove that he committed the murder. Otherwise, there's nothing to do except smash open the jail, and you know that jail breaking isn't as easy as opening a can in a town where Sheriff Bert Moon keeps office hours. Are you following me?"

"Like a hound on the trail," said Bud.

"Then throw in with us. This trail goes to sea, where most landsmen can't follow it. I think that Fennel's trail goes to sea also. Well, perhaps you could follow it where we can't. Suppose you throw in with us, and Beatrice Wilton is not found guilty—then we turn over to you these pearls. That means six or seven thousand dollars for the two of you. Not your full share, I know. But, otherwise, how do you get anything at all?"

Bud said instantly: "Big boy, I'm with you. I like your style fine. I'd sign with you any day. That goes for Jerry, too. Eh?"

"Sure," said Jerry rather vacantly.

"We being broke, though?" queried Bud.

Sherry drew out the wallet, and gave two hundred and fifty dollars into the hand of the sailor.

"That's half the price of the pearl," said he.

Money possesses a peculiar eloquence and emphasis. Now, Bud held the bills in a firm grasp for a moment and stared at them. He had worked most of his life before the mast, and sailors' wages are not high. Then, with a knotted brow, he made exact division and handed half of the whole to Jerry, who was now plainly agape.

"We'll see you through this buster," said Bud quietly. "What do we do first?"

"Go down to Moon and say that you've been sailors. That you knew a man who looked like Fennel. The sheriff will let you see his stuff. Maybe that will tell you something. But right now you can perhaps give us an idea of how many of your other shipmates are apt to turn up here at Clayrock."

Said Jerry: "Three of the boys died in the Sulus before ever they sailed. 'Budge' Sawyer fell from the end of the bridge and busted his back on the way home. Loomis and Cartwright was killed in a dynamite explosion in Frisco right after they landed on shore. Well, that's six out of twenty. The skipper's dead, and so is Capper—and good riddance! And here's me and Bud. Well, say there's ten more that might show up, but will they? I dunno. Some gents are pretty careless. It's a wild-goose chase, anyway. I never would've stayed on the road, except that Bud made me. I dunno. I don't think that many more of the crew will be showing up this way!"

Bud said with his grave, bulldog manner.

"Here's my hand, big boy. You, too!"

He shook with Sherry and Pete Lang.

"We're hitting the grit right now. Whatever we find out, we'll let you know. So long!"

And, in a moment, they were off down the path.

Lang looked after them with a dubious eye.

"Is there six thousand dollars' worth of brains in that outfit?" he asked. "Is there any chance of getting back what you offer to pay, old son?"

"I don't know," answered Sherry. "But if they're any help at all—great

Scott, man, won't it be beyond all price in the world?"

But Pete Lang sighed and looked the other way, like a man dealing with a child.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"FANNIE" SLADE.

AFTER that, Pete Lang remained at the house; but Sherry, growing nervous with inaction, started into the town to see what he could see, and almost at once encountered the tall form of Doctor Layman, coming along the street with his long, light stride, his trousers brushing together with a *whish* at the knees.

He was white and thin-lipped with anger.

"The sheriff is as full of malice as a mad dog!" declared the doctor. "By heaven, there's a flaw in the man's mind. He's unbalanced!"

"He's a name for being a square shooter," suggested Sherry, in doubt because of the violence of this accusation.

"Square shooter? He's going to railroad Beatrice to the hangman's rope!" declared Layman. "He's just refused to allow her to see any one, or even to send out letters! A more high-handed outrage I never heard of!"

"Not even see her lawyers?" asked Sherry.

"And precious lawyers she'll have," stormed Layman, "unless we can get at the funds of the estate. And how is that to be done unless she can execute a power of attorney and place it in my hands—or in any other hands! I've never heard of such illegal tyranny!"

"It is!" said Sherry. He thought a moment and then added: "Some men naturally dislike women. Moon does."

"You're right, of course," acknowledged the doctor. "But there's this to be considered—he never had a chance, before, to put a woman in jail on a heavy charge. And now the tyrant in him is being shown—without precedent."

"Have you appealed to the judge?"

"What use is that? The judge is in Moon's pocket. Everything that Moon does is inspired, one would think. But, by Jupiter, I'm going to break his reputation to bits like bad wood!"

He went on without farewell, only to turn on his heel after a few strides and call back: "You know that Slade—the 'Phantom,' or 'Fannie,' or whatever they call him—is in town looking for you? Is there any bad blood between you two, or is he a friend?"

"We've never crossed," added the doctor, and hurried on, like a man full of his own thoughts.

It was a double blow that Sherry had received. In the first place, the news that the sheriff had taken such a pronounced stand against Beatrice Wilton was a shock to him, not only because it was sure to make her way to freedom more difficult, but because it showed from the beginning that Herbert Moon was convinced of her guilt. And the reaction of Sherry was unlike that of Layman. The doctor, keen in the pursuit of the girl's freedom, seemed to have had no feeling except that injustice had been done; but Sherry, looking at the matter in another light, felt the weight of Moon's condemnation. For the sheriff was not a man to make up his mind lightly; and before he would take such a vigorous attitude as that which he had adopted toward the girl, it was certain that he had searched the case thoroughly from beginning to end.

In a word, if Herbert Moon felt that Beatrice Wilton was guilty, guilty she undoubtedly was!

The chief work for Sherry, he resolved, as he marched on down the street, was not to prove her innocent, but to devise means of getting her out of the jail. And bitterly, now, he regretted the threats which he had poured upon the quiet little sheriff in the Wilton house, on the day of the coroner's examination. He had, in gambling par-

lance, "tipped his hand," and the sheriff would be waiting for exactly such an attempt as Sherry now had in mind.

However, for the moment even the girl was thrust to the back of his mind. There was another point of greater importance, for the nonce. Slade!

His name showed the manner in which he had graduated in the school of violence. "Fannie" Slade they called him now. But in his earlier days, before debauchery and a thousand crimes had lined his face and put iron in his heart, he had been known as Phantom Slade. Because like a ghost he stepped without sound. And his wild rides across country made his presence ubiquitous.

It was not likely that Slade had come to Clayrock for any friendly purpose. If he were asking for Sherry, it meant that he was intent on making trouble—his vocation in life.

It might well be that the fame of Sherry, so foolishly spread abroad by the pages of many newspapers—his fame as a gunfighter—had come to the ears of Slade and wakened the jealousy of the famous killer.

For such was Slade. It was said of him, as of some cutthroats of earlier days, that he killed men merely for the pleasure of seeing them fall. There was no chivalry in Fannie Slade. He would shoot from behind as readily as he would shoot from in front. He was a half-breed, and he had a half-breed's—or a tiger's—indifference to honorable methods of warfare. The tales that were told of him chilled the blood. Though still in the prime of life, he was old as a slayer. He had begun in his 'teens, said rumor. He was now over thirty. And he was said to have killed a man a year.

It was no wonder that Sherry grew cautious and his manner altered as he went down the street.

All things had now a different meaning. There was as great a contrast as there is between day and night in the mind of a child—or in the minds of most grown men. All had been open and harmless the instant before, but now every alley-mouth yawned at Sherry like a leveled gun, and every open window was a source of careful thought.

For so Slade acted.

Like the rattler, he delivered his warning the instant he appeared. And, by so doing, he more or less established that he was to be the hunted as well as the hunter. The warned man would be sure to be upon his guard, might well be expected to deliver a counterattack. But Slade trusted to the superior secrecy and cunning of his own maneuvers to gain the upper hand.

However, it might all be another matter. Some mutual friend might have recommended Sherry to Slade. In hope of that, the big man went on. For he had no desire to risk his life in such an unequal battle. It was true that he had a gift of speed and surety with weapons, but he never had given to fighting for its own sake, the professional attention which Slade had devoted to the game. He had lived by labor; Slade had lived by his Colt.

Sherry went straight to the hotel and sat down on the veranda. It was an empty veranda when he arrived, but quickly it was filled. People turned in from the street in passing; others came out from the building. For every one was anxious to be in the presence of this temporarily notorious character.

And then his next neighbor leaned a little toward him: "You're in for Slade, I guess?"

"Have you seen Slade?" asked Sherry.

"He's over in Ratner's Saloon."

"Did you see him there?"

"Yep. He lined up everybody and bought a drink."

"He wants me?"

"That's what he says."

"To talk or to shoot?" asked Sherry.

"I dunno. What does he usually want when he sends for a gent?"

Sherry was silent; the answer was too obvious.

"The best way is for you to sit tight," volunteered Sherry's neighbor. "You stay put where you are, with plenty of the boys around you. That way, Slade won't have a chance to get behind you."

"Will you do me a favor?"

"Proud an' happy to!"

"Go over to Ratner's Saloon and ask Slade what he wants of me."

The other stiffened a little and changed color. But he was a man of courage.

"I'll do it," said he. "Are you—are you gunna make a show-down of it, Sherry?"

"I'll hear his answer, first," said Sherry.

The other rose, and walked rapidly down the veranda steps. Once in the street, he paused, tightened his belt, jerked his hat on more firmly, and with all the air of a man going to undertake a really desperate commission, he started for Ratner's Saloon, the front door of which was visible across the street some distance down.

Through the swinging door went the messenger, and was gone a mortal minute. Then he appeared again, not walking, but literally hurled through the air. He landed in the street, rolled over and over in the dust, then picked himself up and came on the run back to the hotel.

When he arrived, a crowd gathered around him, but he fought his way through them to Sherry and stood before the latter, a battered, tattered speciman. One sleeve of his coat was missing and a great rent went up its back. His hat was gone. One eye was very red, and rapidly beginning to swell and turn purple.

"I done your dirty work for you, Sherry," he declared angrily. "And a fine reception they gave me! Slade has every ruffian in town around him. When I asked him your question, he said to me: 'Tell the low skunk that I'm here to get him, and that I'm comin' soon! Tell him to be ready! But what are you doin' down here, you sneakin' spy?'

"The rest of them took that up. They dived on me, half a dozen of 'em, beat me up, and turned me out! And you, Sherry, you—what're you gunna do about it?"

He was a young fellow with plenty of fighting spirit, and now, with his fists clenched, he looked as though he were about to throw himself at Sherry's throat.

"Steady, steady!" said Sherry. "Let me have a minute to think this thing over!"

And think it over he did, and in dead silence. Caution told him to wait where he was or, better still, go home to the assured protection of Pete Lang, rather than trust to the motley crew here, where each man was only for himself. Then he looked at the half-obscured eye and the tattered coat of his emissary, and honest anger cleansed the heart of Lew Sherry.

Wait for Slade here? Even policy forbade that he wait in silence, his nerves wearing thin, while Slade took his ease, and came to strike when he was ready.

He rose suddenly to his feet.

"What're you gunna do?" demanded the messenger again.

"I'm going to get you another coat," said Sherry, and went down the steps in one stride.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PHANTOM FADES.

IT was not far down the street to Ratner's place, but it seemed a great distance to Sherry, for he had clothed himself in his wrath as in a garment, and

every step that he took increased his anger.

For, after all, it was little short of murder that the great Fannie Slade now contemplated. He must know his own superiority over such a common puncher from the range as Sherry was, but, eager to swell his own reputation by destroying that of this newly rising light, he had come to consume Sherry like a tiger on the trail.

And it maddened the big man to think of the gunman leaning at Ratner's bar, surrounded by his cronies, waiting for nerve to weaken in Sherry. And besides, what strange thoughts, what odd devices, were now rising in the imagination of the destroyer?

A brisk young man jogged a horse up the street and hailed Sherry.

"I've come over from the sheriff's office," said he. "Sheriff Moon knows that Slade is in town. He's heard that Slade is threatening you."

"And what is that to him?" asked Sherry, vexed.

"He sent me to tell you not to go near Slade. It's his business, as sheriff, to handle that man, and he wants no other person to interfere."

Sherry, truly amazed, looked in wonder at the boy. The latter continued:

"Sheriff Moon is waiting for Slade to come out of the Ratner Saloon. He's surrounded by his cronies and his hangers-on, in there, and any of them would as soon shoot a man in the back as look at him in the face. But when Slade comes out, the sheriff will tend to him. He expressly wanted me to tell you this."

"Young fellow," said Sherry, "this is darned kind of the sheriff. Tell him so from me. Who are you?"

"Sheriff Moon is my uncle. I am his sister's son," said the boy. "My name is Charles Crandall."

He was as clean a lad, with as straight an eye, as ever Sherry had seen.

"I didn't expect this from the sheriff," answered Sherry. "I've been rather rough on him. Now I thank him from the heart, but it's too late. I've got to go and get Slade."

He strode on down the street.

But presently he was aware of a shadow following him. He jerked suddenly about and saw that the youth had dismounted and was coming from behind, quietly, and straight behind.

"And now what do you want?" asked Sherry.

"My uncle told me to prevent you from meeting Slade," said the boy.

"Will you prevent me by walking at my heels?" asked Sherry, half annoyed and half wondering.

"No, sir," answered Charles Crandall. "But at least I can help you when it comes to the pinch."

Sherry actually gasped.

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes, Mr. Sherry, of course."

"That you'd go into Ratner's place with me?"

"I'm under orders," said the boy.

"Look here!" exclaimed Sherry. "What are you doing in this town?"

"It's the school vacation," said Charles Crandall. "I came out to visit my uncle, you see."

"And now you're going to take a chance of breaking your neck for yourself? Crandall, I like you fine. You have as much nerve as any youngster I ever heard of, but now I order you to get away from behind me."

He stepped on, looking back over his shoulder; young Charles Crandall remained rooted where he was.

And so Sherry went on again, turning many thoughts in his confused brain, and always harking back to the strangeness of this day, which had brought him a kindly word and a kindly hand from Herbert Moon!

Bitterly, bitterly, he realized what all other men knew, that Herbert Moon was the soul of honor, of courtesy, of human gentleness, and therefore, the

case of Beatrice Wilton seemed darker and darker.

And this sorrow, this inner gloom, went to color his anger and make it more savage, until he was cold with rage as he reached the door of the Ratner Saloon.

He paused for an instant and looked up the street, and down it. At either end the people were flooding from their houses and blocking the road with a solid mass of humanity, and still they poured out, like water from every crevice after the long wave has receded to the sea.

He would have spectators for his death, at the least!

Then he struck the door with his fist and dashed it open, and as he did so he was conscious of a shadow just at his back. He glanced like lightning over his shoulder, and saw the handsome face of young Charles Crandall!

It was too late to turn back the gallant boy again! So Sherry stepped on into the saloon, and the first face that his eyes fell upon was that of Fannie Slade. He saw that man with a wonderful distinctness in a hundredth part of a second. And it was an unforgettable face, with bright silver tufts of hair at either temple; sunken eyes that flashed like metal out of the deep shadows beneath the brow; and lines of irony and pain and savagery marked on it deeply everywhere.

That face convulsed with anger at the sight of Sherry; but the eyes widened and grew blank, also. Plainly, Fanny Slade was receiving the greatest surprise of his life, and he was not enjoying the shock.

But it is that way many a time; a reputation grows too great. The pedestal becomes so high that even the statue is afraid of falling. So Slade stared, unable to believe that any man dared to invade his lair.

"Are you ready, Slade?" called Sherry.

The great Fannie Slade leaned a little forward, his left hand extended along the edge of the bar, his right hand at his thigh, just hovering over the handles of his revolver, but he did not draw, and he did not speak.

"Keep back, all of you," said a quiet young voice behind Sherry. "I'll start shooting, the first man who tries to interfere!"

That was the sheriff's nephew. A bit of real stuff! thought Sherry.

The blankness was leaving the eyes of Slade, but still a ghost of it remained, and suddenly Sherry stepped forward. He dared not stand quietly, waiting for the gunman to make the first move.

"You sent for me, Slade, to tell me that you were coming," said Sherry. "I couldn't keep such a famous man waiting. Here I am!"

He stood close, looking down on the slayer.

And then the glance of Slade wavered n a flash to the side—and back again to Sherry. But it told Sherry enough. It was a blinding ray of light.

"Great guns!" said Sherry. "I thought you were a man. I didn't expect to find merely a murdering sneak."

And with his left hand, lightly, he struck Slade upon the cheek. The gun fighter turned white as death; but that deadly and famous right hand remained frozen upon the handles of his gun!

Sherry turned his back and saw a line of sick faces along the bar.

"This is a rotten show, boys," said he. "You'd better get your friend out of town, because I hear that the sheriff may want him!"

And he walked out of the saloon, leaving deathly silence behind him. At his back stepped young Charles Crandall, his revolver still leveled, guarding the retreat of the big man. When they were outside, he sprang before Sherry and wrung his hand enthusiastically.

"That was a grand thing!" cried Charles Crandall. "That was the finest

thing that I ever saw or heard of. Even Uncle Herbert never did a better thing in all his life!"

"You go back to your uncle," said Sherry, "and give him a message from me, word for word. Will you do that?"

"Yes, sir," said Crandall, with an almost soldierly readiness.

"Tell him that he ought to keep you at home, because if you wander around, one of these days you'll blow up."

"I don't know what you mean by that," protested the youngster.

"I don't suppose you do," nodded Sherry. "But *he* will. In the meantime, I want you to know that I'm your friend. I never would have come out of Ratner's alive without you at my back. You don't have to repeat that to the sheriff. I'll call on him and tell him that myself!"

He left Charles Crandall with a face suffused with joy, and went slowly back up the street to the hotel. He did not arrive there first. Hurrying figures had left the saloon shortly after his departure, and they had given brief messages to the curious. So a murmur arose before Sherry and behind him as he went up to the youth of the tattered coat and black eye.

"Young fellow," said Sherry, "I thought that I could get a coat out of the crowd in Ratner's for you. But they didn't want to play. Come into the store with me, and I'll get you a new one."

A broad grin played over the battered face of the other.

"Partner," he said with emotion, "I wouldn't change this here coat, now, for a broadcloth one—not with tails to it!"

He added, in a burst of enthusiasm: "It don't seem possible that you made Slade take water! Great guns! Fannie Slade! The killer! Now, every terrier in town will take after his scalp!"

"They'll never catch up with him," suggested Sherry. "Slade has sloped, by this time, I think!"

And, in fact, Slade had disappeared from Clayrock on a fast horse, and none of his escort of cronies rode with him. But as Sherry went down the street again, he saw that his own position in the town had altered considerably. Men and women had looked at him before with awe, to be sure, but also with dread, as one would admire a huge, but savage dog. But now they regarded him with a more friendly air. Children suddenly darted out of gates and began to tag along behind him. A bold spirit ran past him and slapped at his great, ponderous, swinging hand. Sherry scooped him up as he fled and whirled him in the air, while the boy shrieked with fear—and found himself suddenly deposited upon a vast shoulder, then settled safely upon the ground again. So laughter arose and spilled back and forth riotously among the children, and they swarmed around the knees of the big man all the way to the sheriff's house.

It was the smallest dwelling in Clayrock; it was also the most poverty-stricken; but in front of it there was a garden of flowers which the sheriff kept going by much labor in the intervals between his man-hunting expeditions. He was digging in that garden, now, on his knees, whistling cheerfully as he worked around the roots of an ancient rose-bush.

"Hey!" shrilled a child in the crowd. "Look what we've brought home to you for lunch, Sheriff Moon!"

And they yelled with delight as Sherry strode triumphantly through the gate.

Sheriff Herbert Moon got up from his knees rather painfully, and with a slowness which made Sherry realize that time was stiffening the hero.

"Well, well, well," said Moon. "I'm glad to see you here. I was sorry to hear from Charles that you had taken such a foolish chance. But, of course, I'm glad that it turned out that way. I never would have dared to go into Rat-

ner's for him, I'm sure! Come into the house and sit down, Sherry!"

So spoke the sheriff, knowing that twenty youthful ears heard this tribute to Sherry at the speaker's own expense.

And then he led the giant into the little house, where Sherry had to bow his head to pass through the door, and where he hardly dared to stand erect even inside, because the rafters sloped down so low at the sides. Charles Crandall sprang up at the other end of the room.

"You run along," said the sheriff. "You're a little young to hear what we're going to say!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

SHERRY PROMISES.

THE place looked like a Mexican hut, on the inside. That is to say, the floor was simply hard-packed earth, cool and comfortable in summer, soundless underfoot—but necessarily damp in the winter. There was only one room, but each of the four corners was used as a separate chamber. The stove, with pans and pots hanging behind it, filled one nook; a table, flanked by shelves of dishes and cups and saucers, took the next; the third contained a large roll-topped desk which looked absurdly out of place, but which, as every one knew, probably contained more valuable information about criminals and criminal life than any depository in the Southwest.

The fourth corner was the sheriff's library, two or three hundred old, time-faded volumes being ranged along the shelves there. Near the desk was one couch, and in the "library" was a second, which supplied the sleeping accommodations. The rear door had been left open by Charles Crandall and, therefore, Sherry was able to look out on the regular rows of a vegetable garden, behind which stood the barn. This was such a pretentious and solid structure that neighbors sometimes asked why the sheriff did not move his horses into his house, while he took up his residence in the stable. But he was apt to say in his good-humored way that his horses were worth much more than his skin.

It was not really a very uncomfortable dwelling, when one's ideas were finally accommodated to this scheme of things. In Mexican style, the floor and the couches and even the chairs were covered with goatskins; on the wall was ranged an armory of weapons, new and old: shotguns of several makes and sizes, rifles, and a whole rack of revolvers, with boxes of ammunition beneath. Regularly, winter and summer, in heat or in cold, the patient sheriff stood in his rear yard and worked two hours with his guns. Neighbors peered over the fence and took note of these exhibitions, and what they saw prevented the world from considering that the sheriff had grown old!

"Will you tell me," said Sherry, "how you can go away on trips and leave all these things behind you? I don't think either of those doors would hold, even if they had locks and bolts and bars, which I don't see!"

"This house is never locked," answered the sheriff.

"Then you've weeded all the thieves out of Clayrock?" said Sherry.

"One lifetime isn't long enough to do that," smiled Herbert Moon. "All that I'm able to do is to cut off the heads of the tallest weeds—keep them from choking out the wheat, so to speak. And I suppose that a good many fellows would like to have a look inside my desk, yonder, or put their hands on those guns."

"You hire some one to guard the place when you're away, then?"

"I can't afford that," said the sheriff. "Besides, who could I trust? But I have better guards than men ever could be. I'll show them to you."

He whistled softly, and instantly two

sleek, white forms leaped into the doorway and came to their master—two powerfully made bull terriers with snaky heads, and little, dangerous eyes. They stood at attention like soldiers, their cropped ears pricking.

"This is the answer," said the sheriff. "When I'm away, the rear door is wedged open just enough for them to go in and out. They can't be poisoned, for they've been taught to take food from no hand except mine and that of my neighbor, Mrs. Miller. She looks after them while I'm gone, but even Mrs. Miller doesn't dare step into the yard. Once or twice there have been awkward situations when tramps came to beg at the door, but a tramp with a fast bull terrier at his heels can do wonderful jumping. Up to this time, they've always been able to clear the front fence in their stride; but I confess that I'm always relieved when I get home and find that Jack and Jill have hurt no one."

Sherry smiled. He could understand a great deal about this little man by the explanation he had given. For what could have been more effective than such an arrangement? And certainly even those accustomed to danger from men and guns would hesitate to face the teeth of these small white defenders! A wave of the sheriff's hand sent them slipping out of the house again.

Sherry said bluntly: "Sheriff, I've come to talk plain talk."

"I like that kind best," said Moon.

"You've had the name of a square shooter, always. But now you have a girl in jail and you're bearing down on her."

"In what way, Sherry?"

"You've refused to let her see any one; you've refused to let her send so much as a note out of her cell!"

Herbert Moon did not attempt to deny the accusation, but he said with a nod: "One has to take a different line with nearly every prisoner."

"But what does the law say about this?"

"The law doesn't give me any such power," said Moon with amazing openness. "However, I often have to overstep the bounds of the law."

"Do you admit that?" gasped Sherry.

"In our country," replied the other, "the law is made entirely for the sake of the accused, to assure him of receiving justice. We're raised to believe that all men are free and equal, and according to the letter of the law an accused man, no matter what proofs are against him, is apt to be treated as though he were a little more free and equal than any other person in the land!"

Sherry nodded.

"I follow that," he said. "I don't want to make trouble about this. I'd rather stand behind you, Moon. But—tell me this. Are you sure that Beatrice Wilton killed her uncle?"

The sheriff made a little pause at this for, frank as his talk had been, this was a question that rather overstepped the bounds.

At length he answered: "You want a free answer to that—an answer never to be repeated, of course?"

"Of course not," agreed Sherry.

"Then I'm glad to tell you that my mind is entirely made up. It doesn't often happen that an officer of the law can throw himself into his work with surety. But I feel an absolute surety now!"

Sherry sighed.

"I hate to hear this," he admitted. "Is she as surely guilty as all this? Is there no way of throwing a little blame on Fennel?"

"My case is not entirely made up," answered the sheriff. "I'm frank to say that. But the truth is that this crime never in the world would have been committed if it had not been for Beatrice Wilton!"

Sherry loosened his collar and took a great breath.

"I think you're wrong," he said huskily. "I think you're wrong! But suppose that you get together enough evidence to convince a jury—what will they do with her?"

"Find her guilty of murder in the first degree; but since she's pretty, they'll recommend a mild sentence, or some degree of mercy, I have no doubt."

"And then?"

"I know the judge, I think," replied the sheriff coldly.

"And you'll influence him to give her all that the law allows?"

"A good judge never can be influenced," answered Herbert Moon.

"Man, man!" muttered Sherry. "She's young—— A more beautiful woman was never made!"

At this, Moon stood up from his chair.

"A woman born with a pretty face is born with a curse!" said he. "Her beauty becomes her end of living, her vocation. Her work is to let herself be seen. She doesn't need to be witty, or gentle, or kind. She's a tyrant! The world comes to her and bows down. If I were a married man, I'd pray that my daughters should be plain women. As for the beauties—Heaven help them!"

"And that's why you hate Beatrice Wilton?" asked Sherry gloomily.

Moon went to him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"My boy," said he, "I know that your heart is aching over this. I want to do something for you. If it will give you as much pleasure as pain, you are free to go to the jail and see the girl—and talk to her alone."

"Would you let me do that?"

"On one condition, that you take no written message for her from the jail. As many oral messages as you please. But not a syllable in writing."

"It's a good deal to offer me," admitted Sherry. "When may I go?"

"Now, if you wish. I'll send over word to the jailer. And you may see her again, as often as you wish, only promising that you'll never take a bit of writing from her."

"I'll give that promise."

"I'll take your hand on it, Sherry."

They shook hands, and Sherry, his mission performed, left the house in haste.

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

GAME ON THE INCREASE

SOME of the States in the Northwest report themselves actually overrun by Chinese pheasants. They seem to be numerous in every section. And they are not only a source of pleasure for the hunter, but also appeal to the agriculturist, who finds them beneficial in the extermination of insects that would molest his crops.

In fact, since the pheasants have increased so greatly, farmers declare that grasshoppers, crickets, and locusts have almost entirely disappeared. And orchardists now look to the bird to remove such pests as moths and worms from their lands.

State game farms have been raising wild turkeys, partridges, quail, and prairie chickens for distribution to farm lands. So these birds, too, are very decidedly on the increase.

Hardrock Beards the Goat

By Seth Ranger

Author of "Ducks and Drakes," etc.

"WOULDN'T that get your goat?"

As "Poke" Tupper pulled that rather ancient observation, his partner, "Hardrock" Shipley, bristled with rage. The next instant his hard fist had caught Poke on the jaw and the tall sour dough went down in a heap. As he started to get up, Poke realized that Hardrock was all set to hit him again. "You miserable, red-whiskered walrus," Poke rasped, "why did you sock me?"

"You know why," Hardrock retorted. "I've told you again and again I won't be kidded about goats."

"Kidded about goats is good," Poke growled. "I wasn't kidding you. I was stuck on a cross-word puzzle and——"

"Yes, you was!" roared Hardrock. "You was reminding me of something I want to forget. I know you." Hardrock gave him a sharp look. "You're laughing right now. If it wasn't that I'd promised my mother never to hit a man when he was down, I'd knock that smile off your face. Get up, you ice worm, stand on your hind legs like a man so I can knock you off 'em."

But Poke Tupper refused to get up. In fact, he could not. He was laughing too hard. "All is forgiven," he howled. "You've reminded me of the funniest thing I ever saw." Again he broke into gales of laughter. "I can see it just as plain as day."

"And if I pop you another on the jaw you'll see stars just as plain as night." Hardrock used his partner's tone of voice.

"There you were," Poke recalled, "crawling along that ledge, hunting War-horse Bill, a goat the best big-game hunters have failed to get. And there was War-horse Bill coming toward you on the same ledge. And neither knew about the other until you came face to face. And there I was seeing the whole business from another ledge.

Well, when your red whiskers met his white whiskers—— *Eeeeeeyow!"*

"I promised my mother I'd never hit a man when he was down," Hardrock gritted, "but that don't stop me from choking you to death." He dived onto his howling partner and Poke's laughter became a choking sound.

The episode was something the sour doughs often related when sitting around an oil-drum stove in some roadhouse on a raw winter night. While it is true that the mountain goat fails to inspire the same admiration the mountain sheep creates in the heart of the head hunter, War-horse Bill Flannigan was an exception.

The goat derived his last name from the fact that he lived on Mount Flannigan. It was natural for a goat to be called Bill, and the "War-horse" part of the title was justly deserved, due to his many successful encounters with man and his natural enemies.

Bill was built for battering down opposition. He stood nearly forty inches at the shoulder and weighed around three hundred pounds. His low hindquarters and thick-set body; his low-carried head all added to the sense of power. His almost needle-like horns were jet black, nearly a foot in length, and very smooth.

And it was this sort of a proposition that Hardrock Shipley had been seeking, and had met, unexpectedly face to face—or, rather, as Poke claimed, whisker to whisker—the previous winter. Hardrock had climbed above War-horse Bill and was working along the ledge when Bill had spotted Poke and deemed it wise to seek a higher level, having been shot at on other occasions. There, surprise was mutual, but Bill swung into action first. He struck Hardrock as the little Irishman was in the act of firing. The rifle was knocked from his hand and fell into the crevasse of a glacier five hundred feet below. Hardrock struggled to his feet and ran at a pace that caused Bill to revise his ideas on human speed. The fact that the goat's sharp horns prodded Hardrock's flesh might have had something to do with the extra burst. He leaped a six-foot chasm and landed on another ledge. When he looked around, Bill had vanished.

As Hardrock could not get a running start for the return leap, Poke Tupper had to rescue him from the ledge. Before they would stop mentioning the incident in Hardrock's presence, the little Irishman had had to whip nine of Big Nugget's foremost citizens.

And now for the second time Hardrock was attempting to silence his partner; this time by the practical method of choking him.

Eventually, Poke shook Hardrock off and got to his feet. "You runt," he panted. "I wasn't trying to kid you. I know it's a sore point. The goat licked you, and that's all there is to it."

"It ain't a sore point, and Bill didn't lick me," retorted Hardrock. "I was there, waiting for him to come back."

"Sure," Poke jeered, "because you couldn't run any farther."

"Slim" Bledsoe, a neighbor, entered the cabin at that moment. "Fighting again, eh? I could hear the furniture breaking when I was a mile away."

"Hardrock thought I made a wise remark about that goat and so——"

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roared Slim. "I'd plumb forgotten that. But don't feel bad, Hardrock, you're only one of many that War-horse Bill has licked."

"I can go out to-morrow and shoot him," exploded Hardrock. I suppose I'll have to do it to save my face."

"You couldn't get within shooting distance of that old boy again," Bledsoe said. "The big-game hunters from outside have certainly run him ragged this year."

Hardrock's fighting spirit was up. "I'll bet you anything that I can not only get within shooting distance of

him, but that I'll shoot him. I'll bet anything."

"Anything?" queried Bledsoe softly.

"Anything I've got against a cold flapjack."

"Tabasco, your mushing mule? Will you bet him against a cold pancake that you can get within shooting distance and shoot War-horse Bill Flannigan?"

Hardrock was just angry enough not to hesitate. "Yeah, I'll bet Tabasco. Here's my hand on it. That's how sure I am. I've got that goat's goat!"

"Yeah," chided Poke, "until you're whisker to whisker, then it's another story."

"I'm going right now," Hardrock announced, "and I'm going alone. If you hadn't stirred him up last year I'd have got him."

"Better take a camera along," Poke suggested. "You know you can't shoot as good as you used to, and you might want to show us a picture of you and Bill, whisker to whisker."

"Oh, lord," groaned Hardrock, "help me keep my temper! I don't want to kill this half-baked partner of mine because men would call it murder." Then he dived into the small room in which they kept their trail grub and equipment.

War-horse Bill Flannigan looked down from an icy ridge on a snow-covered country. The bears, of course, had holed up for the winter, but the creatures depending on grass and moss for food were having a difficult time. Already the fat laid on the previous summer was feeding the fires of life. Some of them were gaunt.

The storm had driven the weaker members of the band of goats and the kids to the lower levels. Bill had followed, watchful, well aware that wolves might be prowling even above timber line. The icy blast sweeping over the glaciers rippled his shaggy coat, but the chill could not penetrate such a pelage as his. Next to the skin was a dense coat of fine wool, which was protected, in turn, by a heavy thatch of coarse hair.

Bill's eyes, perhaps, were not as keen as those of the mountain sheep, but he missed no detail of what was going on below him. He did not, however, see the red-bearded man, crawling along an icy ridge immediately above. The man's mitted hands dragged a rifle over the ice; frequently, he crouched for long spells and waited. Once he stopped, rested the rifle on a shoulder of ice, then fired. He saw a jet of ice leap up beyond the goat.

Bill and his small flock grew alert, unable to determine the source of danger. A kid huddled close to its mother's side.

"Heck," growled Hardrock, "shot over him. They were farther down than I figured." The best of shots shoot over when pointing a weapon downward. "I'll have to go back and come in the other way. That'll head him off in case he decides to come upward!"

This maneuver required nearly an hour to execute. Hardrock was careful. There was too much at stake. The very thought of losing Tabasco was sufficient to steel his nerves. While they fought a lot, nevertheless he had a real affection for the mule and was confident that the mule, in turn, liked him. Once Bledsoe got possession of Tabasco he would never give him up, as he had often expressed the desire to try mule mushing if he could get a mule as good as Tabasco.

A new situation had developed when Hardrock emerged. A skulking form was moving between boulders and ice blocks. Hardrock lifted his rifle again. "Wolves!" he muttered. Yet, if he shot the wolves, he would frighten the goat, which was still beyond good gunshot. Hardrock settled down to wait. It would take days, if not weeks, to

work into a position as favorable, all things considered. Eighteen hours of hard climbing lay behind him.

The wolves vanished. Then one reappeared. With a deadly rush, it cut in between a kid and its mother. A single slash brought the kid down. The mother bawled in terror.

War-horse Bill Flannigan whirled and charged to the rescue. His hoofs, knifelike on the edges and padded within, were designed by nature to travel on either ice or rocks. He crossed the face of a small cliff that Hardrock would have sworn a fly would have found tough walking, then with gathering speed hurled himself on the wolf. Watching the others in the flock, the wolf had not observed their leader. Bill's head caught the wolf in the side, knocking him high into the air.

The kid struggled to its feet, crimson staining the white fleece of its side. The flock was flying in terror, straight up an icy slope, the mother and kid last, the former frequently pausing to let the weakened kid overtake her. Perhaps she was confident that the leader could stand off attack until the flock had reached the safety of the upper ledges; or mother love made her willing to die with her offspring if need be.

Hardrock watched Bill square off for a second charge on his enemy, and held his fire. As the goat started the charge, a new danger appeared. A second wolf magically appeared from behind. His nose was close to the ground, his brindle hair moved in curious waves as the icy wind struck it. His fangs were dripping and bared. He changed from scent to vision as he leaped an icy barrier over which the goat had moved a few minutes before. His charge was desperation born of hunger. If not the tender meat of the kids, then the tough flesh of the old leader would serve well enough. He slashed at Bill's flanks, his fangs penetrating the coat and sinking into the flesh.

Their very momentum sent the fighters end over end down a sharp pitch. The wolf lost his hold. Bill was the first up. This was footing to his liking. He noticed the second wolf, partly recovered from his encounter, slinking toward him. Apparently without communication, the wolves had formed a plan of battle. The first wolf began to cut in to head off possible escape, the second planned to bring Bill down from behind while his companion worried him.

Bill understood the situation perfectly. He rushed up the slope, straight toward Hardrock, at full speed. When he was finally headed off, the scene of battle had shifted to within good shooting distance of Hardrock. "Luck's with me," the little man chuckled. "We're almost whisker to whisker!" He thrust the fingers of his trigger hand under his armpit to warm them, then waited.

The two wolves were on the goat and all Hardrock could see was a flurry of stained white wool, brindle, fangs, and legs. Once the goat was on his back, his hoofs in the air, then he was up. His head went low and lifted sharply. His sharp horns went deep into a wolf's breast. Then he tossed the heavy wolf fully six feet into the air. The animal fell with a thud, then began to roll slowly down the slope.

"That's polishin' 'em off," Hardrock cried. "Now go after the big fellow."

The larger of the two wolves was gasping through a mouth filled with goat hair and wool. But his fangs had nipped something more substantial, and he was attempting to drag the tired goat down. Only his own exhaustion stood between him and victory. War-horse Bill Flannigan slowly dragged the wolf to footing more to his advantage. The fighting animals left a crimson trail on the white battleground; the wolf clung desperately to his narrow margin of victory; the icy blast swept over the

ridges and cooled the hot blood of their wounds.

Once it seemed as if the goat would go down. His stocky legs shook from his weight, his head sagged. The wolf snarled and slashed for a better hold. The goat, feeling the wolf's weight relax, leaped a few feet with the last of his strength. The wolf was beneath him now. With lowered head, he put his chance of survival in one mighty charge. The impact lifted the wolf into the air. As his body came down, the furious goat drove his head upward. The horns found a vital spot in the brindle body. The wolf gasped convulsively as it struck the ice. Slowly, it began to slip toward a crevasse.

Hardrock watched it move with increasing speed until it shot into space, then vanished in the dark depths. "Two less wolves to prey on big game!" he exclaimed. "Hello! There's a couple more attracted by the blood scent."

Hardrock withdrew his hand from beneath his parka and the flesh almost froze to the trigger. Well hidden from both the goat and the onrushing wolves, Hardrock waited. There was something more than noble about the battle-scarred Billy as he faced the two wolves. He must have known he could not hope to handle one, much less two, in his present condition. His eyes lifted to the flock, now safe high above him. He could not outrun the bounding wolves.

And then a miracle happened. The peaks echoed with the roar of a rifle. The leading wolf leaped into the air and fell back on the ice. Again the rifle cracked, and the second wolf was knocked sprawling.

War-horse Bill Flannigan looked about for the source of the shot. He could not locate the man nor the gun, but he knew that a hunter was about. Slowly, he began to climb upward. Each step was agony; his body seemed more than his legs could support. Then he saw the man, crouched, waiting. He could not run; he was too near gone for that. The man was one enemy from whom escape was impossible. He raised his eyes to the upper levels, as if wishing by some magic he could be lifted there. Then back to the crouching man the eyes came and stopped.

"Just about whisker to whisker," Hardrock muttered, "and to save Tabasco I've got to prove I got within shooting distance. Well, here goes!"

Poke Tupper and Bledsoe saw Hardrock coming. Tabasco was moving slowly, as though exhausted; Hardrock was slumped down in the sled, almost asleep. "Did you win or lose?" bellowed Poke, as the sled came to a stop.

"Saw one of the greatest fights I've ever seen. Old War-horse Bill Flannigan licked two wolves single-handed."

"Yes, but did you win?"

"I had to win. I missed the first shot —too far away. Then I got within shooting distance and let him have it. Took six shots from different angles. Come on down to the cabin and I'll develop the pictures. Most anybody can get close enough to that goat to blaze away at him with a rifle, but it takes a good man to get within camera distance —if I do say so myself. By the way, Bledsoe, I'll trouble you to pay that bet. I'm hungry enough to eat a cold flapjack."

"Well, wouldn't that get your goat," muttered Poke. And this time Hardrock did not hit him.

Touched With Gold

By Hugh F. Grinstead

Author of "Injuns Don't Laugh," etc.

SEEKERS after precious metal were held by Rufe Watson in a sort of contempt. He was not a prospector, and the men who came and went, year in and year out, enduring hardships and toil almost beyond comprehension, were no more than misguided fools, in Rufe's estimation. He never took any chances with life or limb, he had missed few meals in his life, and yet he had more in a material way than any of the old-timers he knew. Usually, whenever any of them had made a little strike, Rufe had come in for his share of it, and without giving much in return.

He was a gambler of sorts, the kind that always bet on a sure thing. A man was a fool, he claimed, ever to get excited over anything. Let others plunge, while he calmly stood by to gaff the victim at the proper moment. He had lost but few dollars in his life, and it irked him yet when he recalled the circumstances under which these infrequent losses had occurred. It had always been due to overeagerness on his part.

No, Rufe was not a prospector, but he loved the sight and touch of gold. Not particularly gold in the raw, but the clinking coins as well. He regarded silver just as highly, or crisp bills for that matter—anything that was money. Nor did he hoard the few thousand dollars he had accumulated through methods that were more or less questionable. He made them work for him. He lent money to others less fortunate, demanding ample security, and by devious methods frequently contrived to make the dollar so put out double or quadruple itself within a short time.

Schooled as he was in self-restraint and tranquillity, Rufe, nevertheless, ex-

perienced a tremor of exultation as he held in is hand a fragment of gold-bearing ore the size of his fist, which he had picked up there at the base of a low ledge on the border of the dry wash. Before he realized what he was doing, he was down on his knees, clawing frantically at the loose stones with his bare hands in an effort to find other pieces of rock like the one he had picked up. He found not only one, but a dozen such. Almost every piece of rock he touched was flecked with gold.

He presently stood up to glance cautiously about him, so as to make sure he had not been seen. It was not likely, for he was off the beaten path, and in a region where few people lived. His breath came in gasps from the unwonted exertion of the last few minutes, his hands were skinned and bleeding, dust covered his clothes, and streaks of perspiration coursed down his face. But he appeared oblivious to the momentary discomfort as he stood gloating over the little heap of broken rock. A grin of triumph and avarice lifted a corner of his mouth.

Rufe knew gold when he saw it, as did every other man who had lived long in the mining country. He had trafficked in worthless mines on occasion, selling to the unwary for a price far in advance of the trifle he had paid. It had taken scheming and deception to do that, but these constituted his chief stock in trade. And now, being a fair judge of the value of quartz, he knew that the fragments he had picked up were very rich, as rich as any he had ever seen.

He carefully obliterated all evidence of his presence about the spot, picked up as many pieces of the rock as he could well carry, and hurried back to his buckboard, which he had left some hundred yards up the wash where a disused road crossed it. He had forgotten all about the water hole he had set out to look for, had even forgotten that he was thirsty, though his mouth was drier than ever now. Not until he had thrown the fragments of ore into his rusty vehicle and covered them from sight with a piece of canvas, did he regain a portion of his wonted composure. He climbed to the seat and gathered up the lines.

"Giddap, hosses," he urged, flapping the lines over the pair of uncurried beasts that drew the antiquated buckboard.

"Foolish of me to let myself git excited like that," he muttered. "Got plenty of time to cool down before I git to town or meet anybody, though. If it was one of them old fool prospectors had found that much gold, he would go a-yelpin' all the way into Burnt Rock, showin' the samples to everybody an' tellin' where he got it. But I ain't tellin' nothin', not for a spell I ain't."

And Rufe had his reasons for keeping his find a secret for the present. There was no doubt in his mind that he had made a valuable discovery, that the low ledge of rock was seamed and lined with gold; but what detracted somewhat from his joy was the knowledge that the land on which he had found the gold belonged to another man, a man who was not altogether friendly to him. Not an insurmountable obstacle, to be sure; for the land could be purchased cheaply enough, provided the owner did not suspect that there was precious metal to be found on it.

Rufe chuckled to himself as he urged his team to a slow trot, and his face twisted into his peculiar expression of real amusement.

"Give me a chance to even things with old 'Dad' Scott for hornin' in where he didn't have no business an' beatin' me out of good money a coupla times," he burst out gleefully. "He figgered he was so smart, allowed he

could tell the kind of country to prospect for gold, and that he took up his homestead here where he knowed they wa'n't any gold. Do me a heap of good to laugh at him after I git a deed to his land, but I won't laugh none before, not a grin."

Old Dad Scott, ever the champion of the weak, had on two occasions thwarted schemes of Rufe to fleece innocent persons, hence the latter's enmity. Dad Scott, when rheumatic joints interfered with the further prosecution of his search for gold, had taken up a homestead here in this isolated region. Subsisting in a precarious manner until he had lived on the land long enough to get title from the government, he was now compelled to spend most of his time working around the mines at Burnt Rock or freighting short hauls to outlying settlements, in order to make a living. The homestead idea had not been a good one in this land of little rainfall and few flowing streams. And it was on this very land that Rufe Watson had discovered gold.

Rufe's stroke of luck was a source of much satisfaction to him as he drove the ten miles or so into Burnt Rock. He had been out spying around to discover, if possible, where he might make a little investment, trusting to the misfortunes and frailty of his fellow man to insure a liberal return. He always kept his own movements secret as far as he could, hence his habit of traveling by way of unfrequented and disused roads. It was luck, sheer luck, that he and not another had been guided to the place where the gold lay exposed right there in the bed of the dry wash.

"An' the fools have been trampin' over it fer twenty year or more, right within fifty yards of the old road," he declared with a cuckle. "Goes to prove they don't know any more about prospectin' than I do, maybe not as much. I reckon gold is where you find it, sure enough."

In spite of his determination not to become impatient or excited, Rufe was not without certain misgivings. He would have felt much surer of immediate success, had the owner of the land he must buy been some one who did not know him quite so well as Dad Scott did. Still, there would be an added satisfaction in hoodwinking the wily old prosecutor. After due consideration, Rufe decided to engineer the transaction without the aid of anybody else, for old Dad Scott would be quick to recognize the subterfuge of a go-between, and would be on guard. Then, too, the kind of man that could be hired for such work was not to be trusted.

It was late afternoon when Rufe arrived at Burnt Rock and put up his team. Carefully guarding the ore samples from prying eyes, he carried them into the shack where he lived and transacted such business as he had. He would wait until the following day to make his first move, perhaps longer, for he liked to have plenty of time to think a matter over before committing himself.

First, he must have the ore assayed; men of more experience than he had often made mistakes as to values. On second thought, he decided to go away from Burnt Rock for that. There was an assayer at Ore Creek, who could do the work just as well, and there would be little chance for information to leak out if he went there. That would take another day, but he must not hurry matters. Undue haste had never gained him anything. The following day he took some of the ore samples to the assayer at Ore Creek and got his report.

"A hundred and eighty dollars to the ton!" declared the assayer. "I haven't tested ore like that in a long time."

Rufe grinned, but said nothing about

where the mineral came from. When a man discovered ore that would test as much as a hundred and eighty dollars to the ton, he was expected to be reticent about it. The assayer likewise would keep his own counsel. There was no chance whatever for old Dad Scott to know of the gold on his property, Rufe was sure of that.

Back at his shack in Burnt Rock, Rufe went over in his mind the plan of approach he had laid out. He must be wary in his dealings with the man who owned the land he was going to buy. He would appear to be liberal in his offer; he was willing to be rather liberal in the face of apparent value. Still, he must not betray his eagerness to purchase. That had always been his chief weapon in his contest with men—apparent coolness and indifference in his dealings.

But, as the hours passed, Rufe was restless; when he lay down, he did not sleep for a long time. He mentally upbraided himself for the foolishness of being disturbed over so commonplace a transaction as the purchase of a piece of land that was next to worthless to the present owner. That should be simple enough, for if he could not get it for a fair price, he could well afford to give a few hundreds more. Veins bearing ore that would test a hundred and eighty dollars to the ton were not so common.

He had thought that he might wait yet another day, and by subtle questioning open the way to a more propitious beginning. Anxious as he was to possess the land that might yield him a fortune, he had well considered the foolishness of paying even fifty dollars more than was necessary. But when morning came, he was impatient to have the thing over. The uncertainty was wearing on him, reluctant as he was to admit it. The sight and touch of gold, raw gold that would assay a hundred and eighty dollars to the ton, had gone to his head. He was feverish with the desire to possess great wealth without the necessity of dividing it with another.

He found old Dad Scott in his cabin, suffering from a slight attack of rheumatism. Rufe licked his lips; his task should be an easy one. A man with that ailment would naturally need money much more than he would need land that demanded unending labor for the meager return it gave.

Dad Scott was no wizened little runt. He stood six feet and better, and his weight was in accord with his height. His long, gray beard gave him the bearing of a patriarch, and he had an eye that quailed before no man. Stiff in his joints as he was, he was not yet bereft of strength. There was a glint of suspicion in his eyes when he opened his door in answer to a knock, and saw Rufe Watson standing before him. It was not like Rufe to pay his respects to ailing neighbors, not unless he expected something in return.

"Heard you was crippled up with the rheumatiz, an' thought I'd drop in to see how you was gittin' along," Rufe began when the owner of the cabin had invited him in.

It was a very good beginning, Rufe prided himself on his diplomacy. However, he did not fail to detect the gleam in the eye of the older man as he hobbled across the room to set a chair for his visitor. Rufe would have done well to leave after the first five minutes of casual conversation, that had been his plan in the beginning—to pave the way with a friendly call and come back later for business. But the conversation seemed to persist in swinging in the direction of his thoughts.

"I reckon you won't be workin' any on your homestead fer a long time, crippled up like you are," Rufe ventured. Dad made no immediate reply to a remark that was obviously true.

"Allow you could sell that place if you'd price it right," Rufe followed up. He had not intended to be so precipitate, but, with the subject broached, it seemed to be a good time to steer toward the point.

"Ain't said I wanted to sell," Dad Scott grunted.

"No, but I figgered you might, an' reckon I could find you a buyer if you didn't price it too high."

"Meanin' you want it yourself, huh?"

"Well—er—I could use it at a reasonable price," Rufe admitted, somewhat taken aback by the gruff retort. "I'm figgerin' to buy me a place about like that, you see, want to make it into a ranch."

"Got a good ranch down on Crab Creek, ain't you?"

"Yes, but I got some idle money I'd like to put in on another one, an' seems like your place suits me well as any. Of course, the's plenty other places I could pick up that would do me just as well if you don't want to sell," Rufe hastily added.

"Uh-huh," grunted old Dad Scott simply, but there was a wealth of meaning in the tone of his voice and the lift of his eyebrows. For the moment, Rufe Watson was baffled, but he had made a start and this was a poor place to turn back.

"What do you hold it at?" he asked as if taking for granted the desire to sell.

"You said you'd pay a fair price, let's have your idee of what it is," Dad Scott countered.

Rufe was heartened by the apparent willingness to dicker. He had been right, after all, to broach the matter at this time. But he was warned by the attitude of the older man that he would have to offer a really fair price if he expected to get anywhere. While it was not his usual policy to do that, he decided it would be best at this time to offer all the place was worth at the first bid.

"How's five hundred dollars, cash, fer a clear deed?"

Dad did not reply at once, he appeared to be thinking the matter over. Rufe discovered that his own heart was thumping painfully, and he was annoyed by the fact. Why could he not be cool and collected, as he always had been before in matters of this kind? He sat with his eyes glued on the silent man, as if life itself depended on his answer.

"I reckon, Rufe, that bein' as you offer five hundred, the place would be worth a thousand anyway," Dad Scott finally replied. "Never knowed you to offer more'n half what a thing was worth when you took a notion to buy it."

At that moment Rufe Watson hated himself for a blundering idiot. It was true that he had made a practice of offering but a fraction of the worth of anything he wanted to buy. There was always the opportunity of increasing an offer, but one could never reduce it. He could pay the thousand easily enough, would agree to it, except for the fear of exciting suspicion, the very thing he must guard against.

"A thousand dollars!" he exclaimed in genuine astonishment. "Why—why, I wouldn't give my Crab Creek ranch fer half a dozen like it, an' I'd take three thousand fer that, maybe less."

"You ain't obleeged to buy my homestead, I reckon," Dad Scott responded dryly. "If it's like you say, an' you could git other places to suit you just as well, I think it would be good bus'ness to take the one you could git cheapest."

Rufe raged inwardly, but he did not dare say a word that would offend the old man before him. It had been an awful mistake, no denying that, to make the offer so precipitately and in the manner in which he had put it;

but it would be utterly disastrous to close the door to further negotiations by losing his temper. Nor would he raise his bid at the present time; there was no assurance that Dad Scott would not go on doubling the price as he was offered more, once he suspected that his land was so much in demand.

It was a good time to leave, far too much had happened already. Rufe made his retreat in such order as he could. When he was well out of hearing, he burst into a string of invectives hurled alternately at himself and his prospective victim. He would wait a week, a month, or a year, before he renewed his offer. The time would come when old Dad Scott would come to him, begging to accept the five hundred dollars that had been offered him. Oh, he knew the tricks of suspense, he had made good trades in just that way, by waiting. He could stay away at least a year if necessary, the gold would still be there, he confidently told himself.

But when Rufe Watson was back in the quiet of his shack, he began to doubt his ability to wait so long, or the wisdom of it. The minutes were like hours in their passing, and the hours became days. The suspense of a week was contained in the remainder of the forenoon. After noon, time dragged even more heavily. A dozen times Rufe looked hopefully out of his window, but when he failed to see old Dad Scott coming to accept his offer of the morning, fresh misgivings assailed him.

Was the old man aware of the presence of gold on his homestead? But if he had known of such wealth, he would have set about working it long before. There was no assurance, however, that another would not stumble upon it just as Rufe himself had. The thought of such a possibility drove him frantic with suspense and apprehension. He endured it for an hour, then grabbed his hat and bolted from his shack.

He would go back to Dad Scott and agree to give him the thousand dollars at once. He would be meek, he would humble himself for a season if only he could get undisputed possession of the coveted land. He threw caution to the winds as he almost ran toward Dad Scott's cabin on the hillside. Had there been room in his mind for more than one thought at the time, he would have marveled at his own queer behavior. He had never been like that before—nor had he ever, until a short time before, held in his hand gold of his own finding.

He wasted no words in preliminary conversation this time, but went right to the matter in hand, when he came to the cabin and found its owner at home.

"I'll give you the thousand dollars you was wantin' fer your place," he began. "Once I take a likin' to a thing, I'm willin' to give a feller his own price fer it."

"I ain't said that a thousand dollars was my price," Dad aggravatingly reminded him.

"But you said——"

"What I said was that anything you'd offer five hundred fer was sure to be worth a thousand; but since you come hot-footin' it back to me inside a day, agreein' to give a thousand—why, I figger it's worth a heap more'n that to you."

Rufe Watson felt as if something was slipping from his grasp, and he involuntarily reached forth a hand to clutch it. He realized too late what a colossal mistake it had been to come back this same day. Why had he not been content to wait? Why couldn't he have spun his web and sat down with the patience of a spider to wait for his victim to come, just as he had done countless times before?

But the torturing suspense of the

last few hours was still fresh on his mind. He knew he would never be content to hold out for a day, or a week, or a year, as he had told himself he could. Not even for an hour, when there was a risk of losing everything. It was with a gesture almost supplicating that he leaned forward, demanding to know the worst.

"Well, what—how much do you want?" he blurted out.

"Well, now, speakin' of things a feller takes a likin' to," Dad Scott began with tantalizing deliberation. "I've took a likin' to that Crab Creek Ranch of yourn; been sot on havin' it ever since you beat Tom Freeman outn it five years ago. It's got trees, an' water an' everything just like I want, a garden where I can raise truck, an' plenty of ground fer a cow an' chickens. Yes, sir, I'd admire to own a place like that."

"You don't mean that—that——" Rufe sputtered when the older man paused.

"What I'm drivin' at is that I'll make a even swap," Dad replied. "Since both of us has took a likin' to the other feller's land, ain't no way of satisfyin' us, fur as I can see, better'n just givin' one fer t'other. Don't you think that's fair enough?"

It was preposterous, asking a well-improved ranch like Rufe's in even exchange for a worthless waste that could never be made much better. That is, worthless so far as its owner knew. But to object to the price asked might mean an additional thousand or so to pay in the end. It was with suspicious eagerness that Rufe agreed to make the exchange as suggested. He knew old Dad Scott for a man of his word.

If Dad Scott had his suspicions, and he must have had, his countenance betrayed nothing. Rufe insisted that the transfer of deeds be made at once, and it was with some difficulty that Dad hobbled down to old Squire Thornton's office. The transfers were duly made and recorded, and each principal in the transaction went his way completely satisfied.

If Rufe had passed a sleepess night devising means by which to gain possession of the coveted land, he was as greatly disturbed when he lay down on the night following. A hundred times he wondered if he had been wise in risking so much; but he was reassured when he remembered that the assay had indicated a fortune that was all his now. A hundred tons of ore, probably many hundreds, lay there to be smelted into golden slugs and minted into yellow coin. But he must have additional assurance at the earliest possible moment.

The following morning, while it was barely light enough to see the road before him, he hitched his team to the old buckboard and set out to inspect his recent purchase. He took with him a pick and shovel and he made no effort to conceal his destination from others Let those who would, see him drive out to his own property with pick and shovel; secrecy was no longer needful. Never before had the team of astonished plugs covered that distance in so short a time.

Without delay, Rufe set to work at the spot where he had found the gold a few days before. Evidently, no one else had passed that way since he had been there. He scraped away sand and gravel, and again came upon the fragments of gold-bearing rock. They were all the same, he broke a number of them with his hammer to make sure. He looked for the outcrop on the low ledge, but failed to find it. That troubled him not at all. The place was near the center of the quarter section, and wherever was the lode the loosened fragments came from, it was sure to be on his own land. Possibly only a few yards away was that vein. There would be plenty of time

to locate it, he would hire an experienced miner to help him.

Rufe threw as much of the ore as he could carry into a grain bag, and staggered to his buckboard under the burden. He poured it out in the shallow bed of the vehicle, making no effort to conceal it. He had a hazy notion that prospectors always staked their claims, it might be necessary even on his own land. He consequently cut stakes and drove them where he thought they should be, and he wrote out a crude notice and posted it. He would file notice of location of a mining claim, and thus be doubly secure in his rights.

His return drive to Burnt Rock was like leading a triumphant procession of the victorious. He wore a constant grin, and once or twice essayed to whistle a tune, a thing he had not attempted in years. Gone was the meekness with which he had been forced to accept the terms of old Dad Scott. In its place was the smirk of contemptuous arrogance.

"A pack of fools, all of 'em, pretendin' to know where gold could be found just by lookin' at the rocks," he muttered. "It'll make old Dad Scott look down his nose when he sees what I found, an' I'll be even with him. Way ahead! Thought he was workin' it fine to git a ranch worth two-three thousand, when he give up a place worth a hundred thousand, maybe a million."

It was a sweet morsel, and he rolled it under his tongue as he drove back home late in the afternoon. He could be deliberate enough now. He wanted the stage properly set for his triumphal exhibition. He put away his team and ate his supper; then, with a pocketful of the ore samples, freshly broken to show the gleaming surface, he set out for the Miner's Rest, the favorite gathering place for the male population of Burnt Rock. He would display the ore to the men there, tell where it had come from, and let the information drift in the natural channel to old Dad Scott. Everybody in Burnt Rock knew already about the land trade, and some were laughing at Rufe. Let them laugh, he would show them who the joke was on.

It was even better than Rufe had hoped. Old Dad Scott himself was seated there at a table in the Miner's Rest, talking to another old-timer, "Idaho" Truitt by name. Rufe failed to note the slight lull in the conversation upon his entrance. He walked straight to the table in the corner, where the two old-timers sat, and threw down a fragment of the freshly broken ore.

"What do you call that, Idaho?" he shouted, so that every man in the room could hear.

The old prospector picked up the piece of ore and looked at it intently. Everybody there knew that the opinion of Idaho Truitt, a veteran hard-rock man, could be accepted at face value.

"Well, I'd say it was a sample outn rock that would run up toward a hundred and eighty dollars' worth of gold to the ton," the old miner calmly replied.

That was a startling statement to make anywhere at any time among mining men. Even Rufe blinked his astonishment. He knew the ore would assay exactly that, but what surprised him was the fact that any man could know that just from looking at a bit of quartz.

"An' more'n that, I'd say it come outn the old Bluejay mine away up in the Packsaddle Mountains, thirty-forty miles from here," old Idaho continued after giving his first statement time to soak into the understanding of his suddenly attentive audience. "I ain't ever seen rock like that anywheres else, an' this is the first piece of it I've seen in twenty year, not since

the old Bluejay petered out an' shut down. She was rich in her day, nigh half a million dollars was took out of her, I reckon, before she completely played out."

Rufe licked his lips and laughed. Half a million dollars! Old Idaho Truitt was a good judge of values, but he was all wrong about where the ore came from. The Bluejay was not to be the only mine turning out ore like that. That was a good joke on the old prospector, too.

Old Idaho chuckled reminiscently. "Come to think of it, I reckon it ain't been quite twenty year since I see a piece of ore like that," he declared. "Funny how that come about. Back when they was workin' the Bluejay, over twenty year ago now, me an' Jim Forbes was freightin' ore from the mine to the stamp mill here at Burnt Rock. Feller could afford to haul ore a long ways when it tested a hundred an' eighty to the ton. We was haulin' in a little better'n a ton to the load, an' one time when we was within about ten mile of Burnt Rock, Jim's wagon broke down, busted a wheel, an' snapped the reach. They wa'n't nothing to do but throw that ore off in a pile an' bring the wagon on here to the shop, figgerin' to go back an' git the ore next day.

"But they come a big rain that night, reg'lar waterspout it was. You know how it is in a dry country—when it does rain, it comes in chunks. Yes, sir, it made a river outn that little dry wash where we'd dumped out that ore. The wash wa'n't never there no more, that is, it wa'n't in the same place. Seems like they'd been a new channel cut out through the soft sand, an' the old one filled up so's you couldn't exactly put your finger on the spot, like it does a heap of times. An' that ore, more'n a ton of it, was washed down an' covered up with the sand so we never could find it. Allow that, bein' heavy like it was, it lodged low agin' the rocks an' mostly in one place."

The old miner paused, and Rufe shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. Vaguely, he sensed impending disaster, though he could not have told just what connection old Idaho Truitt's story was to have with his affairs.

"It ain't right proper to say they wa'n't none of it ever found," Idaho went on. "Five year after that, maybe a little longer, a tenderfoot picked up a piece of that ore right close to where we unloaded. Come in here a-rarin', allowed he was a rich man, but I knowed where it come from soon's I laid eyes on it. It was right where the old road crosses that dry wash that comes quarterin' acrost that homestead of yourn, Dad, the one you sold to Rufe here, yest'day. Somewhere along there is where we dumped that ore out, an' it ain't fur from there yet. Rufe ain't said where he got this piece, but I allow he picked it up along there somewhere. Feller could find all of it, he'd have most two hundred dollars."

Rufe did not say where he found it. He could not have uttered an intelligible sentence if his life had depended on it. His mouth was suddenly dry, his knees wabbled beneath him, and the room and its occupants seemed to reel before his eyes. Worst of all, he fancied he saw the ends of old Dad Scott's mustache lift in a smile. The crowd gathered there were compassionate enough to restrain their mirth until Rufe had somehow stumbled from the room.

Water

by Arlen Luvano

YOU say 'twas just a mirage, yet I can't see how that's true.
You say they found me dyin' when they brought me here to you—
Well, nurse, perhaps they really know, because my head went bad
When I gave my gaspin' pardner all the water that I had.

You see, we've been together pretty nigh for thirty year,
We even tried the Yukon and then drifted back down here.
Why, Dick was just a whistlin' kid when I first called him pard,
And now we're old and broken 'cause the travelin' has been hard.

You say they found him hours afore they stumbled on to me—
Well, that's all right, because it's just the way I'd had it be;
And knowin' that Dick's restin' over there in yonder bed
Seems to help unroll the muddle of the thought that's in my head.

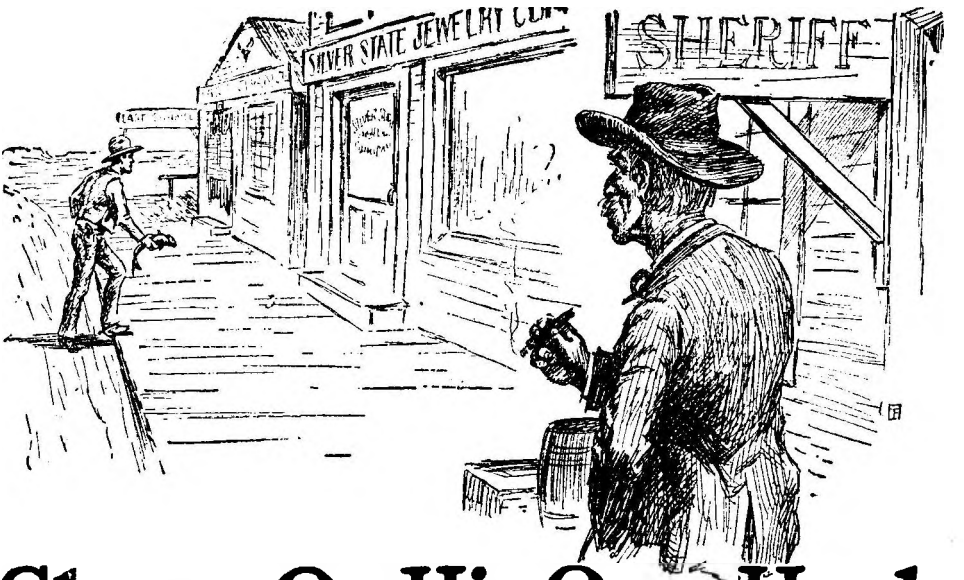
Did you ever think you saw a lake of blue-and-silver sheen?
Could you, if you was thirsty, put it down for just a dream?
Did you ever, when your tongue grew dry and choked the words you'd say,
Did you ever see green pastures where you *knew* the sands were gray?

Lord, nurse, the things I saw out there a-glitterin' in the sun
Was the devil paintin' pictures and laughin' at the fun!
I'd go and help Dick up once more and we'd trudge on again,
While thirst, and sand, and weakness, was beatin' on our brain.

You say the doctor said to see that I should sleep a lot—
Well, you can tell him, if he asks, that you just plumb forgot;
Because if he'd been wanderin' out where our burros lay
He wouldn't want to shut his eyes on what mine see to-day.

There's Dick down in the corner in a regular chariot bed,
And you right here beside me with your cool hand on my head,
There's that curtain I see blowin' in that breeze that's meant for me,
And the flowers on the dresser, or whatever that thing be.

Well, yes, if you explain it that you'll have to go away
Unless I stop my talkin' and will promise to obey,
I'll ask you put that water on a chair alongside me
Just so when I'm awakin' up it's the first thing that I see.



Shorty On His Own Hook

by Ray Humphreys

Author of "Shorty Takes the Ghost's Part," etc.

EVERY one in Monte Vista was excited over the mysterious disappearance of George Traylert. But no one was more excited—or angrier—than Sheriff Joe Cook. The sheriff, who had been aroused at dawn to start the search for poor Traylert, was pacing back and forth in his office now, a frown on his ruddy face, and his watch clutched in one trembling hand.

"Thunder an' forked lightnin'!" he ejaculated for the seventeenth time in almost as many minutes. "Whar in holy heck kin that bird 'Shorty' be at? He leaves two hours ago to arrange fer hosses fer a posse an' he ain't so much as showed a chin whisker around here since He's disappeared, too—probably out whimperin' honeybee words to some gal—while I've run my laigs off tryin' to solve somethin' that kain't be solved! Ef I could lay hands on him——"

The sheriff, exhausted at last, slumped into his big chair. He reached for a piece of yellow paper on the desk. He picked it up. He knew well what was on it, seeing he had written it shortly after dawn that morning. But he read it again as a sort of stimulant to his tired brain. The paper, with some scrawled words upon it in the sheriff's handwriting, told quite graphically the whole story, as far as it was known, of Traylert's case.

The sheriff read:

Mrs. George Traylert called me at 5 a. m. to report her husband hadn't come home all night, and she is worried. I went immediately to her home and she said George had gone to the hardware store after supper to work on the books and had not returned. She cannot understand. Went to store and found it locked tight. No sign of George. No one saw George last night, as far as I can find out. Wore dark suit, gray fedora hat, white shirt, tan shoes, when he left home. Had little money on him; watch, signet ring.

Sheriff Cook sighed, putting the report back on the desk. He had worked like a Trojan to find some trace of Traylert, but without avail. He had aroused Shorty and got him out. Half the town had been on the trail early. But not a trace of Traylert had been found. Traylert, one of the leading business men of Monte Vista, had had no reason to disappear, as far as any one knew. He owned his own business. He was not in debt. He was not in trouble of any kind. He was not the sort to run away if he had been in trouble. He had not been moody. He had an adorable wife. What, then, had happened to George Traylert?

There had seemed but one answer. Traylert must have been kidnaped by the Squaw Mountain gang of rustlers. It was rather a far-fetched conclusion, but it was the only possible one, it appeared. Traylert, as head of the Monte Vista Progressive Businessmen's Club, had been active in raising funds to hire special officers to run the rustlers to earth, in the interests of the San Luis Valley cattlemen. The Squaw Mountain gang was known to be a conglomeration of desperate characters—renegade Piute Indians, outlaw Mexicans from La Jara and Buena Vista, worthless white trash from Gunsight, Como, and Alamosa—men who would not hesitate to take Traylert out and torture him if they felt like it.

So the sheriff had sent out his deputy, Shorty McKay, to line up horses for a posse. It was the sheriff's final gesture. A posse would start for Squaw Mountain, many miles to the southwest, in the wild hope of finding trace of Traylert; but Shorty, for some strange reason, had not returned with a report on the horses. The possemen had long since congregated in the courthouse square, some with mounts and some waiting to be supplied with horses. The sheriff had lingered in his office, in feverish impatience, because he had told Shorty to report there to him. Yanking out his watch again, Sheriff Cook snorted in disgust.

"That sap ain't comin' back, I reckon" he exploded hotly. "I kain't keep that posse waitin' any longer. I'll write a note an' leave it here fer him ef he should under any circumstances wander in."

The sheriff hastily scrawled a few words on a slip of paper.

Gone to Courthouse Square. Come there, yuh boob.

The sheriff buckled on his big cartridge belt with the twin holsters attached to it. He pulled his black, slouch hat down over his eyes, stuck a fat, black cigar in his mouth, bit the end off it, lit the cigar, and stepped out of the office—to stop dead in his tracks, jerk the cigar from his mouth, and stare in amazement.

"Waal, I'll be danged!"

Crossing the street, halfway down the block, was Shorty McKay, the tardy deputy. There was nothing astonishing about that, but what was astounding was the fact that Shorty carried a big trout in one hand. The sun gleamed on its silvery scales. As the sheriff stared, dumfounded, Shorty passed into the Silver State Jewelry Co.'s store. The sheriff saw red right then.

"The lazy, indifferent son o' a gun!" he exclaimed. "Been fishin' while I've been settin' here coolin' my heels waitin' fer him! An' now he has to go in an' show Mark Moser the swell trout he's landed afore he kin report up here. Oh, boy, I'm glad I stepped out here when I did! He doesn't know I seen him; he'll be up here in a minnit, an'—an'——"

The sheriff stepped back into the office, gloating.

"He'll stroll in with some half-witted alibi, an' ef I don't lose my temper an' poke him in the nose I'll give him a tongue-lashin' he'll remember long after

he's too feeble to drag in even a minny from a crick! The good-for-nothing worthless galoot!"

And, sure enough, it was not ten minutes before Shorty did come sauntering into the office. The sheriff met him like a dish pan full of cold water in the face. Shorty had time to lift his eyebrows in surprise, and that was all, before the irate sheriff opened fire on him—verbal fire, but withering, devastating fire just the same, because the sheriff had boiled over properly.

"Yuh blinkin', freckle-faced idjut, yuh!" cried the sheriff, seizing Shorty's arm in an iron grip. "I been waitin' here years fer yuh to come back an' tell me what about them hosses fer the posse I sent yuh to find out about, an' here, more'n two hours later, yuh come waltzin' in, a vacant look on yuhr mug!"

Shorty jerked himself free of the sheriff's grasp.

"I been investigatin' that Traylert case on my own hook," answered Shorty tartly. "Yuh ain't got no right to accuse me——"

"I got all the right in the world to push both my fists in yuhr face!" cut in the sheriff. "Yuh been investigatin' the Traylert case, have yuh? Yuh got the courage, or the downright foolishness, to stand thar an' tell me that, expectin' me to swaller it like a trout does bait, eh? Yuh git that, don't yuh? I say 'like a trout does bait, eh?' Waal, I don't. I know whar yuh've been! I been investigatin' yuh, too! Yuh been fishin'!"

Shorty did look surprised at that charge.

"Why, boss, I been workin' on a clew on Traylert an'——"

"Sure, sure, play me fer a sucker!" encouraged the sheriff, with hearty sarcasm. "I'm so dumb I don't know nuthin'! Yuh been workin' on a clew on Traylert, have yuh? Don't make me choke to death with laffin'! A clew! What clew, ef I may ask? Please to perduce yuhr clew. Dog-gone it—trot it out!"

"Why," said Shorty, "I don't figger that them Squaw Mountain rustlers had nuthin' to do with George Traylert's disappearance, so I didn't bother to see about hosses, as yuh said, an'——"

"No?" inquired the sheriff, with forced sweetness.

"An' I tol' the posse boys we expected to solve the case purty quick without goin' ridin', an' that they needn't wait any longer," went on Shorty softly. "Fer, yuh see——"

"What do I see?" demanded the sheriff. "What am I expected to see in addition to one bag-eared, slant-haided, cuckoo-lookin' deputy, who is all lip? What else do I see, eh?"

Shorty hesitated.

"I think," he said, "I know who—who might know something about Traylert's disappearance. A feller who——"

"What feller who?"

"I ain't sure, o' course, but I figger that——"

The irate sheriff could restrain himself no longer. He laid two violent hands on his deputy's shoulders and shook the youth until his teeth clicked. The sheriff, although an old man, was no weakling. And when he was thoroughly aroused, as he was now, he was a terror in his wrath. He shook Shorty vigorously, accompanying the action with a string of running and uncomplimentary remarks; and in the end he shoved the youth away, with a push that sent him reeling backward against the door jamb.

"Yuh've failed to git the hosses, an' yuh've dismissed the posse, therby takin' matters out o' my hands inter yuhr own!" charged the breathless sheriff. "An', under them circumferences, yuh kin perduce yuhr witness—or suspect, or whatever he is—in the Traylert case right here, right now, an' ef, as I expects, yuh perduce a flop in this case, yuh're through—fired—discharged—an'

kicked out o' this office—effective as fast as I kin boot yuh."

Shorty's eyes flashed fire. He straightened up suddenly, and said: "Very well, boss. I'll perduce my man danged quickly." And with that Shorty was gone.

The sheriff, breathing heavily from his exertion, sank into his chair with a groan of dismay. The nerve of Shorty, taking matters into his own hands, countermanding the sheriff's orders, failing to obtain horses, dismissing the posse—why, the kid was plain loco, or else he had a working clew! Huh, that was ridiculous! Hadn't he seen Shorty strolling up the street with a silvery trout in one hand? It didn't take a mathematician to figure out where Shorty had spent all or some of the two hours he had been gone! At Crystal Lake, of course! And now Shorty had had the impudence to pretend that he had really unearthed a clew in the Traylert mystery! He had gone to fetch a man in the case!

"Waal!" said the sheriff, lighting another cigar to quiet his pounding nerves. "Ef that Shorty does drag some pore feller in here with a cock-an'-bull story, I kin jus' figure it's a frame-up to save his face. Gosh knows he's got enough friends among the lower class to git one to come in here an' lie that black is white fer him Sure, that'll be his game! He tried to bluff me an' I called his bluff, an' now he'll try to work a whizzer on me."

The sheriff smiled grimly as he puffed on his cigar.

"Huh, he won't play me fer no sucker—or trout!"

When Shorty returned, in ten minutes, he had TeJoe Gomez with him. TeJoe, a Mexican of unsavory reputation, wore a surprised expression. The sheriff, seeing who the fellow was, quickly revised his ideas about Shorty's game. No, Shorty had not talked TeJoe into pulling any chestnuts out of the fire for him, that was certain. Instead, no doubt, Shorty meant to blame TeJoe for something and trust to the sheriff's knowledge of TeJoe's record to sustain whatever charges he might make. The charges came—swiftly.

"Here's the bird I was mentionin'," said Shorty crisply, for he was still smarting from the sheriff's scolding. "It's TeJoe Gomez, as yuh may know. I reckon he kin tell yuh something about the disappearance o' George Traylert. I say I 'reckon' he kin—meanin' I think he kin. An' since yuh seem to be sore, boss, about me doin' so much buttin' in on yuhr case, I'll leave him here fer yuh to question—I'm goin' out to—to git me a ice-cream sody!"

And with that Shorty went—abruptly, too.

"Waal," said Sheriff Cook, staring hard at the blinking TeJoe Gomez, "what do yuh know about this Traylert case, hombre? An' I kin tell yuh now that ef yuh do know anything yuh'd better spit it out mighty quick, because I ain't in no mood to lissen to no hokum."

Gomez snarled a sullen reply. "I know nuthin's!"

"Waal," said the sheriff, in quick determination, as he yanked a six-gun from it's holster and laid it on the desk in front of him, "I tol' yuh, TeJoe, I wasn't takin' no danged lies offn yuh this mawnin'. Shorty says yuh know about Traylert. All I got to say is that yuh better unbutton yuhr mouth right pronto an' start explainin', or else I'm liable to let loose o' my temper an' pick up this gat."

The Mexican's beady eyes flickered, but he shook his head.

"What would the Señor Sheriff ask that I should answer?" he demanded surlily. "TeJoe knows nuthin's! Would the señor have me lie? I tell that Shorty he is crazy! He wants that he should know whar I was late las' night? I tell him I was home! I tell him that Felipe Quijano, an' Pedro Flores, an'

Ramon Onifaro tell him so—that they see me home. We play the cards."

The sheriff seemed to drill TeJoe with his cold, gray eyes.

"Yuh have a alibi, eh, TeJoe?" he asked softly. "Yuh have friends who will say that yuh was home, eh? I wonder why Shorty picked on yuh in this case? Do yuh know? Has Shorty got it in fer yuh fer something, eh? Did yuh know Traylert?"

"I know him, yes—but no troubles with him," said Gomez.

"An' you've had no troubles with Shorty, either?"

"No; no troubles with Shorty," said Gomez thickly.

"Waal," said the sheriff, "I kin tell yuh this, Gomez, either yuh're a liar or yuh ain't! Ef yuh know anything about Traylert, yuh'd better tell me now afore we git the low-down on yuh! Ef yuh are lyin' an' I finds it out, I jus' pity yuh, that's all! I'm in no mood to fool with yuh long, Gomez; think yuh'd better——"

The sheriff, glancing out of the window, stopped short in his tirade. He had looked up just in time, it appeared. There, headed down past the office, going toward Crystal Lake, a quarter of a mile away, was Shorty, with a fishing pole over his shoulder! Mark Moser, the fat little jeweler, was with him and a couple of other individuals. The sheriff stared. The others had fishing poles, too. Shorty, angered, no doubt, at the sheriff's reprimand, was deliberately going fishing again, apparently, and taking a few cronies with him. The sheriff's face got very red! The nerve of Shorty, walking out on him in the middle of a mysterious disappearance case and leaving him high and dry in the office with an alleged suspect that absolutely denied all knowledge of it!

The sheriff chewed on his cigar for a second as he made up his mind. Then, whirling on Gomez, he picked up the gun.

"Gomez, as sure as I sets in this here cheer I'll put a bullet through yuh right this minnit unless yuh come clean with whatever yuh may know about this Traylert case! What did yuh say to any one about it? What did Shorty overhear yuh say, ef anything? Did yuh make any cracks to any one—yesterday, to-day? Was yuh unfriendly with Traylert? Did yuh quarrel with him? Bad blood between yuh? Did yuh see him yesterday—las' night, say? Has any one got it in fer yuh who could have reported yuh to Shorty? What did Shorty accuse yuh of when he came after yuh, besides askin' yuh whar yuh was las' night? Yuh answer me quick. I'm in a hurry to go somewhars, an' I'd jus' as soon send yuh to the happy huntin' grounds ef yuh lie."

The Mexican's smoldering eyes glittered.

"Shorty said it was indecent fer me not to wear more clothes," said the Mexican calmly, "an' that was all he say!"

"More clothes?" echoed the sheriff, and not until then did he notice that Gomez wore no outer shirt. The man had a red-flannel undershirt on under his coat. "Waal, why ain't yuh got a shirt on, Gomez, ef that has anything to do with it? Whar is yuhr shirt?"

"I burn it up—it itch," said Gomez complacently. "Mebbe to-day I buy new one—yes?"

The sheriff's eyes narrowed. He made a quick decision.

"Gomez," he said, "I may be wrong, but I figger either yuh or me is bein' framed in this matter. I kain't spend all day here swappin' words with yuh. I got a matter to attend to right now. I'm gonna let yuh go, seein' that I ain't got nuthin' on yuh an' I don't know what reason Shorty had fer luggin' yuh in here except to keep me busy while he sneaks off fer some recreation. I'll recreate him! Yuh kin go home, Gomez, an' stay thar, in case I wants to talk to yuh ag'in. But fust off—yuh swear

to me that yuh don't know nuthin' about this Traylert affair?"

"I swear it!" said Gomez promptly.

"Go on then," said the sheriff, in an absent-minded manner. He was thinking of Shorty. He was planning just what to say and do when he overtook Shorty and his fishing companions at Crystal Lake. He got up and kicked the chair to one side. He yanked open the door. Gomez stepped out ahead of him, causing the sheriff to stumble on his heels. That brought the officer back to his senses with a jerk.

"Yuh, Gomez, on second thought yuh come along with me!" snapped the sheriff. "Yuh may have an apology comin' from Shorty, anyway."

"Whar?" asked the Mexican blandly.

"I'll show yuh whar soon enough!"

Sheriff Cook led the way in long strides, Gomez trotting along beside him. Gomez was talking, as usual, but the sheriff was not listening. The sheriff, sore as a hornet, had determined on three things. He would first punch Shorty on the nose for insubordination. Then he would give him a lecture for neglect of duty. Then he would discharge him for inefficiency—all of these things right before the eyes of Mark Moser and the others in Shorty's fishing party! After that ceremony the sheriff would return to the office and reorganize the search for George Traylert, probably leading the posse out to Squaw Mountain to make a belated hunt there for the missing business man. If Gomez had been falsely accused, whatever he might do to the de-deputized Shorty after the sheriff had got through with him would be strictly up to Gomez himself.

"We go Crystal Lake, sheriff?" asked Gomez suddenly.

"We does."

They did. They reached Crystal Lake in record time. Yes, sure enough, halfway around the little lake, under a fringe of willows was Shorty and his fishing party. Four men altogether. The sheriff put a finger to his lips and motioned Gomez to go quietly so that the fishermen would have no warning of their arrival. Gomez nodded. The pair sneaked up on the four fishermen, who were too intent on their business to notice the approach of the sheriff and Gomez.

"Shorty!" barked Sheriff Cook.

At the explosion, the four men looked up suddenly, and the sheriff saw that in addition to Shorty and Mark Moser, the jeweler, the party consisted of Eddie Owens, the druggist, and "Doc" Healey, the coroner. And at the same second he saw that the party were making peculiar use of their fishing poles. Or were they fishing poles?

"Jus' a minnit, boss," said Shorty, in a cold tone. "Yuh an' yuhr friend Gomez stand right thar. We've located what we're after. I'm handlin' this matter myself now. All right, boys——"

The four men bent over and tugged. Gomez, his eyes starting, backed away, but the sheriff nudged him to be quiet. The next instant the long poles of the four "fishermen" managed to draw up, out of the deep water, a sodden thing. The sheriff, pressing forward, with Gomez in front of him, saw that it was a body. He needed no second glance as Shorty and Doc Healey seized it and stretched it out on the sand to know that it was the body of poor George Traylert, the missing Monte Vistian.

"Suicide!" he exclaimed dramatically.

At that, Shorty whirled on him like a tiger.

"Hold Gomez thar, he's in yuhr custody!" snapped Shorty.

"This ain't no suicide! Doc, take a good look now—an' yuh, Eddie—is it as I figgered or——"

"His haid has a bad bruise, Shorty," agreed Doctor Healey, the corner, as he bent over the body. "Yep, he got a crack on the skull afore he went in, but he evidently wasn't daid. But——

Hullo—look at this, Shorty, I guess this cinches it!"

"Jus' a minnit, doc," cried Shorty, turning again on his astounded boss. "Sheriff, please recollect that I arrested TeJoe Gomez thar an' placed him in yuhr custody. I don't know what yuh got out o' him about this case, but I reckon not very much ef yuh figgered this was a suicide. Keep a eye on Gomez—we'll need him to try fer the murder o' George Traylert."

"But Shorty," began the old sheriff.

"Oh, thar ain't nuthin' very deep about this," said Shorty, answering the question he knew the sheriff had on his tongue. "I guess yuh must o' seen me comin' up the street from the lake this mawnin' with that big trout. Well, when yuh sent me out fer the hosses fer the posse I was blamed sure we was barkin' up the wrong tree. I did a little sleuthin' on my own in the Mex quarter, knowin' that was the place to git dope ef anywhars. I found a man who said that late las' night he had seen a feller pass a lighted winder on Pecos Street carryin' what looked like a big sack over his back. It was so dark my informant said he couldn't make out who the shadder o' the man with the burden was."

Shorty stared hard at the awed Gomez.

"The man was haided down Pecos Street an' might, I figgered, have been haided fer the lake. I went to the lake. The 'sack,' I figgered, might have been a body. I found no traces around the hard bank o' the lake. I decided I might be wrong after I had cut a pole an' poked around in the deep pools I knowed existed near the bank. I was about to come in when I sees a daid fish out a little ways. I pokes at him an' brings him in—an' hangin' from his mouth is a gold chain, snapped in two. I knew I had a prize then, so I brought him to Moser, the jeweler, an' with him as my witness we pulls a gold watch from the fish, an' Moser identifies that watch as Traylert's. I fergot to say that after findin' the daid fish I saw a bit o' yaller-silk cloth hangin' to a bush on the trail near the lake. I brought that in, too.

"Ef Moser knew the watch belonged to Traylert, then, I figgered, it was a good bet that Traylert was daid an' his body dumped inter the lake. Ef the slayer had been on Pecos Street it was a safe guess that the slayer was a Mexican, taking that route to the lake. An' ef that piece o' yaller silk meant anything it might be a piece o' the slayer's shirt. What Mexican had a dingy yaller-silk shirt? I soon found out. Gomez. I went an' seen Gomez, an' he was shirtless. He said he had burnt his yaller shirt up, that it was full o' 'itches.' I decided not to be too positive about Gomez until I was sure Traylert's body was at the bottom o' the lake; but when I went to tell yuh what I had discovered yuh hopped me with both feet, and gave me no chance to explain, so I went an' fetched Gomez an' left him with yuh to question the best yuh could.

"After that, I went to Gomez's house. I searched it. Then I got Moser, an' Eddie Owens, an' the coroner here, an' we came here to the lake. We fishes up the body. It's Traylert's, as yuh kin see by steppin' over here, sheriff. He was knocked cold fust, after a struggle. He may have struggled here ag'in afore he was dumped inter the water. I dunno. At some time, his watch chain snapped. An', further, take a look at pore Traylert's hands."

"I never did it!" cried Gomez in a frenzy.

"Waal," said the mortified sheriff, as he obeyed Shorty's order and saw the piece of soaked yellow shirt still clutched in one of the dead man's hands, "I guess we won't argue that point with yuh now, Gomez. The proof is here. But why did yuh want to kill pore Traylert? He never harmed yuh, did he?"

"I never kilt him," declared Gomez again.

"I kin supply the motive," said Shorty grimly. "After takin' Gomez to yuhr office, boss, I searched his house, as I told yuh. I found thar this note. I'll read it:

"'Gomez, yuh go to-night an' tell that coyote Traylert that death awaits him ef he continues to try to git money up to go after the Squaw Mountain gang. Warn him to keep his mouth shut about what yuh say. Ef he doesn't lissen, git him an' we'll pay yuh the one hundred dollars agreed upon last week.'

"The note is signed 'Alfredo,' an' I reckon Alfredo is Alfredo Trefoya, the leader of the rustlin' gang. I also reckon that Traylert, approached as he left the store by Gomez here, refused to comply with Gomez's order, or resisted, an' Gomez, bein' ready fer such, knocked him out an' later dumped him in the water."

"Come on, Gomez," said the sheriff gruffly, "I'll slip these bracelets on yuh afore we start back. Shorty, I reckon yuh an' the others kin git the body back to town, kain't yuh?"

A TIME-KEEPING FISH

A REMARKABLE instance of a fish that not only saved time but also kept it perfectly comes from Kansas. A gentleman of that State, who is devoted to fishing, relates the incident, which was his personal experience.

It appears that about a year ago this patient angler was plying his rod on the Chickasia River. He had started downstream in a rowboat and was baiting his line, when the hook caught on his watch and it was tossed into the river. Naturally, the fisherman thought that it was "gone forever" and hoped that the river god would reward him for his loss by an extra fine catch. For fishermen are first of all philosophers.

Time passed, even though the sportsman had now no watch to tell it by, and vacation rolled round again. Returning to the hole where he had fished the year before, the fisherman again baited his line and was quickly rewarded by an eight-pound catfish. Admiring his catch, as a fisherman will, he noticed a slight swelling in the gill of the piscatorial prize. Annoyed that anything should mar the symmetry of his catch, he hastily split open the fish and found that the swelling was caused by a watch—the very timepiece that he had lost the year before. He was, of course, after that not in the least astonished to find that the watch was going, and indeed would now have been almost justifiably indignant if it had not been keeping perfect time. But there was no ground for this pessimism. The fish had apparently attempted to swallow the watch, but the stem had stuck in its gill and the movement of the gill had kept the watch wound. This accounted for its perfect accuracy, for on comparing the lost watch with the uneventful one recently purchased to replace it, the sportsman—though still not in the least surprised—was thoroughly pleased to find that the watch that had "gone below" was only three minutes behind that of the new one.

This incident seems to prove conclusively the theory which the disciples of Izaak Walton so firmly uphold—that the time gone in fishing is never really lost.

The Killing Streak

by John Briggs

Author of "The Writing Lash," etc.

AT sound of a hail from the road, Job Cutler stepped out onto the porch of his mountain cabin. It was evening, and the first faint stars hung over the rugged horizon of ridges. The purple gloom of the canyon shelving down from his clearing, had crept up nearly to the pale ribbon of road from which the shouted summons had sounded. It was already too dark for Job to recognize the horseman who had halted at his gate, a hundred yards distant. Yet he responded at once.

"Hello, neighbor," he called. "Stop in a while."

"No, I can't stay, Job." The rider's answer carried clearly through the light mountain air. "I must be gettin' on home. I've been down to Jackson."

"Oh—is that you, Gib?" Job inquired, striding toward the gate. "What do you know?"

"Some pretty bad news, Job," returned the other. "Thought I'd oughter stop by an' tell yuh. Seems yore hired hand cut loose, an' done some killin'!"

Job Cutler did not reply, but continued over the springy turf until he reached the gate bars. Resting his arms on the top rail, he gazed up at the round and red-bearded countenance of his neighbor, Gib Rogers.

"Yep—he shore messed things up proper, this time," Rogers continued, scarcely veiling a note of satisfaction.

"You mean 'Skeet' Bladen?"

"Yeh—who else'd I mean?" the rider retorted. "I calls him yore hired hand, 'cuz he's logged with yuh fer three seasons already, ain't he?"

Job Cutler nodded slowly, as if in confirmation of that which he had long feared.

"Who did Skeeter kill, Gib?" he asked at last.

"Mark Green," Gib Rogers stated. "How come he done it, nobody knows —'ceptin' fer them mad spells of his."

"Was he workin' for Mark Green?" Job inquired.

"Yeh. Mark had give him uh good winter's job feedin' stock on that fancy farm o' his," Rogers elucidated. "Yuh know how Mark has alluz been—he'll make uh job for uh man that needs it, whether he needs help or not. Anyhow, they found Mark lyin' in the corral, cold. There was a singletree alongside of him—an' Skeet Bladen had lit out. His tracks was right there, though. It showed where they'd had uh scuffle. Bladen had had 'bout an' hour's start, afore a couple o' the other hands run onto their boss. There's uh posse scourin' the hills now fer Bladen. Thought I'd better let yuh know. 'Cuz there's no tellin'—he might drop in on yuh, too. Better watch out, Job. I alluz tried tuh warn yuh not tuh take chances with thet young feller."

"Did you hear what the trouble was 'tween Skeeter an' Mark Green?" Job asked thoughtfully.

"Trouble!" snorted his neighbor. "Nobody ever had any trouble with Mark Green. He's alluz been an easy-goin' man, like yoreself. Alluz takin' in ev'ry stray dog thet come along. He had the name o' bein' ev'rybody's friend! Yuh know thet yoreself."

"Ye-es," Job agreed slowly.

The horseman gave a short laugh.

"Mebby yuh don't think folks around Jackson is stirred up tuh give Skeet Bladen what he's got comin'!" he remarked. "He couldn't uh killed nobody thet 'u'd riled up the country more. As good uh man as Green was —tuh get killed thet way—without no reason a'tall! He's handed out more money tuh pore folks than you an' me ever had, put t'gether!"

"Ye-es," Job Cutler responded musingly. "He had plenty to give. It ain't always givin' money that counts. I can't seem to b'lieve it, Gib. Skeeter was about cured of them mad spells."

"Them kind never gets cured!" the other retorted. "He had uh killin' streak! Didn't I find it out, when he was workin' fer me? I gave him the high tail, right quick, too! Then you took him on. I reckon you an' Green was 'bout the only ones in the country thet 'u'd have him around."

"We was only wantin' to give him a chance," Job commented. "He never really meant any harm."

"Mebby not," Rogers grumbled. "But Mark Green give him one chance too many. Well, I've got to mosey. S'long, Job!"

"Good night, Gib," Cutler responded. "Thanks for lettin' me know," he added, turning back toward his cabin, as his neighbor swung up the road.

A large shepherd dog that had followed Job nearly to the road trotted before him. The dog halted at the porch steps, and his master absent-mindedly stroked his head. He allowed the shepherd to enter the cabin with him. Cutler seated himself in an old-fashioned rocker, facing a blaze which he had already kindled in his cobblestone fireplace. The dog settled himself in front of the hearth.

"Ye-es," the old man mused aloud, as he filled his pipe, "I reckon it'll go hard with Skeeter. Folks won't remember that Mark Green had a few failin's—well as he covered 'em up."

He sighed pensively, still musing half aloud in his solitary fashion. "Reckon mebby Skeeter'll be here t'-night—if they don't ketch him."

Several seasons before, the youth, known as Skeeter Bladen, had drifted into the little mountain settlement above

the mining town of Jackson. No one knew whence he had come or why he had sought refuge in a manner of living to which he was so plainly unaccustomed. Certainly, he had fared poorly until taken in by Job Cutler. In appearance he had been ragged and half-starved, with a thin, sensitive face, and flashing, dark eyes. His first awkward attempts at manual labor betrayed the fact that he had never before handled an ax or a cross-cut saw. Yet he had shown a determination which Job had immediately appreciated. So, patiently, the mountaineer had favored him, watching the youth slowly acquire strength and ability. Very soon Job had come to suspect the cause of Skeet Bladen's appearance in the mountain settlement. Occasionally, the most trivial occurrences would throw the young man into fits of violent and uncontrollable temper. Once, when Skeet had broken the handle of a splitting maul, Job had told him never to pry on the handle, but to release the maul by driving in another wedge. With insane wrath, Skeet Bladen had grabbed an ax and made a swing at his employer. Job had stood motionless, remarking calmly:

"Skeeter, you'd better dig my grave afore you kill me. It's always better to have it fixed so's to do away with a feller's remains!"

Slowly, the youth had paled, while reason and shame had come into his expression. Dropping the ax, he had started away.

"Where you headin' for, boy?" Job had called after him.

Turning, Skeeter had faced him with a look of keen misery.

"I'm going—anywhere," he had replied hopelessly. "It's always the same with me. I've never killed anybody yet—but there's no tellin' when I will."

"No," Job had declared slowly, "you ain't goin' away, Skeeter. You can't run away fr'm yourself that way. You're goin' to stay right here an' win out. I've got no hard feelin's. Come on back, an' forget it!"

"Would you chance having me around?" Bladen had demanded in astonishment. "You've seen I can't stop myself. I might have killed you!"

"Nonsense!" Job had said reprovingly. "You only think you might have. That's the trouble with you, lad. Most people gets mad, off an' on. Ain't nothin' the matter with you; only you've prob'ly had an overdose o' bein' scar't o' yourself. When you feel a mad spell comin' on, jest grab up a tool an' work it off. That's the way I always do. You never will hurt anybody that way. By 'n' by, you'll work it all outta your system."

At this kindly counsel, Skeet Bladen had regarded him with an expression of overwhelming gratitude.

"Old—old-timer," he had stammered, "you're the first man that ever talked to me like that. When I was a kid, I got nothin' but beatings, on account of my temper. I was an orphan. Later, nobody ever cared, 'ceptin' to give me the road, or a ticket to the cooler. Yes, I've done time—all because of the same thing. Say! You're a—a real man, Mister Cutler. I'd like to know what it seems like, to shake hands with a man like you—only, I ain't worth it. I'm——"

"Get that idea outta your head, Skeeter," Job had replied sternly "You're tryin', ain't you? Well, put 'er there, an' remember, I'm your friend."

Perhaps few men would have been as lenient of Bladen's further outbreaks as Job Cutler had been. Job had hoped that some of the youth's redeeming traits might eventually dominate his character. He had seen Skeet Bladen carefully remove insects from the path of danger. He had seen him lift a spider by its strand of web, to rescue it from being crushed. He remembered the nestling tree squirrel

which Skeet had raised, afterward giving it its freedom. The boy had been a friend to all Job's ranch animals and had made a pal of Tip, the shepherd. Recalling these things, the old mountaineer frequently shook his head as he gravely considered Skeet Bladen's present plight.

Although more than sixty years of age, Job Cutler felt himself to be still in his prime. During the summer months, he cut timber to be used in the mines down at Jackson. In winter, he worked a placer claim which netted him more than wages. He was regarded by his neighbors as a sober, industrious, and truthful man. In all his business and social dealings, Job's thoughtful consideration was so highly esteemed that he was often called upon to act as arbitrator in neighborhood disputes. Living in a community of quick-tempered mountain people, it was a singular fact that he had made no enemies. He was noted for his opposition to violence. To expect him to harbor a man who had taken human life would have been far from any one's thoughts. Yet, with his lamp extinguished, Job was sitting up, late into the night, waiting patiently for Skeet Bladen.

When aroused by the dog's warning growl, Job realized that he had dozed in his chair. By the soft glow from the fireplace, he watched Tip stalk to the door and sniff. The fact that the shepherd sensed the approach of a stranger was indicated by his repeated growling. Presently, Job, whose hearing was exceptionally keen, detected the sound of stealthy treading.

"Hush, Tip!" he commanded, barely above a whisper. The intelligent shepherd made no further sound, but continued to stand by the door, his hair bristling. Again sounded the faint crunch of slow footsteps. Knowing that the dog would have indicated pleasure, had the man outside been Skeet Bladen, Job stepped to the door and boldly opened it.

Instantly, the sound of footsteps became assured, as a man approached the edge of the porch.

"Hello, Job!" his visitor saluted. "Expectin' callers? I see you're up yet."

"Good evening, sir," Cutler replied. "Step in. Jest uh minute, an' I'll light the lamp."

"That's all right. Don't bother," the other replied. "Well—yes," he added, as Job hesitated. "I will step in for a minute. But don't make any more light. There's plenty in your fireplace.

"I see you don't know me," he announced, as Job, peering into the darkness, failed to see his visitor clearly. "I'm Sam Crane."

"I couldn't quite make out who you was, at first," Job admitted. "Step right in, sheriff. Hope you didn't think you had to find out if I was up, afore knockin'. You'd be welcome any time o' night, sir. I'll make you a cup o' coffee. Fact is, I b'lieve there's some on the stove that's hot yet.

"We-e-l," Sheriff Crane hesitated, somewhat sheepishly, as he entered. "I have been hittin' the trail kinda hard. But I didn't wanta bother yuh, unless yuh was up."

Job knew that the officer's stealthy approach had not been because of a desire not to disturb him.

"I s'pose you've heard about Skeet Bladen?" the sheriff began, seating himself in the chair close to the fire.

"I have," Job admitted frankly. "Fact is, I was sorta waitin' up, thinkin' I might hear more about it, mebby."

The old man struck a match, as he spoke; but he was halted in the act of lighting the lamp.

"If it's jest the same to you, don't make no more light," Sheriff Crane objected.

"O' course," Job agreed. "You figger that Skeeter Bladen may be hangin'

out somewheres near, an' waitin' for a chance to drop in. Well, I won't deny that I've been sorta halfways expectin' the boy. But, if he does come, sheriff, I would kinda like to hear what he has to say. Meanin'—he'd prob'ly talk to me like he wouldn't to nobody else. To tell you the truth, I'd rather you wouldn't be here—when he comes. In case he does come a'tall."

"Oh, he'll be here, sooner or later," Crane affirmed, "unless some of the posse gets him first. That's why I'm here, Job. And I mean to wait. Sorry. You might not be able to hold him."

"Meaning——" The old man paused and eyed the sheriff indignantly. "Meaning that I wouldn't try?"

Sheriff Crane chuckled softly.

"No, Job," he replied. "Everybody knows your main failin'—and that is, being too soft-hearted. Excuse my mentionin' it. You've got coffee on the stove, yuh say. Now, who were you keepin' that coffee hot for?"

"You know," said Job, turning into the darkened kitchen.

In a moment he returned, and handed the sheriff a steaming cup of coffee.

"I don't s'pose you've got any doubts about Skeeter killin' Mark Green, have you, sheriff?" he asked, as he settled himself in his old rocker.

"Not any at all," Crane returned, speaking in a low tone. "The evidence was all there, plain as daylight. You know yourself that Bladen had crazy, mad spells. Well, Mark Green had told him to take out one of the colts and harness-break it. The other two hands heard Mark give that order at noon. We found the horse, with the harness still on, and he'd been all skinned up about the head, where Bladen had been beatin' him with a singletree. Mark must have rushed out an' tried to stop Bladen from beatin' the horse. Right where we found Mark's body, the ground was all cut up with hoofmarks. Bladen's beatin' the horse that way shows that he was crazy mad. He turned around and cracked Mark's head with the same singletree he was usin' on the horse. The end of the singletree and clevis fit exactly where Green's skull was crushed. Now, what more evidence would you want—knowin' that Bladen had a killin' streak, anyway? His tracks showed where he started to drag Mark away, then found out that he'd killed him. Also, he lit out into the hills, right away!"

Job Cutler waited in silence until the sheriff had finished speaking.

"Sheriff," he remarked quietly, "your evidence shows that Skeeter prob'ly killed Green. But you've calculated wrong in one important fact. Skeeter Bladen wasn't beatin' that horse with a singletree. Mark Green was doin' that himself. Hold on!" he commanded, as Crane started to expostulate.

Before explaining further, Job paused, for he had been watching the dog. The latter had raised his head, with his ears pointing attentively, either hearing or scenting some one not far from the cabin.

"Quiet, Crane!" Job admonished in a hoarse whisper. "Slip into my bedroom, yonder, an' don't come out till you hear what Skeeter has to tell me. An' don't forget—I told yuh it wasn't him that was beatin' the horse."

The old man became suddenly grim, as the sheriff, not heeding his instructions, rose and stole softly toward the front door, where Tip had already stationed himself, wagging his tail in a friendly way.

"Crane, you've known me for twenty years," Job began. "Won't you please let me——"

But, without finishing his speech, the mountaineer's hand shot out over the mantelpiece, and the next moment he was pressing a double-barreled shotgun into the sheriff's back. That incredulous officer felt his revolver snatched from its holster.

"Turn 'round an' step into that bedroom, quick!" Job ordered. "Now, yuh'll wait t' do yuhr arrestin' till I say to. You're goin' t' hear what Skeeter tells me. An', remember, I've already told yuh what part of it'll be!"

As he ushered the astonished officer into the darkened room, Job Cutler wore a sardonic smile. "No—I don't s'pose I'd shoot yuh, Crane," he chuckled. "But you sure ain't goin' to raise any ruckus, now, an' scare him away! I aim to handle this affair for a spell. An' some of it'll be handled out o' court!"

A moment later, the old man stepped out onto the porch. Tip preceded him, dashing off into the darkness with a low whimper of welcome. Presently, a tall young man stepped into the dim radius of light cast by the open doorway. He was patting the dog, as he glanced at Job. He stood for a moment, wordless, and then falteringly:

"Can—can I come in?"

"O' course, Skeeter," said the old man. "Who else would I be settin' up for?"

"You—you've heard?" said Skeeter Bladen, coming closer.

"Well, I've heard that you're in trouble, lad," Job replied. "Come in, an' we'll talk it over. Have a cup o' coffee, too."

"You're alone?" the other ventured.

"You'd oughta be willin' to trust me," Job returned evasively.

"Yes," said Bladen, stepping up onto the porch and entering behind Job. "They prob'ly think I'm tryin' to get away. I'm not. I wanted to see you, first—that's all. Then I'll give myself up. I didn't kill Mark Green."

"You say you didn't?" Job demanded sternly, facing the youth who had reached the center of the room. "Sit down!"

"I didn't—so help me!" Skeeter Bladen declared, sinking limply into the chair which Sheriff Crane had recently vacated. "But—what's the use of my tellin' that to anybody but you," he continued miserably. "I've done time for assault to do murder. All they have to do is look up my record—if my record here ain't bad enough!"

"Mebby so—mebby not," the old man declared. "Tell me about it."

"I was workin' for Mark Green," Skeet Bladen began. "He was a good man to work for. Everybody knows him—that is—thinks he was a fine man. But he was—well, somethin' like me—only——"

"Only," Job suggested, "he took his pizen out on animals. Is that what you mean, Skeeter?"

"Yes!" the youth answered with relief. "I guess he didn't do it often. Mebby I'm the only one that ever saw him do it——"

"No," said Job. "Afore he struck it rich, on his claim, Mark Green worked for me. That was more'n twenty years ago. Some men are jest naturally born cruel, that way. Mark Green took a pizen pleasure in seein' beasts suffer. Only, he tried to cover it up. Go on—tell me all, Skeeter."

Young Bladen miserably poured out his story, not even guessing that his words were reaching other ears than those of his old friend. It was to the effect that Mark Green, watching the infinite patience with which he was handling the colt, reproved him for making no headway, and picking up a broken singletree, he hit the young horse on the side of the head, to make him follow the guidance of the rein. The colt had reared; Green had seized the rope, and had continued beating the frantic animal with the club.

At this point in his narrative, Skeet Bladen confessed that he had been seized by one of his old, uncontrollable fits of anger. He had rushed at Green and grappled for the club. In the confusion, the rearing horse had come down with both forehoofs, striking the

raised club, driving it into the skull of Green, who had been unable to dodge back because Skeeter had been grappling him by the shoulders.

Skeet Bladen's dark eyes gazed steadily into Job's as he wearily recited his story.

"But who will believe that?" he ended, with the trace of a wry smile hovering about his thin, sensitive lips.

"Well," said Job, "I will—for one. And I reckon Sheriff Crane ought to be'lieve it, too. He's heard yuh. An' I've already told him the first part of your story——"

"He's here?" Skeeter exclaimed.

"Come out, sheriff!" Job commanded. "Skeeter don't aim to dodge yuh no more, anyhow."

The sheriff stepped into the room, eying first his intended prisoner and then Job. He was not in the best of moods. Feeling that his office had been tampered with, he was inclined to discredit what he had overheard.

"I'll take my gun, Cutler, if you don't mind," he announced gruffly.

"Mebby I hadn't better give it to yuh yet," Job objected. "I'm willin' to apologize, sheriff, for buttin' in. Jest the same—what do you think, now that you've heard what Skeeter had to say?"

"What I think don't make any difference," Crane retorted. "If I didn't know you for a big-hearted old fool, Job, I'd make out a case against you, too. It's my duty to arrest him."

"He'll go," said Job. "You won't need your gun jest yet."

"Looka here!" Crane challenged. "How do I know that Bladen hadn't been here already before I came? He could have told yuh that yarn, then you could have had him slip out and come in again to tell it all over in my hearing. You seemed awful sure about expectin' him!"

"Sam," the old man stated, "I'll give you my word of honor that I hadn't seen Skeeter afore you came in. But that ain't even necessary. You ought to know that I don't lie. Now, I'm goin' to ask you a question. Have you got common—horse—sense?"

"I'm supposed to have," the sheriff replied, a trifle coldly.

"All right," said Job. "There's no use of us leavin' here afore daylight, anyhow. Go fetch your horse an' put it in the barn. In a couple of hours, I'll hitch up, an' take you an' Skeeter in. We'll stop by Green's ranch. You saw how that colt had been beat up. Now, if you had beat up a horse that way, would he want to let yuh get close to him the next day?"

After a pause, the sheriff smiled.

"You win, Job," he said. "We'll see."

"All right, Sam, here's your gun," the old man declared, extending the weapon. "Jest size up Skeeter. Does he look like he wants to run away?"

"I don't think he will," Sheriff Crane commented, meeting the youth's gaze.

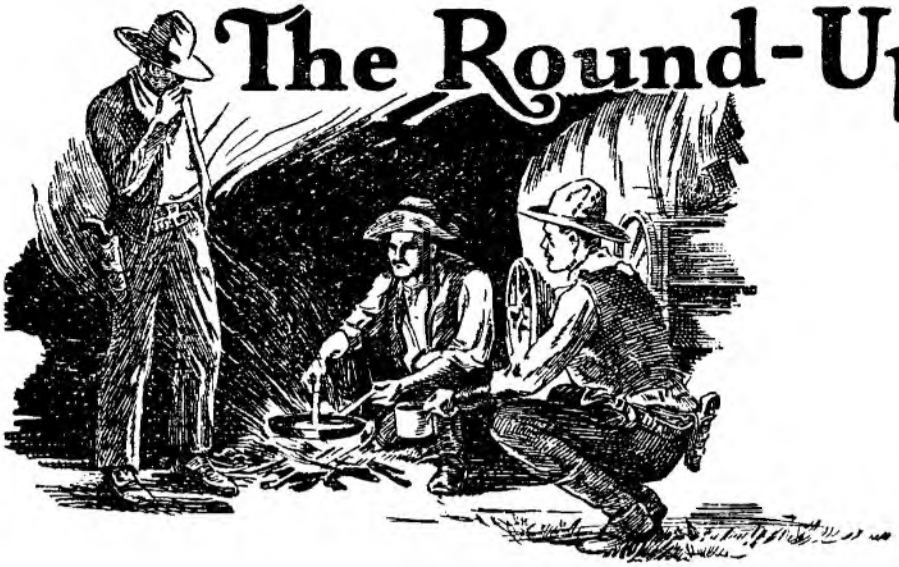
"And one thing more," Job continued. "I reckon you've got that piece o' singletree—haven't you? As exhibit number one, so to speak?"

"It's in my office," Crane replied, sudden understanding lighting his expression. "Of course, the colt was unshod. There might not be any hoof marks on it. But if there are—well—the case will prob'ly be dismissed before it gets very far in court."

"Jest use common horse sense," the old mountaineer advised confidently.

"Skeeter," he announced, turning to the friendless young man, "it's been gettin' kinda lonesome, here, for an ole codger like me. I've got about the best ranch in the mountains, as well as a good minin' claim. It's 'bout time I was havin' a pardner. In a day or two, you'll be clear. You'd better come back an' make this your home. Besides which—there's plenty o' nice gals in these mountains. An' I've give up hopes o' ketchin' any of 'em, myself!"

The Round-Up



BOUNDING lightly and gayly across the plains and into our midst, comes again the antelope discussion. A mighty well-informed member of our million-reader circle, will fork his trusty pony and rope said antelope in the following manner:

"Boss and Folks: I'd like to say a few words in regard to the argument as to whether or not horses can outrun antelopes.

"By experience, I must say they can. That is, if they are good-winded horses. In the fall of 1915, I was living in Mackay, Idaho, and while out hunting, some thirty-five or forty miles north of Mackay, I scared up about fifteen antelopes. Having just emptied my gun a short time before at a couple of deer, I was unprepared for this surprise. Reasoning to myself that they would be too far away by the time I reloaded the gun, I immediately gave chase on my horse, which was just a cow pony. I chased them about two miles up to the edge of the foothills and there overtook one of them. It was nearly winded.

"So from that I learned that an antelope is a very fleet-footed animal, but awfully short of wind, and that any horse that has plenty of "foot," and good lung capacity can overtake an antelope on a long run—especially if he can crowd it into the mountains, for an antelope can't run nearly so fast in the hills or mountains as on a level stretch.

"However, it can be done on a level plain if one can keep track of the antelope for the first mile or better, because that is just about as far as he can run at any speed at all. After that, a horse will gain on him, and in most cases will overtake him on the second mile. Of course, my horse was in good shape, but it was just a common cow pony I used on the ranch. It weighed about eleven hundred pounds when I had it, and was a very sure-footed animal, as it would have to be, for my course was covered with much sagebrush and many badger holes. But aside from that, was just a good, A-No. 1 cow pony.

"Hope this helps to settle the argument."

Sure sounds like talk from a gent as know his antelopes—and horses.

Talk about knowin' your stuff, if J.

Cody Anderson, Riverside, California doesn't know his Jesse James history, then Christopher Columbus didn't discover America in 1492. Jest you all listen to some mighty interestin' talkin' from Anderson about the late Jesse James:

"BOSS AND FOLKS OF THE ROUND-UP: I am an avid reader of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, and always find it most interesting, and of course I never fail to turn to and peruse all the matter in the Round-up. Now, Folks, I am not seeking any correspondents and don't want to have to answer any letters that may be sent me, as I am getting too old to do any more writing, but I want to say that in a recent issue, there is a poem on the passing of Jesse James, at the hand of his supposed pal and friend, one Bob Ford. The Governor of Missouri had offered a big fat reward for the capture, dead or alive, of Jesse James, and of course this hombre, Bob Ford, fully expected to receive this reward, as well as the applause of the public, by killing Jesse.

"Jesse had gone to St. Joseph, Missouri, a few months before, to make his temporary home and was quietly living in a secluded spot on a hilltop, with his little family, when Ford came along to visit him. Ford no doubt had in mind even then the idea of this murder. The opportunity was what he was seeking.

"This secluded spot occupied a whole block of ground, with scattering houses beyond. The streets were graded deep, far below, all around, and the place was inaccessible save by a steep bridle path that led up from the street on the north side. It was a little four-room frame house, with a shed in the rear as a stable for Jesse's one fine horse.

"The little cottage stood up there all alone, where its occupants could not be bothered by prying neighbors, nor observed by the eyes of those passing below. Mr. Howard made a practice every morning of walking down to the nearest drug store, six blocks away for his after-breakfast cigar, and soon the druggist became quite well acquainted with him, and found him to be a quiet, pleasant gentleman. He would never have taken this Mr. Howard for the notorious robber, Jesse James.

"There was but little furnishing in this humble hilltop home, but Mr. Howard possessed a few chromolithograph pictures suspended on the walls of his bedroom. No doubt they needed dusting on this particular morning for, after laying aside his coat and his trusty belt of six-guns and placing them on the bed, he proceeded to stand up on a chair to dust those pictures with a feather duster. While he was engaged in this act, Ford came to the doorway, saw his chance, and plugged poor Jesse back of the ear, just as Jesse heard the click of the gun and turned his head to see the assassin. There Jesse was, unarmed, with not a chance in the world to defend himself, with his six-guns out of his reach, when this dirty coward shot from behind, at his pal, the man who had befriended and aided him, times innumerable—shot with the thought of the big reward he would get for this killing and the glory of it, though he knew in his heart he had ever been as much of a bandit as his victim.

"But little did Bob Ford realize, then, that the commission of that cowardly deed would react against him like an avalanche, and cause the people of that town to rise up in wrath against him and threaten to lynch him for this murder. The public became aroused to that point and condemned the act as that of a cowardly assassin, no matter if the victim was Jesse James the bandit. Ford was immediately arrested and hurried to jail to escape the wrath of the people. Indeed they would have lynched him only too quickly had they gotten their hands on the assassin. However,

some time after that, Bob Ford suffered an ignominious death in a notorious Western gambling resort, and no doubt he got his just reward, without ever having received one cent of the State reward for the capture of Jesse.

"At the time of the assassination, an undertaker grabbed the body before any other undertaker could do so, and hurried it to his mortuary, an inferior kind of one, with a small room, 12x12, adjoining and opening out on a side street; a single door and a small window faced on this side street. It was in the middle of this room, right on the floor, that he laid poor Jesse down on the bare floor on his back, with his feet extending toward that outside doorway. There the body rested for two days to satisfy the morbid curiosity of the public.

"I dare say there were at least ten thousand people who viewed the remains in that time, and of course I was among the rest of the hombres. How do you suppose we got in and got out again? The sash was raised in the window, and everybody climbed in through it, walked around the body, and out the narrow door.

"Jesse looked to me to be about thirty-eight years old, and weighing one hundred and sixty pounds, about five feet and eight inches tall. He had a well-shaped rounded head, and about six weeks' growth of silky brown beard all over his face. I saw him lying there in that little room the same day he was shot, and the next day also, and, though I am now seventy-four, I can still plainly see that brown-bearded face with its quiet, placid smile, as though he were asleep.

"The memory has ever been with me, and I can never feel that this man with that noble face, could be guilty of the many atrocious deeds charged against him. He did not look it. Others in that day, just as mean and ornery, and murderers at heart, no doubt committed many of those awful deeds, for which Jesse received credit. The manner in which his old mother was treated during the Civil War was enough to have made a bandit out of him. May he rest in peace.

"Adios."

Say, there's lots of Folks who write in askin' for rope and knife dope, so that good friend and authority on these two subjects, Charles H. Coe, kindly asked us to give out the followin' notice at the Round-up this week:

For information relating to ropes, lariats, lariat throwing and spinning, knife throwing, also as to knots and splices, address, Charles H. Coe, P. O. Box 284, Miami, Florida. No attention will be paid to letters unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed, return envelopes. Information will be given free on these subjects by Mr. Coe, to stimulate interest in them.

From an iron horse rider, B. W. Bidwell, Freeport, Ohio:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Myself and family have been reading WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE since December, 1922, and have every issue put away.

"I am a Westerner, but I never rode range except on a locomotive between Ash Fork, Prescott, and Phoenix, Arizona. I know some of the country that is described in the stories of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, and it's well done.

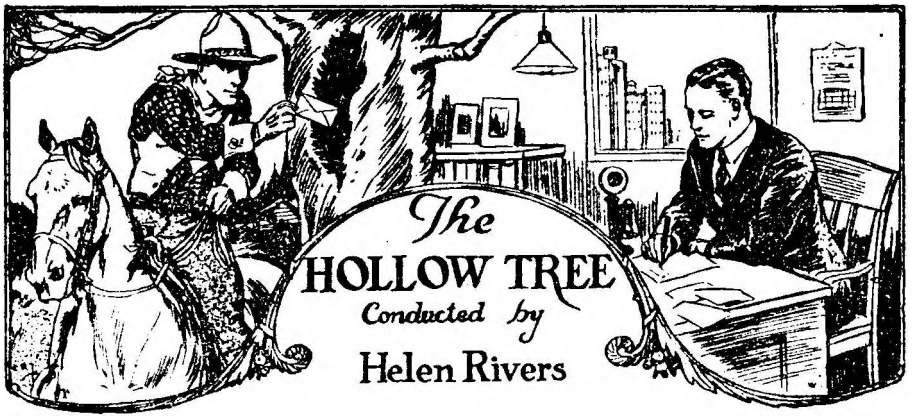
"A few words to the writers: Cherry Wilson, where are 'Hush-a-bye' and 'Little Pard'? They are your best.

"Robert Ormond Case; stay with 'Lonesome' and 'Windy.'

"Ray Humphreys; 'Shorty' McKay is O. K.

"Frank Richardson Pierce, stay with Alaska. You can't improve on 'Flapjack' and 'Tubby' Willows.

"Best wishes to you for a good magazine, with clean, wholesome stories."



Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

THE desert rat who goes out into the hot, white sands with his mule and his pick and shovel is the prospector who faces untold hardships. For the hot, dry sands of the desert do not invite a pard. The prospector who seeks a placer claim may endure the cold blasts of the Yukon, and he may be hundreds of miles from civilization, but he does not often trek alone. The prospector who has a pard and a placer claim is the fortunate prospector.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I was raised in the Western country and have a natural love for the open spaces which no city or town can down. I have been up in Ontario, Canada, and in the harvest three or four times; but it is the bush that is my magnet. When I am in the bush, it is then that I have a truly contented feeling and know real happiness. I have prospected some and once headed for the Peace River district in British Columbia, but only managed to reach Vancouver.

My main ambition is to find a pard—some old-timer and prospector who has a placer claim. I have no grubstake and am not a giant, but I can do my day's work. Having lived in the bush, I'm no tenderfoot, although I'm not a know-it-all, as I have plenty to learn! I am thirty-seven, but would just as soon pal up with an old prospector as one who is middle-aged or young. I'm not particular what State I'm in, so long as it isn't the desert. Yep, I suppose you old desert rats will think I'm not willing to undergo your hardships. Well, you can say what you like. I'm willing to accept my share of the hardships, but I'm not hankering to do my prospecting in the desert.

Now, folks, aren't some of you prospectors who have placer claims looking for pards? By pard, folks, I mean a hombre who knows the meaning of the word 'trust.' I hope to hear from some of you old-timers *muy pronto.*

R. T. C.

Care of The Tree.

Trail crew.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Until the winter set in I was with a trail crew of three men in the Columbia National Forest, on fire duty with the forest service. Our headquarters were at Hemlock Ranger Station, Stabler, Washington. Until three years ago I was a city boy, working in a bank, in Chicago; but I'm here to tell you-all I'm never going back to the city life again. The outdoors, travel, and adventure are the things a young hombre is looking for. I'm hoping to know something about ranch life before I'm many years older. Yep, I'm twenty.

Maybe some of you city boys would like

to know how to make the break and get into outdoor work. I'll give you all the help I can. Ranger service is sure a great life.

ROY LARSEN.

Route 3, Vancouver, Washington.

Colorado ranch.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a nineteen-year-old cowboy, looking for pen-pals from all over the world. I ride herd on a ranch of four thousand acres, and there's plenty of free range adjoining our ranch. You folks who'd like to know about this free range, just come ahead. I'll oblige pronto! This is the range of coyotes and antelopes, as well as of cattle, and it's great sport to go coyote hunting. The law protects the antelopes, however. This prairie is a great country for picking up buffalo horns, spear heads, arrowheads, and stone hatchets. This was once the stamping ground of the red man.

R. E. YOUNG.

Whittemore Ranch, Kendrick, Colorado.

Californian to start a cattle ranch.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm looking for a pardner who would like to start a cattle ranch in the Southwest. The one I'm looking for must shape up something like this—thirty years old, more or less; honest, rugged, and ambitious. He must be willing to take the hard knocks, for we'll get plenty of them; and, last but not least, he must have a fair-sized grubstake. It doesn't matter whether he's experienced in ranching or not, but if he's a cowhand, so much the better. If you think you can match me, pards, get in touch with me pronto. MAC.

Care of The Tree.

The big woods.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm twenty-two, husky, and am aiming to hit for the big woods again. I know what it is to hold down a job in a construction camp and in the big woods. It suited me fine, but my folks thought the outdoor work too rough for me, so I got a white-collar job in the big city. I'm sure sick of it all, and am aiming to go back where there is elbow room. I'd like to find a pard who is a real square-shooter. Would like to get out Texas or Arizona way, if possible. I can handle horses and am pretty handy at most everything, in fact. A ranch would suit me fine.

Well, pards, let's hear from your part of the country. SLIM.

Care of The Tree.

A trekker of the West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am foreman on a bridge gang at present, but if any one wants to know anything about the Western States, just drop a line, for I've been over most all of 'em. Come on, folks, if you're interested in the West of the old U. S. A.

JACK B. CAPPLY.

901 Main Street, Atchison, Kansas.

Not every prospector can have a placer claim, but every follower of the trails can have a pard. A friend-maker badge will help you to find your pard.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

Home Ranch.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We live in southern California, three and a half miles from Escondido, and have a good little ranch here. There is just my son and myself, and we could give some one a good home.

We'll be glad to hear from you-all.

A. M. C., OF HOME RANCH.

Care of The Tree.

Where mail comes once a month.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We are anchored out sixty miles from shore, and we put in eight months of the year here. We receive mail once a month. You can see that it is about as lonely a job as a hombre could have. I'm radio operator on the Nantucket Lightship. In the past ten years I've made sixteen trips to European countries, one to Africa, two to South America, and one to the Orient.

Now, folks, my time is your time, for the asking. I have plenty of leisure to yarn away. ERNEST R. HOOD.

Radio Operator, Nantucket Lightship, Box 215, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

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.

NATIONAL parks are associated in most of our minds with summer vacations, and we sort of forget them the rest of the year. Sam P., of Chicago, Illinois, has just asked us a question, however, that has put these playgrounds back upon the map. "Can you inform me, Mr. North, if the Rocky Mountain Park is open all the year around? If it is, I'm planning to trek out that way some time soon, as I'm mighty keen about winter sports. Will you tell me if the roads are open at this season and how to get there?"

Yes, the Rocky Mountain National Park, situated in north central Colorado, is open to visitors all the year round. The eastern gateway of this park is the beautiful valley village of Estes Park, which is readily accessible by automobile every month of the year by way of Lyons and the Thompson Canyon. Within easy reach of this village is the high mountainous area where the snowfall is heavy, and here Sam may enjoy snowshoeing, tobogganing, skiing, and other cold-weather sports.

The Rocky Mountain National Park Ski Club has constructed three ski courses near Estes Park and offers the free services of a competent instructor. Cross-country trips that are full of thrills may be taken. Parties may make special arrangements for accommodation at Fern Lodge, at an elevation of ninety-five hundred feet, where the blanket of snow lies heavy over forests and mountains.

This park is the most accessible of our large national playgrounds, that is, it is nearest to the large centers of population in the East and Middle West. Both sides of the park may be reached from Denver. Estes Park village, the eastern and principal entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park, is connected by automobiles of the Rocky Mountain Parks Transportation Co. with Denver, as well as with the railroad stations at Fort Collins, on the Colorado & South-

ern and Union Pacific Railroads; Loveland, on the Colorado & Southern Railroad; Lyons, on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad; Longmont, and Boulder, both on the Colorado & Southern Railroad. Estes Park village is also connected by automobiles of the Glacier Route with Boulder, on the Colorado & Southern and Denver Interurban Railroads.

Well, some folks are interested these cold winter days in invigorating outdoor sports, while other hombres are thinking of more serious matters. To the latter group belongs Walt M., of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who is also heading toward the Northwest. "I'm anxious to procure some information from you, Mr. North, about Chouteau County out in Montana. This section has been recommended to me as a good place to settle. Can you tell me just where it is located? What the industries are? What sort of soil one finds? What crops are raised? What the principal towns are? I seem to be asking a lot of questions, but naturally I want all the facts I can get before making a move."

We are glad to give Walt all the information that we have on this portion of the Treasure State. Chouteau County lies in north central Montana, with an extreme width east and west of eighty-seven miles and a maximum length of sixty miles. The northeast corner extends into the Bearpaw Mountains and the Highwood Mountains form the south central border. The Missouri River enters at the southwest, and after being joined by the Teton and Marias Rivers, near the center of the county, makes a big bend to the southeast.

In early days Chouteau County was headquarters for the fur trade of the Upper Missouri. After 1860, it was the head of navigation, and in territorial times it was an important supply point. Later still, in the open-range era, it was a stockman's paradise. At present Chouteau County is divided in its interests. In some districts live stock and mixed farming predominate, in others, big-scale farming, and in still others the development of big natural gas wells and energetic drilling for oil.

The soil types vary in this county, but Walt will find them in the main fertile and suitable for farming. The topography is favorable to large-scale farming, consisting mostly of broad bench lands, with little rough or broken land. Moisture is a limiting factor in crop production, necessitating, for successful farming, special methods of intensive moisture conservation. Successful farmers are replacing the one-crop system common to all new countries with diversified methods, the handling of maximum acreages at a minimum of cost and outside labor, and the growing of feed for live stock. Corn is rapidly becoming one of the main crops.

There is a small acreage along the three rivers that is being irrigated through the use of water wheels and electrically actuated pumps. It is asserted that the costs are considerably lower than on most irrigation projects, and additional large tracts are susceptible to irrigation by this method.

Coal has been mined on a small scale in the county for many years. Near the eastern boundary, while drilling for oil in 1923, a flow of natural gas estimated at five million cubic feet was encountered. Drilling for oil is under way at several other places in the county.

Fort Benton, the county seat, established as a trading post in 1846, is the oldest town in Montana east of the main range. From 1860 to 1880 steamers plied on the Missouri between there and St. Louis. With the passing of river navigation, its importance declined, but when the farming era began, its central location made it again a trading and distributing point. Big Sandy is the principal town and trading center in the

northern part, and Geraldine in the southeastern area of the county is also an important center.

And now we must make a wide, high, and handsome jump from the Northwest to the Southwest, for Bert P., of Baltimore, Maryland, is asking some questions about the latter section. "I'm going to El Paso, Texas, soon, Mr. North, and am interested in finding out about two things. Can you tell me if the celebrated White Sands are near this city, and how to reach them? Naturally, I'm keen to see this famous sight. Also, I'd like to know what the possibilities are for some hunting in the vicinity of this Texas town."

The White Sands are in Otero County, New Mexico, and may be reached in about a two hours' drive from El Paso by way of Alamogordo, New Mexico, and in a little less time by way of the Organ Pass. These are one of the most mysterious wonders of the Southwest, covering an area of six by forty miles. They are continually shifting, pure-white, gypsum sands, resembling a vast snow field. We predict that the White Sands, viewed from a distance, with the Organ Mountains in the background, gloriously colored by a vivid Western sunset, are going to give Bert the thrill of his life.

As for hunting grounds, the Black Range and the Mogollon Mountains of New Mexico, near El Paso, and within convenient driving distance, are unequalled for wild game. They abound in mountain lion, bear, deer, turkey, grouse, quail, and squirrel. In fact, El Paso is a good starting point for the big-game hunter.

NOW DOTH THE LITTLE BUSY BEE—DESERVE MORE PRAISE

THE bee has so long been held up as a model to mankind that it is not surprising to know that a new reason for emulating and admiring it has been discovered. The scientists, for whom the bee seems to have a singular fascination, have now discovered a reason for the value of the bee product. It might be said, in passing, that seven ounces of honey are equal in food value to twelve ounces of beefsteak!

It is known that honey absorbs the moisture from anything damp with which it comes in contact. Beekeepers have always known that if honey is placed in a barrel not thoroughly dry, the seams will open and the honey run out. Further investigation reveals that the lack of any bacteria in honey is caused in the same way. An unlucky microbe falling into a honey pot curls up and dies! Thus, being its own disinfectant, honey is one of the safest foods in the world. It might be quoted as one of the leading instances of the law of self-preservation.

The moralist may point a moral from the fate of the microbe and the honey, but that is best left to the moralist to do. Here we may be content to adorn the tale with a reference to a traveling queen bee—Lady Margaret of Modena. This indefatigable personage traveled three thousand five hundred miles in fourteen days recently when she went, by parcel post, from America to London, to appear in person at the exhibition of an English beekeepers' association in that city. Sad to relate, her death occurred soon after the opening of the exhibit.

How great an importance the bee assumes in the scheme of things may be gathered from the fact that development of air communication between Europe and America would greatly improve the breeding of bees, as the more rapid communication would aid in lessening the danger to the lives of the traveling bee royalties. Here's something for an ambitious aviator to specialize in—the safe conduct of bees!

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 those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

LEE, JAMES LEONARD.—Last heard from at Taft, California. An old pal wishes she had answered your letters. Please write to Betty, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from former members of the Headquarters Company, Twentieth Infantry, in San Antonio, Texas. Please write to Ray Zies, 1312 Thirtieth Street, Rock Island, Illinois.

HOFFMAN, REUBEN.—Twenty-two years old. Brown hair, blue eyes, and is five feet, eleven inches tall. Last heard from in February, 1923. Information appreciated by his brother, Justin Hoffman, Cuervo, New Mexico.

TURNER, DARIUS M.—Twenty-six years old. Has black hair and is about six feet tall. Last heard from in Vancouver, Washington, in 1926. Information appreciated by Mrs. Anna Turner, 915 Spring Street, Zanesville, Ohio.

GOSS, MRS. JENNIE COLVIN, HAMLIN, SIDNEY, and **HARLEY.**—Information appreciated by Ella Morrell, 214 Howard Street, Cadillac, Michigan.

CLARK, ROBERT and **ALLEN.**—Formerly of Portland, Oregon. Information appreciated by Ella Morrell, 214 Howard Street, Cadillac, Michigan.

JOHNSON, NICK.—Twenty-eight years old. Wife's name, Betty. Last heard from in Akron, Ohio, in 1923. Information appreciated by an old friend, Alvin McMichael, Station Hospital, Kelly Field, Texas.

MINIX, MRS. COLFAX, and son, **FRED.**—Formerly of Kentucky. Fred was last heard from in Ohio. Information appreciated by Bob, care of this magazine.

HUTCHINSON, CHARLIE.—L. B. is heartbroken. Josie is still in B. Please come back; I need you. Information appreciated by Grannie, care of this magazine.

CHARLIE.—You promised to come home in 1928. Please write to L. B. C., care of this magazine.

BURFIELD, ADRIAN.—Thirty-two years old. Dark hair, brown eyes, and light complexion. Last heard from in 1926, when he was leaving Colorado for California. Information appreciated by his father and mother. Mrs. E. Burfield, R. D. 1, Cutler, Ohio.

O'DELL, PAUL J. or **PERLE.**—Thirty-one years old. Five feet, six inches tall, blond hair, and blue eyes. Joined the Marine Corps at Toledo, Ohio, in 1916. Served on the U. S. S. "North Dakota" during the World War. Last known address was 167 East Eighty-ninth Street, New York City. Information appreciated by Jeanne Summitt, 1734 East Nineteenth Street, Apartment 33, Cleveland, Ohio.

STREAT, FRANK.—Information appreciated by Mrs. Frank Streat, Box 254, Troy, Illinois.

BOWLEY, ROBERT.—Last heard from in New Hampshire. Information appreciated by Henry Doyle, care of this magazine.

MOSS, LEW.—Forty-five years old. Five feet, six inches tall, light-brown hair, and gray eyes. Has a knife tattooed on his left forearm. Last heard from in November, 1915. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Alice E. Thompson, 3730 Ohio Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

PATRICK, ANTHONY.—Last heard from near Denver, Colorado. Please write to an old buddy, Jake Freldrick, Jackson, Missouri.

SPANGLER, MRS. and **MR. G. P.**—Last heard from at Poolesville, Maryland. Please write to Mrs. Frances Pierce, Rush Run, Fayette County, West Virginia.

FARMERLY, FRANCES BOOTHE.—Of Bellepoint, West Virginia. Please write to Mrs. Francis Pierce, Rush Run, Fayette County, West Virginia.

BAUM, JOHNSON, and **MARINO DeBREE.**—Formerly members of Battery A, Fifty-seventh Artillery, C. A. C., at Fort Hancock, New Jersey. Please write to Robert Davis, 133 West State Street, Quarryville, Pennsylvania.

ATTENTION.—Will members of Battery A, Fifty-seventh Artillery, C. A. C., stationed at Fort Hancock, New Jersey, please write to Robert Davis, 133 West State Street, Quarryville, Pennsylvania?

LAWSON, CURFITT.—Brown hair, brown eyes, and is about five feet, nine inches tall. Information appreciated by Mrs. J. C. Lawson, 2917 Gold Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

BURLESON, ERNIS and **R. C., JR.**—Last heard from in Phoenix, Arizona, in December, 1927. Information appreciated by R. C. Burleson, Sr., Box 435, Post, Texas.

CURBY, MARY FLORENCE, and **MARAGARET ANN BURGROP.**—Came to south Missouri in 1913, lived there four years, and then went to Oklahoma. Information appreciated by Mrs. Sarah Jane McCormack, care of this magazine.

ZIMMERMAN, FLORENCE T. and **LUELLA E.**—Nineteen and seventeen years old, respectively. Last heard from in Colorado, eight years ago. Information appreciated by their mother, Mrs. J. C. Lawson, 2917 Gold Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

McGOVIT, IDA.—Born in Montgomery County, Kansas. Had two brothers, James and Phillip. They were adopted from the juvenile court in October, 1911. Information appreciated by Leo W. Clay, 803 South Robinson Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

KRAPIL, JOSEPH.—Important news. Information appreciated by Patches, care of this magazine.

THOMPSON, ROY B.—Left Canada in 1927. Information appreciated by Hoksila Thompson, care of this magazine.

CLARK, RICHARD.—My stepbrother. His mother's name was Jane Toner. Information appreciated by Edith Clark Hays, 4700 Arapahoe Street, Route 5, Rosedale, Kansas.

LOGAN, STEPHEN.—Boarded with Mrs. Clark, my mother, in Joplin, Missouri, twenty-four years ago, and later moved to Boise, Idaho. Was a friend of Doctor Knox, of Kansas City, Missouri. Please write your little pal, Edith Clark Hays, 4700 Arapahoe Street, Route 5, Rosedale, Kansas.

DAVIS, ARTHUR.—A school friend in Joplin, Missouri. Information appreciated by Edith Clark Hays, 4700 Arapahoe Street, Route 5, Rosedale, Kansas.

FRAZER, ROBERT, EZRA, BLANCHE, and **ELIZABETH.**—My brothers and sisters. Children of Mrs. Agnes E. Fraser, Upper Stewiack, Nova Scotia, born between 1880 and 1893. Robert and Ezra were adopted by Sam Fraser; Blanche, by a Mrs. McMiller, and Elizabeth, by a Mrs. Kate McLeod, all of Pictou County. Information appreciated by Mrs. Walter Anderson, 33 Chapin Street, West Springfield, Massachusetts.

O'CONNELL, NELSON J.—Last heard from in San Bernardino, California. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Anna M. Gallagher, 422 C. W. Fourth Street, Long Beach, California.

ROBERTSON, JOHN R.—Please write to mother, care of Bertha Deegan Johnston, 849 Lilac Street, Square Hill, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

BILLIE.—I still love you. May lose everything in a few weeks. Please come back or write to Sugar, care of this magazine.

ANDERSON, JOHNNIE.—About six feet tall, dark-brown hair and eyes. Has a slight limp. In 1925 he moved from Pawuska, Oklahoma, to some place in Oregon. Information appreciated by F. L. Jones, Box 205, Marshall, Oklahoma.

NELSON, JENNIE and **CHARLIE.**—Last heard from in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1915. Information appreciated by Mrs. M. E. Kilgore, Route 4, Birmingham, Alabama.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from friends made in the winter of 1924-25, when I was in the Michigan State Sanitorium. Please write to Charles E. Purdy, Department of Engineers, Fort Santiago, Manila, Philippine Islands.

KORPI, HARVEY S.—Lived for some time in Iron Mountain, Michigan. Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois. Served in the same company as my brother, Jesse, in Panama, in 1923-24. Please write to Anna, Box 81, McKee, Blair County, Pennsylvania.

DYER, LAURIE.—On the U. S. S. "New York" in 1921. Would like to explain how things were at that time. Please write to Babe Walden, care of this magazine.

STRICKLER, HOWARD E.—Please write to Mrs. M. S. Meigs, 18 Clantoy Street, Springfield, Massachusetts.

BROWN, ELLA JANE.—Formerly of Brushton, New York. When last heard from, thirty-five years ago, was traveling through Oregon and California with a show. Information appreciated by her daughter, Mrs. M. E. Meigs, 18 Clantoy Street, Springfield, Massachusetts.

DRAPEAU, TONY.—Of Berlin, New Hampshire. Why have you never tried to find me? I know that they did not tell you the truth and kept all the letters I wrote to you. Nothing will ever change my love for you. I need you. Please let me know where you are and if you are all right. Betty Lutz, 818½ Federal Avenue, Massillon, Ohio.

FLACK, MEVLIAN.—Forty-seven years old. Formerly of Asheville, North Carolina. Is married and has two children. Last heard from in Baltimore, Maryland. Information appreciated by his cousin, Ada Austin, Route 4, Box 183, Salisbury, North Carolina.

MOTHER, DAUGHTER, and **GRANDDAUGHTER.**—Please write to Dad, Newlin, Texas.

LAMBERT, CLYDE, who advertised for Fred.—We have news for you. Please send your address.

BROWN, SAM.—Last heard from in the Old Soldiers' Home, in Kansas. Information appreciated by his brother's son, Macon Brown, care of this magazine.

PETTIT, GEORGE.—Last heard from at Moody, Texas, in 1906-07. Believed to be in Arkansas. Please send your address to your old buddy, M. B., 632 Fifteenth Street, Merced, California.

FOY and **BETTY.**—Have good news for you. Please write to B. M. H., 225 South Main Street, Lima, Ohio.

BISHOP, WALTER E.—Left Portland, Maine, in November, 1928, for New York. Last known address, 120 Prime Avenue, Huntington, Long Island. Information appreciated by Mrs. Edward J. Bayliss, Jr., 180 Franklin Street, Portland, Maine.

JACKSON, RAY.—Was adopted from the Orphans' Home, at 1115 Charlotte Street, Kansas City, Missouri, when he was three years old. Information appreciated by his sister, Zella May Jackson, now Mrs. E. C. Hubbard, Box 42, Cardin, Oklahoma.

LOCK, MYRTLE, ROSELLA, RODNEY, IRENE, LOUIE, WALLACE, EDDY, LLOYD, and **WILLIAM.**—My brothers and sisters. We lived in Oregon, and were separated by the death of our mother, when I was eight years old. I was adopted by a family in Sunol, California. Information appreciated by Mrs. Lottie B. Vieira, Route 2, Box 290, Hayward, California.

COKE, ROBERT WILLIAM.—Born in 1833, in Virginia. Father's name was James and his mother's was Mary. His parents died when he was a baby, and he left Virginia when he was nineteen years old and has not been back since. Information concerning his people appreciated by Adam Coke, 404 South Thirty-fourth Street, Billings, Montana.

KESTNER, JAMES CARMEN.—Last heard from in Bigelow, Arkansas, in 1918. Information appreciated by his daughter, Freda Kestner, 213 South Smith Avenue, El Dorado, Arkansas.

ROBERTS, CHARLES and **WILL.**—Brothers of Oscar Roberts. Last heard from in Tennessee, about twenty-five years ago. Information appreciated by their niece, Mrs. Martha Belle Roberts Metcalf, Route 6, Box 23, Corsicana, Texas.

STEVENS, MARTHA and **GEORGE.**—Mother and brother of Oscar Roberts. Last heard from in Tennessee, about twenty-five years ago. Information appreciated by Mrs. Martha Belle Roberts Metcalf, Route 6, Box 23, Corsicana, Texas.

ESPNOSA, MRS. JOE, nee **FLORENCE KISSLER** or **HILL.**—Twenty-one years old. Brown hair, blue eyes, and five feet, four inches tall. Left home five years ago. When last heard from she was working in Oakland, California, where she had married. Had one child, Dorothy. Information appreciated by her mother, Mrs. Joe Suca, 304 Clark Street, Fresno, California.

SMITH, WILLIAM THOMAS.—Forty-five years old. Was born in Tennessee. Light hair and blue eyes. Last heard from in Surrey, California, in 1907. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Sara E. Smith Humphrey, Box 1083, Quanah, Texas.

HOCKENHULL, MARVIN.—Remember the songs we sang and the games we played? Would like to hear from you. Please write to C. A. T., Box 108, Las Vegas, Nevada.

ROBERT, TODD L.—We are all well and want you to write to the same address. Mother Lilly, Jersey City, New Jersey.

WAMFOUGH, ANNA.—Was turned down. Anxious to hear from you. Please write to Aaron Dempsey, Box 41, Michigan City, Indiana.

BARBER, CLAYTON CHARLES.—Last heard from in Mesquite, Dallas County, Texas. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Minnie Beckman, 606 East Fourteenth Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

SMITH, THOMAS, JR.—I wrote to the address you gave, but my letters were returned. If you have more information, please write to Mrs. Minnie Beckman, 606 East Fourteenth Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

WANHA, IMPIE.—Twenty-three years old, five feet, four inches tall, blue eyes, and brown hair. Left home in 1926. Last heard from in Chicago, in December, 1926. Information appreciated by her sister, E. Wanha, Route 3, Box 14, Cokato, Minnesota.

WANHA, HENRY.—Twenty-five years old, about five feet tall, stout, blue eyes, and light, wavy hair. Left home in July, 1927. Last heard from in July, 1928, at Fields Landing, California. He had been working in the lumber camps, but was leaving for the East. Information appreciated by his sister, E. Wanha, Route 3, Box 14, Cokato, Minnesota.

WRIGHT, JOHN ALBERT.—Please write to your daughter, Mary Susan, care of this magazine.

McINTYRE, SERGEANT EARLE C.—Was with the Eighty-third Company, Separate Battalion, Marines, stationed at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, when last heard from. Please write to Novella, care of this magazine.

CAVANAH, WILLIAM BECKMAN.—Eighty-nine years old. Formerly of Crawford, Lowndes County, Mississippi. Had one brother, John Wilson, and three sisters, Lydia E., Sarah H., and Susan Frances. Wife's name was Diza. Information appreciated by his daughter, Lydia Cavanah Rush, Box 53, Artesia, Mississippi.

O'CONNELL, JIM D.—Please let Willie know where you are. He is very sick and asks for you all the time. Address Lorena Kozlek, San Leon, Texas.

MARTIN, DOVE or **DICK.**—Last seen in Indianapolis, Indiana, fifteen years ago. Information appreciated by William M. Martin, care of Sam Killough, Borner Street, Providence, Kentucky.

DIXON, PERCY.—Thirty years old. Last seen in Oregon, two years ago. We did not stop then, because we had been told he was dead. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Della Dixon, Bozeman, Montana.

CROW, HERBERT.—Your answer will be confidential. We want to know if you are all right. Mother and dad are worrying. Please write to Cleburne, 313 East Grand Street, McAlester, Oklahoma.

TOLEN, WILEY or **JACK.**—In 1922, lived in Yakima, Washington. Remember our good times? Please write to your old friend, Oakley Taylor, 1416 Third Avenue, South, Apartment 103, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

HYLTON, BONNIE.—Last known address was 339½ East Long Street, Columbus, Ohio. She was then working for the Ohio Bell Telephone Co. I have valuable news for her. Please write to Frank E., care of this magazine.

WISE, or **WILFRET, RAY.**—Was with the Shesleys Shows, in 1923. Please write to A., care of this magazine.

McPHERSON, TOM.—Last heard from in Miami, Florida, before the storm in 1926. Please write to Alice, care of this magazine.

WILEY, WILLIAM.—Last heard of in Fitzgerald, Georgia, in 1906. Was in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Please write to A., care of this magazine.

MOMPHER, DONALD.—Nineteen years old. An automobile mechanic. Left home in September, 1927. If you are married, you and your wife are both welcome. Please come home, or write to your mother, Mrs. William Mompher, 235 Findlay Street, Fostoria, Ohio.

FLORENCE, M. A.—Remember I said I loved you, when I left, on the 24th of June, 1928? I still do and would like to hear from you. Please write to Cecil, Leavenworth, Washington.

NIEDIG, MRS. MAE.—Formerly of Chicago, Illinois, and Butte, Montana. Believed to be in Los Angeles, California. Please write to Anna Thornrose, 8434 Cregier Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

STRATTON, ROBERT C.—Was in the United States navy, and later a salesman for the Dalton Adding Machine Co. Please write to Vivian of Chicago, care of this magazine.

WOODS, WILLIAM.—My father. My parents were divorced when I was a year old, nineteen years ago. Information appreciated by Mrs. Edith Totten, Route 2, Box 22, Monteca, California.

CANNON, JIM.—Twenty-three years old. Last heard from in Winter Haven, Florida, January, 1928. Please write to Lulie Charron, 202 Middle Street, Portsmouth, Virginia.

TWO GUN.—Your daughter, Fredrica Joan, was born November 11, 1928. Please write to Stella, care of this magazine.

SHORTY.—Last known address was 9 Walton Place, Ocean City, New Jersey. Please write to Flora, care of this magazine.

BONNIE and **AUDREY.**—All charges dropped and you may come home. Please write to Mrs. E. A. C., care of this magazine.

HOCH, AMOUS.—Left Ohio in the early '80s for Kansas City. In 1885 he mailed home a picture taken by the Haines Studio, North Yakima, Washington. Information appreciated by his nephew, M. F. Hoch, care of Union Pacific Railway Co., Ontario City, California.

KYLE, WILLIAM.—Would like to hear from you soon. Everything O. K. Please write to Grace, care of this magazine.

SON.—Please write to your mother, Mrs. Gussie Schroeder, care of Mrs. Eleanor Kolas, 498 Tenth Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

WIGGINS, MARY.—Mother is very ill. Father died in 1923. Twenty years brings many changes. Please write to your sister, Ola Wiggins, Box 1569, Dallas, Texas.

TURNER, BRYAN D.—Cook or barber. Thirty years old. I need you; please come at once. Information appreciated by Mrs. B. D. T., care of this magazine.

ANDERSON, OSCAR E.—Forty-two years old, blue eyes, and dark hair. Was born in Dalsland, Sweden. Last heard from in Spokane, Washington, in 1927. Please write to Brother, care of this magazine.

LEECH, ED.—Thirty-five years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, dark hair, and has a large scar across the back of his left hand. Information appreciated by C. L., care of this magazine.

GANDY, RICHARD.—Please write mother often. You owe her that, at least. Emma, care of this magazine.

KULA, JOSEPH.—Twenty-two years old. Son of Frank and Anna Kula. Left Albany, Oregon, in April, 1922. Heard from in Condon, Heppner, and Burns, Oregon. Information appreciated by Mrs. Anna Kula, Route 3, Orland, California.

CONCHOT, ROBERT J.—Last heard from on the U. S. S. "New Mexico," in Bremerton, Washington. Remember "Monty-say-no"? Please write to Lil of Bremerton, care of this magazine.

SNIDER, MRS. GRACE HOSKINS.—Formerly of Las Animas, Colorado. Last seen in Palisade, Colorado, in 1927. Please write to Pat, care of this magazine.

BJOERNDAHL, INGVALD.—Five feet, seven inches tall. Last heard from in 1916. Had just returned from a visit to Bergen, Norway. Information appreciated by his brother, Mons Bjoerndahl, care of Fritz Blumenthal, Box 217, Sulphur, Oklahoma.

HOUSTON, GEORGE W.—His father's name was Bob, and when he was a boy he lived in Quitman, Arkansas. Last heard from in North Little Rock, Arkansas. Information appreciated by R. E. W., care of this magazine.

LEE.—Have news for you. Love. Please write to Pearl, care of this magazine.

SCOTT, LIZZIE MAY.—Fifty-five years old. Believed to have married a Mr. Brown, in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by Mrs. Alice Scott Hawkins, Route 2, Jackson, Michigan.

SMITH, JOHNNIE B.—Nineteen years old. Last heard from in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, in 1919. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Mae Ward, 144 West Sprout Street, Norwalk, California.

NIPPY.—We received your letter and picture. I wrote you, but my letter was returned. Carl is well. There have been many changes since you left. We are holding a letter from China for you. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

NEWBY, CHARLES and **ELIZABETH.**—Their father was William Newby, and they lived in Fairfield, Nebraska. Elizabeth was last heard from in Michigan. Please write your cousin, Ed. H. Newby, 203 Main Street, Joplin, Missouri.

ROSS, HENRY and **WINNIE.**—Last heard from in Montgomery, Alabama. Please write to Francis and Arthur Ross, care of this magazine.

ADAMS, or **LOGUE, MARIE.**—Last heard from in Paris, Illinois. At that time she had six children—Alvin, Andrew, Loretta, Clarence, Edward, and Ralph. Information appreciated by her niece, Mrs. Thelma Conroy Long, 863 Putnam Avenue, Zanesville, Ohio.

GASPARAC, MATT.—Thirty-five years old. Last known address was, in 1924, 406 Hazel Street, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Please write to your sister, Mary Bon, care of this magazine.

RISCH, MAE.—Last heard from in Cincinnati, Ohio. Believed to have married a soldier, by the name of Thompson, at Fort Thomas, Kentucky. Information appreciated by her brother, Fred, care of this magazine.

CARTER, JIMMY.—I met you in October, 1920. Please write to Orvil C. Cofer, Sixth W. Company, Fort Lewis, Washington.

CATES and **MOSE.**—Mose worked in the canteen at Fort MacArthur, California, in 1920. Please write to Orvil C. Cofer, Sixth W. Company, Fort Lewis, Washington.

McGRATH, HENRY D.—Last heard from at Anadarko, Oklahoma, in 1911. Please write your brother, H. McGrath, Sexsmith, Alberta, Canada.

BRESLIN, GEORGE, and **CUNNINGHAM, RALPH** and **FRANCIS.**—Left Cleveland, Ohio, in 1922. Last heard from in San Francisco, California. Information appreciated by a friend, Dan Kelly, 11302 Hazeldell Road, Cleveland, Ohio.

R. F. R.—Daddy, have faith in me; I love you. Please write to T. H., care of this magazine.

EASTEP, LEE BROWNLOW.—Last seen in Portsmouth, Ohio, in 1910. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Treecy Darnell, 765 North Main Street, Marion, Ohio.

LEHNARD, SIMON.—My father. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan, several years ago. My mother's maiden name was Mary Frisch. I was born in Crestline, Ohio, in February, 1909. Information appreciated by Mathias Lehnard, care of Reney Langlois, R. D. 2, Tecumseh, Ontario, Canada.

KIRKENDAL, L. W., and **W. R. WYATT.**—Information appreciated by Beatrice Kirkendal, 1822 Sycamore Street, Kenover, West Virginia.

AMBELAS, AUGUSTUS.—Last heard from in Boston, Massachusetts. Known to have worked in, or owned, bootblack stores in New Jersey, Staten Island, and Connecticut. Your wife has done all she can for your son, but she is very ill. I do not know what will happen to the boy. I will keep your address confidential if you will write to Sarah B., care of this magazine.

PENMAN, ROBERT.—Have important news for you. Please write to your brother James, Michel, British Columbia, Canada.

ALDRIDGE, IRENE CROW.—Worked in Berinett's Cafeteria, in 1924. Do you remember the three B's? Please write to Billie, care of this magazine.

SANORA, BABB.—Remember Cecil and Forgon, Oklahoma? Please write to Cecil, care of this magazine.

MORAN, "RED."—Believed to be operating a cafe in Bridgeport, Nebraska. Do you remember the Club Cafe and Billie, Gene, and Bob? Please write to Bob, care of this magazine.

BRU, or **BRUE, JOHN.**—Fifty years old. Was born in the northern part of Norway. In 1912 was a poultry farmer in one of the Pacific-coast States. Information appreciated by Jack Brue, 1021 Michigan Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

BONEWIG, FRANKIE.—Nineteen years old; six feet tall, brown hair, and dark complexion. Formerly on the U. S. S. "Brooks." Last heard from when he was a fireman on the Midnight Limited Express, between Boston and New York. Information appreciated by Evelyn Ledener, care of this magazine.

ANDERSON, WILLIAM B.—Forty-four years old; five feet, nine inches tall, dark hair and eyes. Left home, in Clinton, Indiana, on October 16, 1928. Alice Aileen is grieving for her daddy, and I am almost worried sick about you. Am at mother's and unable to find work. Please write to Lillian, 430 North Fourteenth Street, Terre Haute, Indiana.

YOUNG, GORENA.—Last heard from in 1894, at the St. Peter Mission School, Deer Lodge, Montana. Information appreciated by Mrs. Mary Morton, 7½ Nallain Street, Sapulpa, Oklahoma.

McCANN, MAGGIE MAY, and **GROTWALD, ESTHER ROOSEFELT.**—My daughters. Maggie was born at the Lancaster County Hospital, Lancaster City, Pennsylvania, thirty years ago. She was adopted from there when she was three years old. Esther was born in a hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, twenty-five years ago and was adopted from there when she was four years old. I was very ill at the time and not able to look after my children. Information appreciated by Mrs. Mary Etta Kane, 1022 North Adams Street, Peoria, Illinois.

HICKS, PAUL.—Do you remember your old pal at Steubenville, Ohio? I think of you often and of our happy days along the river. Please write to Anna Hawksworth, Nanty-Glo, Pennsylvania.

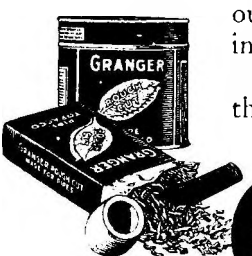
"...in more pipes every day"

A cool sweet smoke — and the pipe stays clean!

Smokers tell us that after its rich, cool flavor, the thing they like best about Granger Rough Cut is the way it burns, slowly and completely, to a clean *dry* ash. No soggy "heel" of half-burned tobacco oils; their pipes are cleaner, they say — cleaner, sweeter, and cooler — than they ever were before!

"A cooler smoke in a drier pipe" — thanks to our secret Wellman Method and the slow-burning Rough Cut.

Packed in foil (instead of costly tin), hence the price — ten cents.



Granger
ROUGH CUT

LIGGETT & MYERS TOBACCO CO.

Classified Advertising

Agents and Help Wanted

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR, Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., Dept. 2860, St. Louis, Mo.

YOU ARE WANTED TO RESILVER mirrors at home. Immense profits plating autoparts, tableware, etc. Write for information. Sprinkle, Plater, 333, Marion, Indiana.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, FURnishing everything. Men and women, earn $10 to $100 weekly operating our original "New System Specialty Candy Factories." Begin home spare time. Unlimited opportunity. Valuable booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 29, East Orange, N. J.

GIRLS, Boys, Grownups, Make Money, Spare Time, selling—White Hands—Worth Its Weight in Gold, for Scalds, Burns, relieving instantaneously, healing quickly. Should be in Every Home. Ye Olde Tyme English Principle, for allaying irritations, Beautifying, Making the Skin Soft and White. Retailed fifty cents, thirty brings bottle and particulars. White Hands Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS wanted to advertise our goods and distribute free samples to consumers; 90c an hour; write for full particulars. American Products Co., 2555, Monmouth, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Help Wanted—Female

HOMEWORK: Women wanting obtain reliable kinds write for information. Enclose stamp. Eller Co., 296-T Broadway, New York.

Patents and Lawyers

PATENTS. Send sketch or model for preliminary examination. Booklet free. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 724 Ninth St., Washington, D. C.

INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED. Patented or unpatented. Write Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 223, Enright, St. Louis, Mo.

INVENTORS—Write for our guide book, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. Randolph & Co., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for free book, "How to Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Advice Free. Terms reasonable. Victor J. Evans Co., 767 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

How To Entertain

PLAYS, MUSICAL COMEDIES AND revues, minstrels, comedy and talking songs, blackface skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, juvenile plays and songs, musical readings, make-up goods. Catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 132, Chicago.

Male Help—Instructions

MEN—BIG PAY. SOUTH AMERICAN work. Companies pay fare, expenses. South American Service Bureau, 14,600 Alma, Detroit, Mich.

MEN, enter U. S. Mail service; $142-$225 month; steady; paid vacations; experience unnecessary. For details, write Norton Inst., 1545 Temple Court, Denver, Colo.

WANTED, Men-women, qualify for Government Jobs, $125-$250 month. Steady. Vacations with pay. Write Ozment Inst., 308, St. Louis, Mo.

MEN 18-35. $1900 year. Steady. Railway Postal Clerks. Sample coaching FREE. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. M2, Rochester, N. Y.

Detectives—Instructions

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Great demand. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, George Wagner, 2190 Broadway, New York.

Scenarios and Stories

PHOTOPLAY AND MAGAZINE Stories developed and submitted to markets. Particulars free. Universal Scenario Company, 444 Western & Santa Monica Bldg., Hollywood, Calif.

Big Men and Big Books

If it's action you want, the thrilling stories of brave-hearted deeds, then ask your bookseller to show you the fine, cloth-covered books that bear the "CH" mark on their handsome jackets. "CH" books cost only 75 cents apiece.

There's something doing all the while in a "CH" book. These books which have never before been published were written for men who love the sweep of the great West, the mysteries of big cities, the conquest of man over his environment. Ask your bookseller to show you these latest titles—

The Brand of a Good Book

NEW BOOKS

MR. CHANG'S CRIME RAY
A. E. Apple
THE RANGE WAR ON V V
Emart Kinsburn
FORTUNE UNAWARES
Joseph Montague
LOOT OF THE LAVA BEDS
John H. Hamlin
THE WELL-WISHER
Robert J. Horton

75c per copy

CHELSEA HOUSE PUBLISHERS
79-89 SEVENTH AVE.
NEW YORK CITY

Over the Top

Front-line Fighting Stories

A
Magazine
Full
of
Smashing
Realistic
Fighting
Stories
of
the
From
by
Such
Authors
as

Arthur Guy Empey
George Bruce
Major J. S. Carneson
Raoul F. Whitfield
Owen Atkinson

And others who were
Over There

Over the Top

Front-line Fighting Stories

Issued the first Wednesday of every month

20c a copy—
and more than worth it!

His teeth were white, but . . .

. . . He is among the 4 persons out of 5 after forty and thousands younger who think they are safe when teeth are white only to discover that Pyorrhea has taken heavy toll of health. This dread disease which ignores the teeth and attacks the gums need never worry you—if you brush gums vigorously with the dentifrice made for the purpose.

Forhan's for the Gums is this dentifrice Start using it every morning and every night. Soon you'll notice an improvement in the appearance of your gums They'll look healthier and more youthful In addition, the manner in which Forhan's cleans teeth and protects them from acids which cause decay will delight you

Get a tube of Forhan's from your druggist, today, 35c and 60c.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.
Forhan Company, New York

Forhan's
for the gums

YOUR TEETH ARE ONLY AS HEALTHY AS YOUR GUM

restful sleep

WHY endure the pain and discomfort which thousands of people have relieved with PAZO? Restful sleep is assured after the first application. Unquestionably one of the most popular remedies ever offered for all forms of Piles, because it gives quick results. Money-back guarantee and full directions in package. Tube with pile pipe, 75¢. Tin box, 60¢.

PAZO *for* PILES

The Bust

Beautifully Developed

IT IS FASHION'S DECREE! —*"flowing curves of beauty for the feminine figure"*—just the proper fulness of the bust—hollows in neck, chest, shoulders and back filled out.

Write quickly, learn of the newest science in physical development. Our new book, "BEAUTY CURVES DEVELOPED"—sent FREE.

THE OLIVE CO., Dept. 7, Clarinda, Iowa

$23.50 FOR ALL WOOL SUIT

BIG PAY

Make big money showing Pioneer all-wool, tailored to measure clothes. Amazing values at $23.50 and $33.50. Big commissions in advance with liberal bonus. **Customer satisfaction assures fast growing repeat business.** No experience necessary. We train you. Ambitious men who want to make money steady, send for our attractive sales outfit. Most complete and effective double size swatch line ever offered FREE. Write now for full details of this unusual opportunity

Pioneer Tailoring Co. Dept. B-1003 Congress and Throop Sts. Chicago

SPARE or FULL TIME

CHELSEA HOUSE
Popular Copyrights

Tales of the West, of Love and Mystery and Adventures on sea and land—you can have them now, fresh from the pens of your favorite authors. They are real books, too—no reprints of old-timers but new books bound in cloth, with handsome stamping and jackets and all for 75 cents. Ask your bookseller to show you some of the books listed below—

The Brand of **CH** *Good Books*

THE QUICK-DRAW KID	George Gilbert
THE "GOLDEN DOLPHIN"	Joseph Montague
"LOOKOUT" LARAMIE	Paul Bailey
THE TUNNEL TO DOOM	Roy W. Hinds
THE VALLEY OF THE MONQUIS	Arthur Preston
THE BLACK SANDER	Loring Brent
GUN GENTLEMEN	David Manning
BLUNDELL'S LAST GUEST	Albert Payson Terhune
THORNTON THE WOLFER	George Gilbert
THE COASTS OF ADVENTURE	James Graham
OL' JIM BRIDGER	Joseph Montague
THE SLEEPING COP	Isabel Ostrander and Christopher B. Booth
THE BAYOU SHRINE	Perley Poore Sheehan
THE SILVER SKULL	George C. Shedd
THE TRAP AT COMANCHE BEND	David Manning
HIDDEN OUT	Howard Fielding
YOUNG LIGHTNING	Charles Wesley Sanders
THE GLORIOUS PIRATE	James Graham
THE HOUSE OF DISAPPEARANCES	Chester K. Steele
ISLAND RANCH	Thomas K. Holmes
STRANGE TIMBER	Joseph Montague
THE FLYING COYOTES	Raymond S. Spears
THE THUNDERBOLT'S JEST	Johnston McCulley
THE MUSTANG HERDER	David Manning
MUTINY	Frederick R. Bechdolt

CHELSEA HOUSE PUBLISHERS
79-89 SEVENTH AVE.
NEW YORK CITY

75c **75c**

New • New • New

Have You Seen the

NEW POPULAR MAGAZINE?

The most interesting—
The most attractive—
The most readable—
The most *comprehensive* of all!

The Reason

We Publish Stories of Romantic-Adventure of

WAR SEA AVIATION
THE WEST BUSINESS
MYSTERY SPORT

In fact, every kind that makes for entertaining reading.

Be a POPULAR reader and satisfy *all* of your interests.

On the stands the 7th and 20th of each month

Their last ride together

THERE'S more than one reason why girls walk home. There's more than one bachelor who wouldn't have to stay that way if only some one would tell him about Sir Walter Raleigh. Oh well, for that matter, *we'll* tell him. It's milder, men, a lot milder, and it will do a lot to make that strong old briar of yours fit to enter decent company.

LIMITED OFFER (for the United States only)
If your favorite tobacconist does not carry Sir Walter Raleigh, send us his name and address. In return for this courtesy, we'll be delighted to send *you* without charge a full-size tin of this *milder* pipe mixture.
Dept. 70, Brown and Williamson Tobacco Corporation, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

B.W. PRODUCT

SIR WALTER RALEIGH

Who discovered how good a pipe can be

It's *milder*

Piles

End your pain this modern way.

Use UNGUENTINE RECTAL CONES, endorsed by doctors everywhere. Soothing, healing—they stop the torture of bleeding, itching piles. At your druggist's—75c.

For stubborn cases, doctors also urge the use of NOROL-AGAR, a mild, safe lubricant, prescribed by physicians even for children. Write for FREE trial. The Norwich Pharmacal Co., Dept AE-2, Norwich, N. Y.

Foreign Work!

Like to Travel—Does Romantic, Wealthy South America call you? Unusual opportunities for young men. American employers. Fare and expenses furnished. BIG PAY. *Write for Free List.*

SOUTH AMERICAN SERVICE BUREAU
14600 Alma Avenue Detroit, Michigan

DEAFNESS IS MISERY

Multitudes of persons with defective hearing and Head Noises enjoy conversation, go to Theatre and Church because they use Leonard Invisible Antiseptic Ear Drums. Tiny Megaphones fitting in the Ear entirely out of sight. No wires, batteries or head piece. They are Unseen Comforts and inexpensive. Write for booklet and sworn statement of the inventor who was himself deaf.

A. O. LEONARD, Inc., Suite 398, 70 5th Ave., New York

How I Lost 97 Pounds

Before 279 lbs.

I weighed 279 lbs.!

After I had tried many ways to reduce, a medical advisor of one of America's leading insurance companies told me of a new way . . . a natural way, pleasant and healthful. No dangerous drugs, no tiresome courses in dieting or exercise; no thyroid or glandular extracts, no sweat baths, lotions, soaps or creams. It was easy, natural and absolutely safe.

Send your name and address and I will send you all particulars at absolutely no cost or obligation to you.

Today 182 lbs.

M. E. HART

Hart Bldg. Dept. 30 New Orleans.

The Brand of a Good Book

CHELSEA HOUSE
Popular Copyrights

The biggest and fastest selling line of cloth-covered books. Ask your druggist—your bookseller to show you any of these latest titles.

There's something doing all the while in a "CH" book. These books which have never before been published were written for men who love the sweep of the great West, the mysteries of big cities, the conquest of man over his environment.

THE QUICK-DRAW KID	George Gilbert
THE "GOLDEN DOLPHIN"	Joseph Montague
"LOOKOUT" LARAMIE	Paul Bailey
THE TUNNEL TO DOOM	Roy W. Hinds
THE VALLEY OF THE MONQUIS	Arthur Preston
THE BLACK SANDER	Loring Brent
GUN GENTLEMEN	David Manning
BLUNDELL'S LAST GUEST	Albert Payson Terhune
THORNTON THE WOLFER	George Gilbert
THE COASTS OF ADVENTURE	James Graham
OL' JIM BRIDGER	Joseph Montague
THE SLEEPING COP	Isabel Ostrander and Christopher B. Booth
THE BAYOU SHRINE	Perley Poore Sheehan
THE SILVER SKULL	George C. Shedd
THE TRAP AT COMANCHE BEND	David Manning
HIDDEN OUT	Howard Fielding
YOUNG LIGHTNING	Charles Wesley Sanders
THE GLORIOUS PIRATE	James Graham
SCHEMED AT SANDY BAR	George Gilbert
THE HOUSE OF DISAPPEARANCES	Chester K. Steele
ISLAND RANCH	Thomas K. Holmes
STRANGE TIMBER	Joseph Montague
THE FLYING COYOTES	Raymond S. Spears
THE THUNDERBOLT'S JEST	Johnston McCulley
THE MUSTANG HERDER	David Manning
MUTINY	Frederick R. Bechdolt

75c
Per Copy

CHELSEA HOUSE PUBLISHERS
79-89 SEVENTH AVE.
NEW YORK CITY

YOU'RE MISSING SOMETHING!

Unless you're reading

Top-Notch
MAGAZINE

The livest fiction magazine on the stands!

Humor, Adevnture, Mystery, Romance, Action, Emotion, Drama.

Entertaining Stories by Entertaining Writers!

On the news stands, the 1st and 15th of each month

Top-Notch
MAGAZINE

Are you afraid you will be fired?

ARE you sitting on the anxious bench wondering what will happen to you if business slacks up? Are you one of the many small-salaried, untrained workers who are always the first to go when employers start cutting the salary list?

Why have this spectre of unemployment hanging over you all the time? Why not decide today that you are going to make yourself so valuable to your employer that he can't get along without you?

You can do it if you really want to, right at home in spare time, through the International Correspondence Schools. In just an hour a day you can get the special training that you must have if you are ever going to get —*and keep*—a real job at a real salary.

You're ambitious, aren't you? And you want to get ahead? Then don't turn this page until you have clipped the coupon, marked the line of work you want to follow and mailed it to Scranton for full particulars.

Surely it is worth at least a two-cent stamp to find out all about the I. C. S. and what it can do for you.

Mail the Coupon for Free Booklet that has helped thousands of men to win Success.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
"The Universal University"
Box 2081-B, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X in the list below:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management
☐ Industrial Management
☐ Personnel Management
☐ Traffic Management
☐ Accounting and C. P. A. Coaching
☐ Cost Accounting
☐ Bookkeeping
☐ Secretarial Work
☐ Spanish ☐ French
☐ Salesmanship
☐ Advertising
☐ Business Correspondence
☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering
☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ English ☐ Civil Service
☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Common School Subjects
☐ High School Subjects
☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Electrical Engineering
☐ Electric Lighting
☐ Mechanical Engineer
☐ Mechanical Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice
☐ Railroad Positions
☐ Gas Engine Operating
☐ Civil Engineer ☐ Mining
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ Plumbing and Heating
☐ Steam Engineering
☐ Architect
☐ Architects' Blueprints
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Automobile Work
☐ Airplane Engines
☐ Agriculture ☐ Navigation
☐ Mathematics ☐ Radio

Name.....

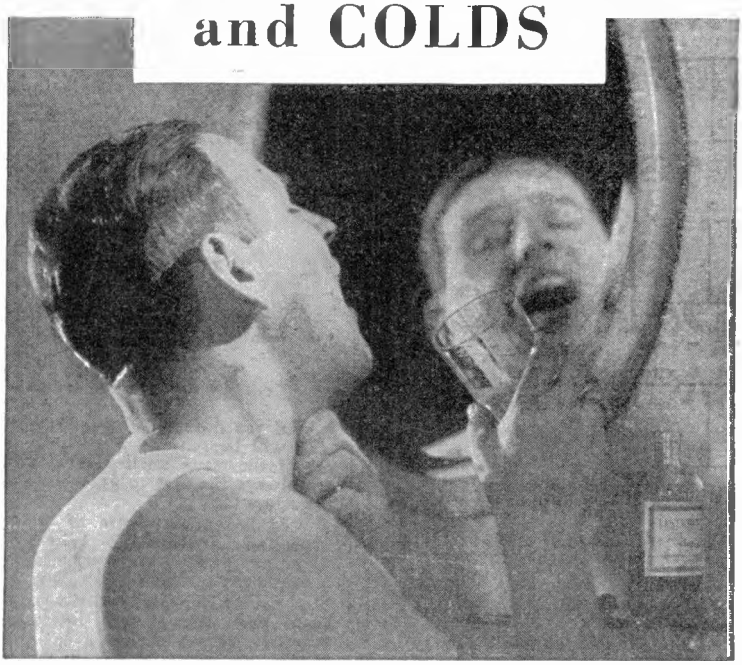
Street Address.....

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

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

How to avoid SORE THROAT... and COLDS



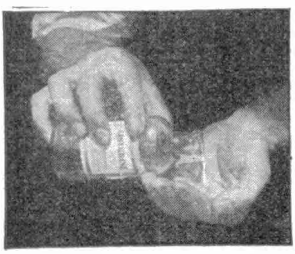
Tests show amazing power against bacteria

Kills typhoid germs in 15 seconds

More than fifty diseases, some slight, some dangerous, have their beginning in the nose or throat.

Therefore, an irritated throat demands immediate attention. It may be the symptom of a cold—or worse. The germs causing the irritation must be killed before they get the upper hand.

Listerine, used full strength as a gargle, is a powerful aid in killing germs. Repeated tests by laboratories of national repute prove it. For example, Listerine, full strength, in 15 seconds destroyed even the virulent M. Aureus (pus) and B. Typhosus (typhoid) germs.



Yet Listerine is so gentle and safe it may be used undiluted in any cavity of the body.

Now you can understand why millions rely on Listerine to avoid ordinary sore throat and colds entirely, and to check them should they gain a throat hold. You'll be amazed to find how quickly Listerine brings relief.

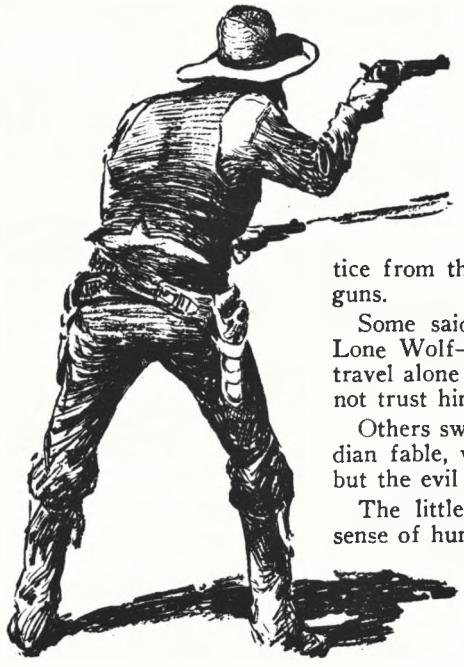
If, however, a feeling of soreness persists, call your physician. It is no longer a matter with which an antiseptic can deal.

Keep a bottle of Listerine handy at home and in the office, and at the first sign of throat irritation gargle repeatedly with it full strength. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

Prevent a cold this way? *Certainly!*

Countless colds start when germs are carried to the mouth on food. By using Listerine on the hands before every meal, you attack such germs and lessen the risk of cold. Remember this, mothers, when handling baby's food.

LISTERINE
The safe antiseptic



WITH A PRICE ON HIS HEAD

Jim-twin Allen—also known as the White Wolf—dealt out primitive justice from the smoking muzzles of his terrible six-guns.

Some said that Jim-twin Allen was the fabled Lone Wolf—outlawed by his pack—condemned to travel alone because his kind feared him and would not trust him.

Others swore that he was the White Wolf of Indian fable, who brought good luck, and that none but the evil need fear him.

The little freckled gunman with his whimsical sense of humor was a picturesque figure who made himself feared and respected wherever he appeared.

And when his brother, Sheriff Jack Allen, was laid up and unable to attend to his duties, it was Jim-twin Allen who tried his hand at sheriffing—and he made a good job of it.

If you like breezy, actionful, richly flavored Western romance and adventure, read

THE OUTLAW SHERIFF

By Hal Dunning

This book is one of the famous CHELSEA HOUSE POPULAR COPYRIGHTS—the line of cloth-bound books published by Chelsea House to sell at 75 cents a volume—books that are the equal of most other publishers' offerings retailing at $2.00. Well-bound, well-printed books, good paper and substantial cloth bindings. When you can buy the best new popular fiction at this price, why pay more?

75 Cents a Volume

ASK YOUR DEALER TO SHOW YOU THIS BOOK AND OTHER TITLES IN THE CHELSEA HOUSE POPULAR COPYRIGHTS.

CHELSEA HOUSE, Publishers :: 79 Seventh Avenue, New York

H A V E A C A M E L

Camels, of course

The more you demand of a cigarette, the quicker you come to

CAMELS

© 1929, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Winston-Salem, N. C.