EVERY WEEK

OCT. 25, 1924

Western Story Magazine

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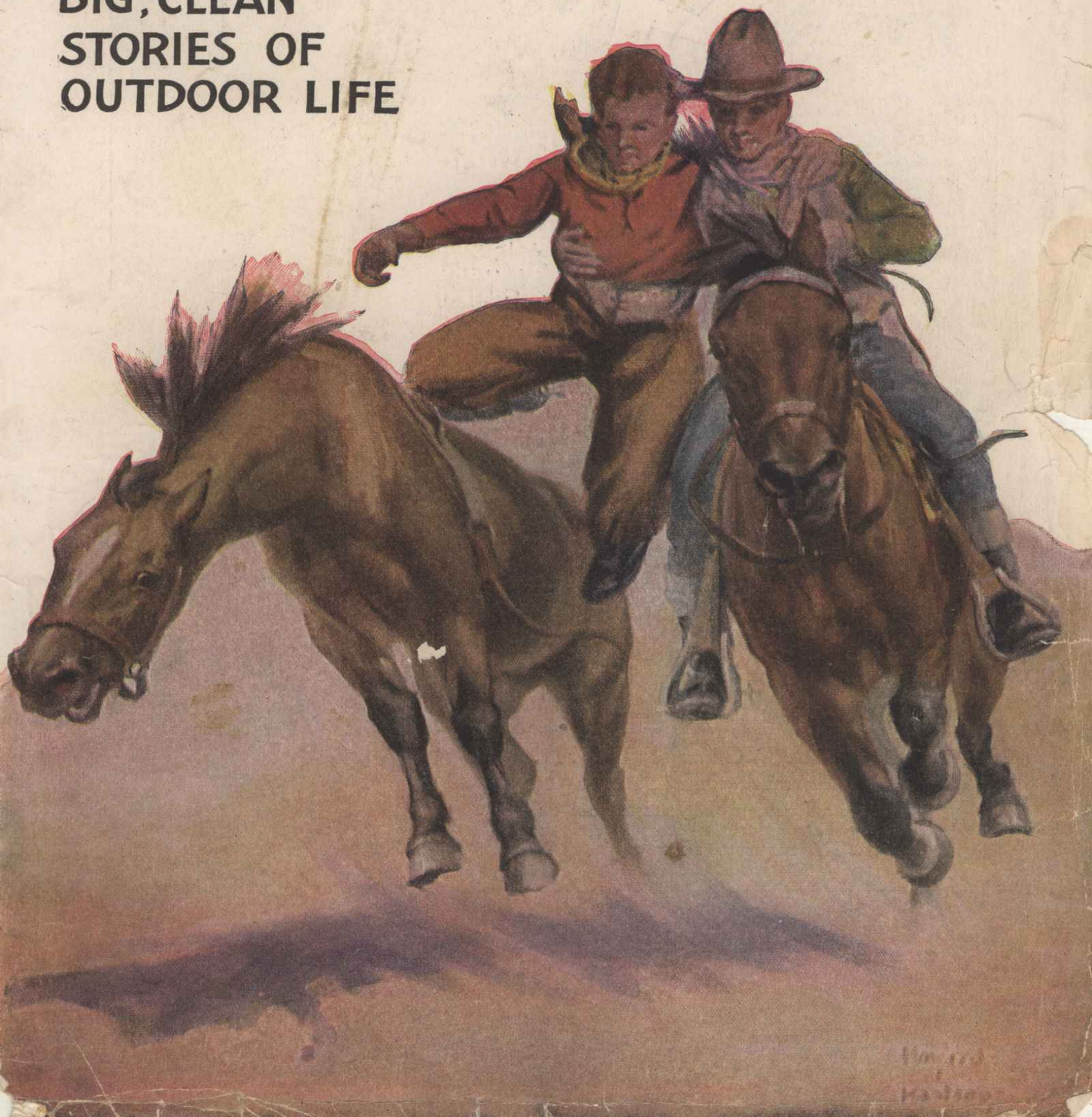

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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. XLVII Contents for October 25, 1924 No. 2

NINE STORIES IN THIS ISSUE

ONE COMPLETE NOVEL

TWO SERIALS

SIX SHORT STORIES

MISCELLANEOUS

DEPARTMENTS

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EVERY WEEK

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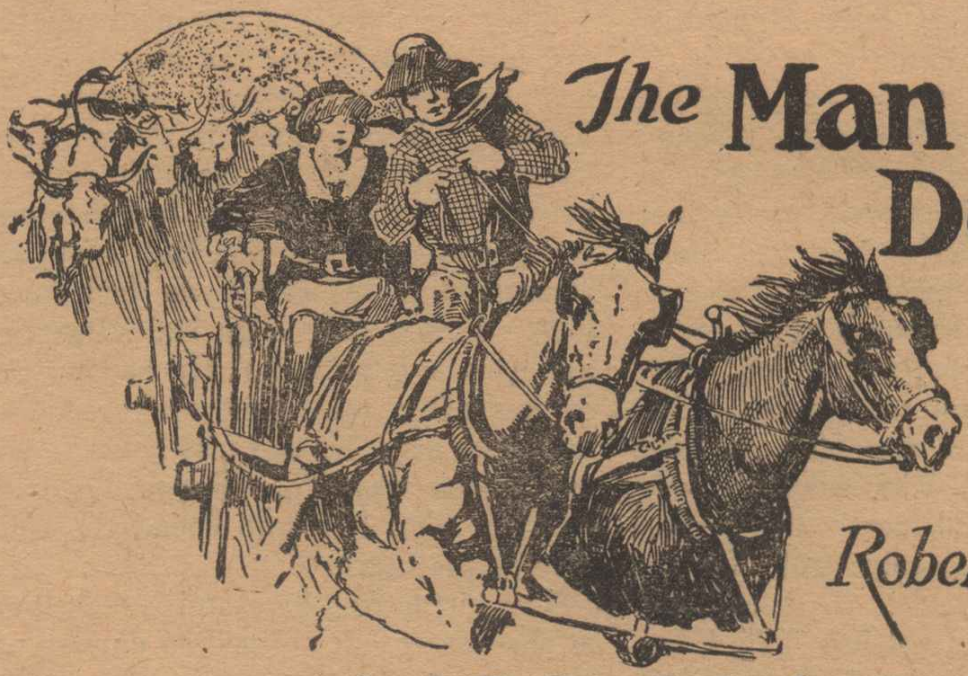

The Man of the Desert

By Robert J. Horton

Author of "The Cactus Kid Cuts Loose," etc.

CHAPTER I.

LIVE DUST.

THE desert road led up a long acclivity toward the mesa. On either side the grotesque branches of the Joshua trees, resembling long, green, bristle brushes, were tipped with clusters of white blossoms. Between clumps of juniper and yucca, among patches of gray sage, little red and yellow flowers peeped forth in radiant bloom, lending an unaccustomed flow of color to the saffron-tinted earth. The sun swam in a cloudless, high-arched sky of blue, and struck fires of brilliancy from the green and crimson stains on mineral rocks. A breath of wind laved a land of desolate, unending distances, cooling and soothing in subtle mockery of the inferno's blistering blast soon to come. It was the brief season of the desert spring.

The road was a cushion of dust in which the wheels of a buckboard, drawn by two sturdy grays, moved noiselessly. But the familiar sounds of slow travel were audible—creak of harness, squeak of floor board, the crunch of hoofs. And there was dust, and noonday heat, and the scent of sweating horses.

In the buckboard were two people, a man, who was driving, and a girl. The man was short, slender, with prominent knees and a stoop, but displaying a wiry

strength in his movements that belied a first impression of frailty. He was not young. There was an intricate network of wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, his neck was seamed and lined, and gray hair showed under his headgear. His neck and gnarled hands were burned a deep brown; but his face was of a lighter shade, almost rosy. His eyes were of a washed-out blue, and constantly twinkling. He wore faded blue overalls, riding boots, flannel shirt, a hat with a medium brim, high crown, undented, and adorned with a narrow, fanciful band of leather.

The girl was a blonde with laughing gray eyes that were frequently serious; rather full lipped and soft cheeked, but not enough so to be merely pretty, nor really beautiful. Her face and smile indicated a likeable personality; her eyes mirrored a certain strength of character while frankly flashing a question. She seemed cool, radiant, composed, glowingly healthful in a neat blue suit and snug blue turban. The wisps of hair that peeped from beneath the turban were the color of spun gold in the dazzling sunlight.

"You say, Mr. Crossley—but I believe you told me you wished me to call you Jim?" She favored the man with a smile that caused him to catch up on the lines with a jerk.

"Jim it is, Miss Farman," he said. "It's what most of 'em call me. My name's Crossley, all right, but Jim's easier on the breath an' the ear, I reckon."

"Very well, Jim." The girl laughed lightly, easily, reassuringly. "Jim, what did you say was the name of my uncle's place?"

"Rancho del Encanto," Jim recited with a lingering accent.

"Spanish, of course. And what does it mean, Jim?"

"Means 'Ranch of Enchantment' or something like that." Jim reached for the plug of tobacco in his hip pocket, remembered just in time, and sighed. Hard luck, this; hard work driving a team without the comforting taste of strong tobacco. But wasn't Miss Hope Farman a lady? And wasn't she a New Englander? He didn't know exactly what a New Englander was, although he knew they came from the East, but the housekeeper had warned him to be careful when he had left the ranch the day before to go to the distant railway station. Well, he would play safe; he would forego the chew.

They were nearing the mesa and the girl looked back over the gray and yellow expanse of desert. Rancho del Encanto. Enchantment in this wild and lonely desolation? Perhaps the wife of her uncle, Nathan Farman, had so named the ranch. Perhaps she had found enchantment there; surely she had found love. Her uncle never had remarried after his wife's death. He had written of her often. He had sorrowed long and deep after he had lost her. It was one reason why Hope Farman had decided to visit him and spend the summer on his ranch.

The girl looked long and wonderingly at the desert. It seemed so empty! It was so utterly devoid of life. Even with its scant vegetation, it appeared bare. The green grass and trees of her native Connecticut! The contrast was so vivid, had been brought about so suddenly after her long journey, that it left her numbed by its very reality. She found it hard to adjust her mind to the new order of things inanimate. But it interested her, as did Jim Crossley, who handled the horses so easily that he appeared to drive by instinct.

"Do you know, Jim," she said suddenly, "do you know——" She hesitated.

"Nope, I reckon I don't, ma'am."

"I don't believe half what I've read and heard of the West," she said boldly.

"Don't blame you a bit, ma'am. There's liars in all countries!"

She looked at him quickly. He had subtly turned the edge of her point. If his reply was a sample of the dullness of the desert breed, it occurred to her that she had been misinformed in a quarter she had not suspected.

"I mean, Jim, that I'm minded to think some of the things that have taken place out here have been exaggerated," she explained.

"Mebbe so," he considered. "An' I reckon half ain't been told about some of 'em."

The horses pulled up a last stiff piece of grade and came out upon the mesa. Then the wind hit them. It was a chilling win', sweeping down the great trough east of the foothills of the Sierras. League on league the desert stretched northward and eastward, rimmed by jagged mountains, naked save for a veil of blue haze.

Hope Farman caught her breath at the stupendous sight. Gone were the fantastic Joshua trees, the junipers and the yucca; gone were all the beautiful flowers.

"Why—it's changed!" she exclaimed.

Jim shrugged, made another false move toward his hip pocket, and shook out the lines.

"Yep, she's a tough proposition from here on in," he announced. "Nuthin' but greasewood an' sage till we get pretty close to the ranch. We come on it suddenlike—off there." He pointed toward the northwest and the foothills.

"Is it all like this at the ranch?" she asked with a feeling of revulsion.

"Nope. There's trees there, an' water."

She smiled at him gratefully. That was it. Water! It was the water she missed so acutely. There was so little of it. They were carrying it in bags. They hadn't passed a single water hole or spring since leaving the small town at the railroad. It was good to know there was water somewhere in that barren country.

"Are there any towns—places of interest—near here?" she asked.

Jim motioned eastward. "Bandburg's off there. Mining town. Ever hear of a 'glory hole?' Bandburg's got one. They're scooping the gold out of the mountain like it was soft coal! They've gutted the hill five million dollars' worth a'ready."

Hope was thrilled. She always had associated the thought of the desert with gold. Here was evidence that it was not a fallacy that the two words were synonymous.

Jim was pointing again, northeastward this time. "Death Valley's up there. Can't see it. Too far away an' the Slate Range shuts it off. Panamint's on this side an' Funeral Mountains on the other."

She had heard of it; a dreaded "sink" in the desert, sometimes white as though covered with the dust of powdered skulls, glowing with color at sunset, practically waterless, below the level of the sea.

"How did it get that name?" she inquired.

"Bunch of Mormons, headed for the gold fields, tried to cross it an' died there," Jim replied. "Plenty has died there since," he added as an afterthought.

Slowly the significance of his laconic speech dawned upon her. It was the water. It made her thirsty, and she said so. Jim drew a drink from one of the water bags.

Refreshed, she again scanned the far-flung reaches of desert. The mesa was a long table-land and the horses were taking it at a jog trot. In the north it sloped down into a great basin. The wind had freshened and Hope took her coat from the back of the seat and put it on. She saw what appeared to be a dark, filmy cloud in the basin. She pointed to it and remarked about it.

"That's dust, ma'am," said Jim readily. "We skirt the basin on the west an'

mebbe we won't get much of it. It's mighty dusty in here when it blows."

They rode on in silence. Jim, on such short acquaintance, was naturally reticent. Hope was turning over in her mind the many remarkable things she had read and heard of in this new land, in which she intended to stay several months. And the nature of the landscape seemed to inspire silence.

But Hope had been bred where conversation is a habit. Besides, she was curious. After all, it was an astonishing adventure—this change from the soft, esthetic beauty of her native New England to the forbidding, sinister land which lay spread out before her. That it held a menace, she sensed, rather than knew; the thing she did not realize was that she had yet to learn the inexorable nature of that menace.

"We never *see* any one," she complained suddenly. "There isn't a single living thing in sight except a few wandering birds, and I feel that *they* have gotten here by mistake."

"There ain't much travel in this direction," Jim commented. "Your uncle's is the only ranch in here. If we was to see anybody sloping this way, I'd be curious."

"Why? They might be going to the Rancho del Encanto."

"They might," was Jim's matter-of-fact rejoinder.

"There's a certain element of mystery in your replies, Jim," said the girl in a tone that hinted of severity. "Has there been any—is there ever any trouble at the ranch?"

"Hasn't been any all winter, ma'am." Jim was giving the horses closer attention.

"I believe you are trying to intrigue my curiosity," she said reprovingly. "Next thing you will be telling me there are outlaws in the country." She had read of outlaws and she awaited his reply with amused interest.

"Mendicott's still here somewheres," he said with a drawl, favoring her with a side glance.

"Mendicott? Who is he?"

"An outlaw just like you mentioned, ma'am."

"But, what *kind* of an outlaw?"

Jim's right hand got clear into his hip pocket and was closing on the plug of tobacco before he recollected his decision. He withdrew it reluctantly.

"He's the regular kind, ma'am." His drawl was now pronounced.

"But what does he do?"

"He does a general outlawin' business, ma'am. Takes what he wants an' don't bother 'bout receipts."

Hope Farman's chin tilted a bit. "I suppose it's impossible to catch him," she observed, mildly sarcastic.

"Has been so far," answered Jim cheerfully.

"Do they—the authorities—know where he is?"

"They *think* they do," replied Jim, grinning.

"Then why is it that they don't go in force and capture him?" the girl demanded.

"He throws a wicked gun for one thing," drawled out Jim patiently. "Then he usually ain't where they think he is, an' it irritates him an' his gang to be followed."

Hope's chin went up another degree and she regarded the little driver coldly. "Then I am to assume that the authorities cater to the whims of this desperado?"

"They sure do, ma'am; most of 'em bein' men of family."

"Humph!" It was a prim exclamation, but the girl managed to put considerable feeling into it. "Do you know what I would like to see, Jim?"

"People, probably," Jim conjectured.

"Yes, and one—ah—character in particular."

Jim looked at her speculatively. "An outlaw?" he ventured.

She shook her head a bit disdainfully.

"No, I can't say I am particularly interested in that class of misguided humanity. I'd like to see one of these famous men of yours; the specimen that is tall, broad-shouldered, slim-waisted, and tanned a beautiful brown; that can ride the wild horses, and throw a lariat without ever missing, and draw his revolver and fire it and hit the mark before you can wink an eye, and—and all that. What do you call them—*buckaroos?* Are there any buckaroos on Rancho del Encanto, Jim?"

"Nope—I reckon not," Jim confessed slowly.

"I thought so!" exclaimed the girl with a note of triumph.

They had reached the north end of the mesa where the road turned westward in descent. The force of the wind had increased as the afternoon wore on, and now it flung blinding clouds of dust in their faces. The horses snorted and tossed their heads, straining in the harness so that Jim had to keep a tight rein.

Hope drew her coat closely about her and buttoned it tightly. The air was growing colder with the approach of sunset. The foothills loomed close ahead through the dust veil. As Jim had said they would come upon the ranch unexpectantly, she felt a growing interest. Suddenly she gripped Jim's right arm and cried out in excitement.

"There's a man on a horse down there!" She pointed eastward into the basin. He looked quickly, nodded, and again gave his entire attention to the horses.

They came to the rolling ground on the west side of the basin and started north at a brisk trot. The dust swept down upon them. Jim drew a blue bandanna handkerchief over his mouth and nostrils, while the girl buried the lower part of her face in her coat collar for protection. She shielded her eyes with an arm. To the left she saw an opening in the foothills, and through this opening came rolling clouds of dust, riding fiercely on the wind.

Jim turned to her and shouted: "That's *live* dust, ma'am."

She looked at him queerly, as if she suspicioned an awkward jest.

"I mean it's kicked up by something that's alive an' movin'," he called. "There! Just what I thought. It's cattle that's kickin' up that fog!"

Her eyes widened as she caught a glimpse of tossing horns through the dust. The bellowing of cattle came to her ears on the wind. She caught her breath sharply as the horses lunged under Jim's whip. The buckboard careened as they dashed wildly ahead.

CHAPTER II.

A MAN ACTS.

HOPE held up her left hand in a futile effort to shield her eyes while she clung to the seat with the other. The road led down for a short distance and then cut straight across in front of the opening. Although she was far from experienced in such matters, the girl realized that the little driver intended to try to cross in front of the onrushing cattle before the maddened animals could reach them. It was the only course left to him. He could not turn around in the narrow road, lined with boulders and rock outcroppings, and to stop would mean merely to await the inevitable in the path of the herd.

She heard him swearing, and the words, "Lost Cañon," came to her. She assumed that it was the name of the opening in the hills.

The dust stung their faces and nearly blinded them. Hope closed her smarting eyes for a few moments. She opened them when Jim yelled: "They're *drivin'* 'em!"

A rift in the dust clouds enabled her to determine what he meant. For, at a distance up the cañon, she descried the dim, swift-moving forms of horses and

riders. There were men with the cattle. Very likely the herd had gotten away from them. She remembered what she had read of stampedes, and shuddered. Terror seized her; left her white, and shaken, clinging to the seat of the swaying buckboard, as Jim flung away the whip he no longer needed.

The horses were galloping madly and they made the turn at the foot of the grade on two wheels. The buckboard came down with a jolt, bumped and swerved; and again the world was blotted out by a solid wall of dust through which the dying sun shone obscurely in a dull, yellow opaque. The effect was weird, uncanny, and added to the terror inspired by the danger of being run over by the oncoming herd.

The air was filled with the thunder of pounding hoofs, and the raucous bellowing of the cattle. Jim braced his feet against the dash, leaned forward on the lines, but gave the horses their heads. Then the vanguard of the stampede loomed directly ahead, so close that they could see the wild, red light in the eyes of the frightened animals.

Jim pulled in on the lines, shouting to the horses, causing them to slacken their pace a bit. Over they went to the right, the buckboard tipping to a dangerous angle, the right wheels nearly buckling. They left the road just ahead of the cattle, now almost upon them, and started down the steep grade into the basin. It was impossible to mark their course any distance ahead because of the dust. The girl was choking, and she saw the wind strip Jim's hat from his head.

The horses ploughed through clumps of greasewood and sage; rocks jolted the buckboard until it became a twisting, writhing thing, with no balance of motion, in imminent danger of overturning.

Hope's gaze seemed rivited on the flying ground under the light tongue of the vehicle. She dared not look up; she could only hold on with all her strength in the effort to keep in the seat. She glimpsed a streak of gray under the tongue; one of the horses stumbled, recovered; there was a shock as the front wheels struck an obstruction. The right side of the little buckboard was lifted high. She was thrown heavily against Jim. Then came a confused moment and something struck her on the left side and head. It was some moments before she realized she had been thrown.

She lifted herself and cried out in horror. The buckboard had overturned. The horses were dragging it, and behind it she saw a bobbing object on the ground. It was Jim, still holding to the lines!

The dust closed in and shut off the sight.

She rose from the ground, pains shooting through her left shoulder, a queer tightening in her throat. She saw the gray ledge of rock that had caused the catastrophe. She looked at it dully. A loud bellow sounded above the thundering rumble of flying hoofs and instantly she was aware of her peril. She started to run, stumbled in the sage, fell. In that moment she felt it was no use; she could not hope to escape; the herd was plunging down upon her to pound her to death. And suddenly she was cool.

It was as if her mind could not fully grasp the horror of her predicament. It had all happened with such suddenness that it seemed unreal—impossible! In swift retrospect her well-ordered life—calm, punctilious, devoid of thrills, exact—flashed before her in kaleidoscopic review. She felt the hard, sun-baked earth shake under her. The sensation reminded her vaguely of her danger. She gained her feet and a red-hot iron pricked at her right ankle. A sprain! Her temples throbbed. It was almost dark in the swirling dust—so dark she could hardly see the shadow that suddenly loomed over her. She closed her eyes.

But, instead of the impact of horns or hoofs which she calmly awaited, she felt herself caught up, rudely, unceremoniously, held tightly within an arm and pressed against leather under which was the feel of playing muscles. Then came motion. She swayed, but the arm held her securely. She recognized the motion. She was on a horse. She opened her eyes, red and smarting, and looked up into the face of a man. Then darkness descended upon her and she was drifting—drifting—slowly out on the tide of oblivion.

From a distance, a great distance, it seemed, she heard the ripple of water. It became more and more distinct, closer and closer. It seemed good to hear the water. Gradually she became aware of a luxurious sense of lassitude. It took possession of all her body, and she reveled in it. She felt a soothing coolness on her forehead, her face, her hair, her hands—at her temples. Then a twinge of pain in her right ankle and a dull, aching throb in her left shoulder, and she abruptly regained her normal senses. Her thoughts flashed back to the long, tiresome ride, the wind and dust, the bellowing of the stampeding cattle, the crash of the buckboard, Jim being dragged on the ground, the sprain, the shadow above her.

She opened her eyes with an effort to see a man leaning over her, applying a wet handkerchief to her temples, holding a canteen in one hand in which water gurgled.

She looked into gray eyes—gray eyes, shot with brown. She saw regular features, strong, clear-cut, and a bronzed skin—hair a shade darker than the color of copper against the gray of a big hat, pushed back from the forehead. She saw white, even teeth; a neckerchief of blue, dark blue silk, perhaps.

"Here, drink some of this." The voice was a modulated bass, musical in its varying inflections. He held the canteen to her lips and she drank eagerly, watching him the while. When he drew back the canteen she tried to grasp it, then pouted.

"In a minute," he promised. And then: "If I had any whisky I'd give you a shot of that! But I guess you don't need it."

She knew she was lying on the ground, but she felt something cushioning her head. She twisted about and saw that it was a coat. *His* coat, of course. She saw a big, bay horse standing with bridle reins dangling. She had been on that horse, and so had the man. He had come just in time. She remembered the horseman she had seen riding up from the basin. He was doubtless the same rider, she reasoned. It all seemed clear enough—and plausible.

"Now you can have some more," came the agreeable, deep voice. "I guess you can have all you want."

She drank as much as she wished, and, with returning strength, smiled up at him. "Thank you," she said in a faint voice.

He rose to his full length, and she looked with wonder at his neat, glove-fitting riding boots, his leather chaparejos, the heavy belt about his slim waist—and then she started. The pearl-handled butt of a huge revolver protruded from a holster strapped about his right thigh over the leather chaps. Then she saw what made the belt heavy. It held a row of cartridges. It was the first time she had seen a man wear a deadly weapon in plain sight, exposed to the view of any who might choose to look; and he wore it naturally, without concern, as a matter of fact. But there was nothing in his bearing to indicate that he wore it as an ornament.

Her gaze ranged upward to the soft flannel shirt that covered his broad shoulders, open at the neck, where the scarf was knotted low. Then she looked at him again and found him surveying her coolly while he fashioned a cigarette

in his brown, tapering fingers. He was studying her frankly, and, she surmised with resentment, curiously. But why should she resent *his* critical inspection when she had just subjected him to the same examination? She laughed and raised herself on her hands.

The wind still was blowing, but it was less filled with dust. The cattle were nowhere to be seen. The entrance to the opening in the hills, Lost Cañon, was clear. There was a peculiar stillness, save for the drone of the wind in the endless sage and greasewood.

High above the towering hulks of the mountains in the west, billowing white clouds rode the sky like vagrant ships. Crimson spangles strewed the blue with the sunset's phosphorescence. Streamers of gold wavered like telltale pennants, flinging their reflections to the eastern horizon to crown the lava hills that swam in a sea of color.

Her attention was diverted from the glory of the desert sunset as the man snapped a match into flame and held it to his cigarette.

"You'll be all right now," he told her. "I must look after your man."

"Is he—badly hurt?" she called as he moved away.

"He's busted up some, but I reckon he'll make the grade," he said over his shoulder.

As he walked rapidly away Hope rose unsteadily to her feet. She sat down again promptly, for the pain in her swollen ankle was unbearable. She unlaced and removed her shoe. After this operation, which relieved her to an extent, she saw her rescuer returning, bearing a limp burden in his arms. As he approached she recognized the white face of Jim Crossley, the little driver. She started to cry out, but the man stopped her with a shake of his head.

He deposited his burden near her and put the coat under Jim's head. It was a hard struggle for Hope to keep back the tears as she saw Jim open his eyes and wince with pain as the man cut the right sleeve of his shirt and felt of the arm. She knew by his look that the arm was broken. With remarkable dispatch the man improvised splints, set the bone, and completed the job of binding it fast with his scarf and the scarf worn by Jim.

Then he gave the little driver a drink of water, and she saw Jim whisper to him.

"The horses are all right," said the man. "I'll have them up here after I make camp. We can't start on for the ranch till morning."

Jim sighed with relief, twisted his head, and beckoned to Hope. She crept to his side and leaned over to him to catch his words.

"There's one of your buckaroos," he said faintly, indicating the stranger.

She looked up at the tall man with a smile, and he motioned her away. But she heard him when he again spoke to Jim.

"Is there anything you want, now, pardner?"

"The devil, yes!" answered the little driver in a stronger voice. "Get that woman out of sight an' give me a chew of terbaccy!"

CHAPTER III.

A LAUGH IN THE NIGHT.

HOPE could not help laughing softly to herself as she turned away so that Jim could realize his desire. When she looked at the little driver again she found him regarding her with a quizzical expression in his mild blue eyes.

The stranger disappeared on his horse. The desert twilight came swiftly, and as swiftly the shadows of night descended. When the stranger returned, he was driving two burros, heavily laden. The little animals stood quietly while he removed the packs. They wore no halters, and when he relieved them of their burdens and the pack saddles, they turned away to graze. He unsaddled his horse,

hobbled it, and turned it out. Then he built a fire.

His movements were methodic, deliberate, but quickly executed, showing plainly that he knew exactly what he was about. He gave the girl an impression of quiet, cool confidence.

Hope felt thirsty and voiced her want. He brought a canteen, unscrewed the cap, and offered it to her.

As she drank she looked up at him—at his clear-cut profile under the wide brim of his hat, in sharp relief against the ruddy light of the camp fire.

"Thank you," she said when she had drank. "Do you know who I—who we are?"

"I know Jimmy, yonder, by sight," he said casually, screwing the cap on the canteen.

"I'm Hope Farman," she volunteered. "I'm going to visit my uncle, Nathan Farman, on Rancho del Encanto."

At this he looked at her sharply, with a show of interest. Then his face again became expressionless. He turned back to his tasks without replying.

"Aren't you going to tell me your name?" she called to him.

He came back and stood over her, apparently in indecision. "My name is —Channing," he said finally, with a light frown.

"I'm sure my uncle will join me in thanking you, Mr. Channing," said Hope, with a feeling that somehow this man resented having to bother with them.

"Yes, he likely will," said Channing soberly. "Nate Farman ain't a bad sort."

"Oh, you *know* him?" said the girl eagerly.

"I know him by sight," was the cool rejoinder.

When he left her again, Hope did not feel inclined to call him back. And Jim Crossley had referred to him as one of her "buckaroos." Now that she pondered the matter, she realized that in many ways this man Channing *did* conform to her conception of a genuine Western man. She felt she was sure he would prove interesting. She wanted to ask him questions. But this wasn't easy.

Channing undid the packs and put up a small miner's tent. In this he made a bed and indicated to Hope that she was to occupy it. She demurred, saying that Crossley was hut and should have the best accommodations.

"You're hurt yourself, I reckon," observed Channing.

"My ankle's twisted, that's all," she returned. "It isn't anything."

"No, it doesn't amount to much; but I guess you're not used to the outdoors as Jimmy, there," he said. "It gets pretty cool on the desert this time of year."

Hope's chin tilted at this. She had at least expected a show of sympathy for her injury. But instead he had agreed it didn't amount to much.

He had brought a canteen. "Might be a good thing if you bathed that ankle in cold water," he said. "I reckon it hurts —some."

She looked up at him gratefully, but he had gone back to the camp fire. She bathed the injured ankle, which had swollen considerably. Meanwhile, Channing busied himself at the fire with frying pans and coffeepot and soon the appetizing odors of frying bacon and strong coffee reminded the girl that she was ravenous.

He fed them bacon and beans, biscuits and jelly, and coffee.

Channing made Crossley comfortable with a blanket and the two squares of tarpaulin used as coverings for the packs. Then he again left them, riding his big horse. Hope managed to hobble to Jim's side. There she sat down on the edge of one of the pieces of tarpaulin.

"You can look and act as mad as you want," she said severely to the little driver; "but I'm going to ask you some

questions. And don't forget my uncle wrote me he was sending one of his best men to meet me at the station. If that's you, I expect you to be friendly."

"I don't want to be anything else, ma'am," said Jim with a grin.

The girl touched his good left hand lightly. "I'm sorry you were hurt, Jim. You were foolish to try to hold the horses after the buckboard tipped over, but I know why you did it, I believe. You're all man, Jim—I think that's a Western saying."

"Shucks! I just didn't have sense enough to let loose," scoffed Jim.

Hope laughed. It was impossible not to like the diminutive driver.

"Jim, who is this man Channing?" she asked, sobering.

Jim shifted on his hard bed. "I reckon that's a hard question, ma'am."

"But—he said he knew you and my uncle," said the girl, surprised. "That is, he said he knew you by sight, and surely you must know *something* about him."

"Nobody knows *much* about him," was the evasive reply. "He keeps in the desert most the time. Wanders aroun' like—no place in particular, I guess."

"But what does he do—what is his business, Jim?"

"I dunno. Prospector, maybe. Knows cattle, though. I heard he'd been on a ranch or two on the other side of the mountains. He's a queer sort of duck."

"Is he what they call a 'desert rat'?" the girl persisted. "I've read of such persons somewhere."

"No, ma'am, I don't reckon he is," said Jim slowly. "A desert rat is an old prospector who's been in the desert so long he's forgot how he got there. This chap, Channing, ain't so old; an' I can't say as he's a prospector. I do know one thing for sure, though, an' that's that he ain't no man to fool with."

"Hasn't he any home?" asked Hope.

"Well, there's a powerful stretch of this desert, ma'am, an' it's all his home. We're in his back yard this minute, I reckon."

"A desert derelict," murmured the girl absently.

"What was that?" asked Jim.

Before Hope could reply they heard horses, and Channing emerged from the shadows driving the two grays that had run away ahead of the stampeding cattle.

The girl heard Jim grunt with relief and knew he had been worrying about the team. He called to her as she started back toward the tent.

"Just wanted you to know, ma'am, I'm right sorry this here all happened," he said earnestly, raising himself on his good arm. "I didn't figure on anything like this an'——"

"That'll do, Jim," said Hope. "I'm from New England, but I'm not altogether stupid. Anyway, it gave me a chance to meet a buckaroo!"

She started to hobble back to the tent slowly and painfully when she was suddenly aware of Channing towering at her side.

"I reckon you've just naturally got to be helped," he said in a matter-of-fact tone.

Then he picked her up and carried her to the tent, put her down just within the small opening, and left without further words.

Hope, flushed and flustered, sat staring as he replenished the fire.

A sudden pound of hoofs brought Channing to his full height. The girl saw him step quickly out of the circle of light into the shadow near her tent. His right hand had darted downward to rest on the butt of the gun on his thigh.

A rider came quickly into view, checked his horse abruptly, and flung himself from the saddle near the fire.

He looked about him and spied Channing. In the few moment before he spoke, Hope had an opportunity to scrutinize him. He was a large man, but

evidently of a muscular build. His features were swarthy, his eyes dark, and he had a bristly black mustache. He was dressed much after the manner of Channing himself, and wore a gun.

"Whose outfit *is* this?" the newcomer demanded harshly.

Channing stepped toward him. "Who was you looking for?" he inquired.

"I'm lookin' for whoever scared them cattle of mine to-night," snapped out the other. "We've been ever since rounding 'em up."

"What'd you start 'em runnin' down Lost Cañon for in the first place?" It was the piping voice of Jim Crossley. "It took more'n just dust to stampede that herd, Brood."

The stranger, whom Jim had called Brood, strode toward the little driver. "Oh, it's *you,*" he said in a sneering tone.

"Yep, it's me," Jim retorted angrily. "Me with a broken arm, thanks to you. Runnin' cattle that way, Brood, ain't no credit to a foreman."

"Shut up, you little——"

"I don't reckon I'd be too strong on the language, friend. The third member of this party happens to be a lady." It was Channing's voice, smooth, almost unctuous, and carrying a peculiar drawl.

Brood turned on him with a smothered curse. Then he appeared to see Hope sitting in the opening of the little tent for the first time. He scowled.

"Who's the company?" he asked Channing.

"She hasn't asked for any introduction to you, as I've heard," replied Channing. "You're the Encanto foreman, I take it, from what Jimmy there has said. Seems to me you'd be doin' better to be lookin' after your cattle."

Brood turned his eyes from the girl and surveyed Channing coldly. "If I didn't know that little runt Crossley is workin' for Farman, I'd say it was a put-up job," he said meaningly. "An' I ain't so sure it ain't."

"Meanin' you want to put the blame on me?" called Jim shrilly.

"Meaning you're cavorting with tramps who haven't any business here," snarled out Brood, thoroughly angry.

Channing stepped directly in front of him, so close that the brims of their hats almost touched. "You including the lady when you mention that word 'tramps?'" he asked in a voice that was deceivingly pleasant.

Brood met his gaze with a glare. "Bah!" he exclaimed. "Some day you'll get a receipt for meddling."

Channing caught him by the arm as he turned away and whirled him around. The girl caught her breath as she saw the flash in the eyes of the pair.

"You haven't answered my question," said Channing sternly.

"An' you haven't told me who the company is," returned Brood.

"She's Nate Farman's niece come to visit him," said Channing after an ominous pause.

Brood stared at the girl with a frown. "I 'spect that lets her out of the tramp class," he reflected gruffly.

"Good night, Brood," said Channing evenly.

Brood, apparently on the point of making a hot retort, caught himself with an effort, looked at Channing narrowly, and swung on his heel. In another moment he was in the saddle and his horse galloped away, cruelly spurred.

Channing's laugh carried after him.

Long after the fire had died and all sounds had ceased, Hope Farman lay in the little tent and puzzled over the quality of that laugh.

CHAPTER IV.

RANCHO DEL ENCANTO.

IN the morning Hope was awake in time to witness the desert dawn, and saw the sun come up blood red on the far eastern horizon across countless leagues of saffron-colored waste lands,

spotted with the never-ending sage and greasewood, presenting a panorama so vast and weirdly beautiful that it caused her to catch her breath in awed wonder.

Channing already was getting breakfast. He paused in his work over the fire and looked at her curiously before he nodded "good morning."

He brought her water for her makeshift toilet. "How's the ankle?" he inquired perfunctorily.

Hope displayed the swelling and smiled at him.

"It'll take a few days for it to come round," he said with a shrug. Then he grinned boyishly in a way she liked. "You got quite an introduction to the country," he observed.

He sobered as she laughed, and returned to his duties at the fire.

Hope could see no sign of the cattle. Jim Crossley called to her in a cheerful voice, and she asked him about his arm.

"I ain't goin' to have it cut off," he replied laconically as Channing brought their breakfasts.

When they had eaten Channing broke camp, bringing in the burros and packing his outfit on their backs. He saddled his own horse and strapped blankets on the two grays that had drawn the buckboard.

"Your vehicle's a wreck," he told Jim. "The harness is pretty well broken up an' we'll have to leave Miss Farman's trunk here to be sent for. We haven't got any way to pack it, an' it's not so far to the ranch."

Jim nodded and looked at Hope, who smiled her consent and approval.

"You an' I'll ride the grays," Channing was saying, speaking again to Jim. "There's halters an' bridles for both of 'em an' we can take it easy. You can make it all right. Miss Farman, you can ride my horse." He turned to Hope and indicated his splendid mount.

The girl looked at the tall animal, champing his bit impatiently, and felt a tremor of doubt. But Channing read her thought and shook his head.

"He wouldn't be any too gentle with a strange man, maybe," he said in a tone of assurance; "but a woman can handle him like he was a kitten. Maybe that's because he sees so few of them," he added as an afterthought.

Then he helped Jim mount one of the grays and came toward her. Her right ankle had swollen so that she couldn't put on her shoe. He noticed it at once.

"You won't have to put that foot in the stirrup," he told her; "we'll walk the distance an' Major rides like a rockin' chair."

"I have a riding habit in my trunk," Hope suggested.

"Sure enough!" he exclaimed. "You ought to have ridin' clothes on—an' that's a fact. We'll go up that way where your trunk is an' you can get your outfit."

With that he picked her up and put her side-fashion in the saddle. Hope gathered her skirts about her, picked up the reins in her right hand, grasped the horn of the saddle with her left, and sat looking straight ahead, her face flaming.

Channing mounted the other gray, started the burros out, closed in after them with Jim following, and Hope's horse struck along in the rear of its own accord.

Thus they proceeded to where Hope's trunk reposed on the ground. There they halted, and Channing helped her to dismount.

"Jim an' I'll ride over that ridge ahead an' wait till you call us," he said. "You can slip on your ridin' outfit an' be all set for the trip."

When they were gone Hope quickly opened the trunk, took out her riding habit, donned it, put her dress in the trunk, and called. Channing and Jim came riding back and soon they were on their way again. Hope rode man-fashion in the deep stock saddle and let her injured right ankle swing free.

From time to time Channing looked back at Jim and herself. But they had no trouble. They rode for nearly two hours before Channing called a halt for the first rest. He brought a canteen and they all drank. The sun was mounting, and Hope thought this day was warmer than the day before.

She mentioned this to Channing, and it brought a quick response from the man. For the first time he smiled in genuine mirth, his teeth flashing white against his bronzed skin, his gray eyes laughing.

"Ma'am," he said slowly, looking at her with a quizzical expression, "this is downright cold to what's coming. This is winter. Summer, when it comes, will come in a day, an' then—well, Miss Farman, *then it'll be warm!*"

He concluded rather grimly, she thought. It was as if he was making a promise, rather than stating a fact or prediction. She remembered much of what she had read of the desert, and she looked at him with more respect as she realized that here was a man who knew the desert—the inferno—who laughed in the face of its menace as he braved its perils and fought it. She wondered *why?* A derelict of that land of desolation! What did he see in it? What was there so acute about the mystery that shrouded him? Was it merely because he was the first of his kind she had met? She accepted the last deduction as the most plausible and resumed the journey feeling less concerned about him.

They stopped more frequently as the day wore on and then, in the late afternoon, they turned suddenly up a ridge, and when they gained the crest Hope cried out in glad wonder.

There was water somewhere ahead, for there were trees—tall, stately trees, from which little fluffs of white were drifting on the breeze.

Jim Crossley was looking back at her with a wide grin.

"Cottonwoods," he called, "an' pines higher up. We're comin' to the ranch!"

They descended the west side of the ridge into a wide cañon up which they rode. Then they came to the water—a thin trickle of stream that gradually widened up the cañon. They now were in the trees, and higher up on the slopes Hope could see the stands of pine—great, green steps that led up the mountains.

The cañon widened, and they came out into a great plateau—a mesa. Below the mesa, on the east, separated from it by the ridge they had crossed, lay the desert. On the west the foothills ranged up to the mountains. The great, level space was carpeted with green grass, and irrigating ditches ran through it. Many of the ditches were lined with red, desert willows; and there were clumps of cottonwoods and alders.

The road followed the stream which flowed straight across the mesa, and midway the length of the fertile plain stood the ranch house and other buildings, nestling under a magnificent growth of towering cottonwoods.

As they approached it, Hope saw that it was built of stone, and it looked substantial, cool and inviting with a wide veranda on two sides. Flowers were blooming below the veranda, and there was a tamarack hedge, a brilliant band of pink and green, on either side of the branch of the road leading to the front of the house.

A man came out on the veranda as they drew up. When he saw Hope he hurried out to greet them; but his look of welcome was tempered by anxiety and perplexity.

"Is this Hope?" he boomed as he hurried toward her horse.

"Yes," said the girl cheerfully; "what's left of me. I would know you anywhere, Uncle Nathan, although I haven't seen you since I was a little girl."

"What happened?" he asked as he

helped her from her horse and kissed her. He looked questioningly at Jim Crossley and Channing.

"I guess you'd better tell him," said Channing to Jim. "Do you want to sit on the porch while I put up the horses?" He helped Crossley down.

Nathan Farman stood staring at the little driver's right arm in the sling. The rancher was a large man, gray of hair and mustache, blue eyed, of medium height and square of chin. He wore gray clothes, a huge, high-crowned hat, and was collarless. As he looked at Crossley, then at Channing and Hope, little lines appeared at the corners of his eyes and he appeared to squint.

In a few words Jim Crossley explained what had happened.

"Sit down on the porch," Nathan Farman commanded. "Mrs. McCaffy—oh, *Mrs. McCaffey,*" he called. He gave Hope his arm and helped her toward the steps to the veranda.

"My dear child," he said to her, "I wouldn't have had anything like this happen for anything. I'll look into it, you bet; I'll look into it right an' proper. Oh, Mrs. McCaffy, take my niece here into the house. She's been hurt an' I've got to find out about it. Be careful, Hope—there."

A large, florid woman had come out of the house. She came toward Hope, who had gained the veranda, with arms outstretched.

"You poor dear," she said in a mannish voice that hinted of a brogue. "I was worrying my brains out! I always said that little shrimp would get himself busted up an' kill somebody else the way he drives." She looked at Jim Crossley in distinct disapproval.

"But it wasn't his fault," said Hope, coming to the little man's rescue. "It really couldn't be helped, Mrs. McCaffy, and I'm not much hurt."

She had surmised at once that the big Irishwoman was the housekeeper at Rancho del Encanto.

As they went inside she saw her uncle bending over Crossley, who was talking in an undertone. Channing was taking the horses around the house.

"Sit right down here," said Mrs. McCaffy, putting her in a large chair in the cool living room. "I'll get the arnicy an' have the swelling in that ankle down in no time. Just don't you worry. You're home, dearie."

She hurried out of the room, and Hope looked out the door to where the pink of the tamarack hedge showed vividly against the green of the grass in front of the house. Already she felt a sense of comfort. The big room was homelike. Mrs. McCaffy she had liked the moment she had seen her and heard her speak. Rancho del Encanto—the ranch of enchantment! She believed she knew why it was so named.

She saw Channing come up on the porch. He passed out of sight, and the low hum of voices came to her ears, but she could not distinguish what was being said. Then Mrs. McCaffy returned and began to treat the injured ankle, indulging in a vast amount of talk, meanwhile, and adroitly drawing the story of what had taken place from the girl by clever questioning.

"That Brood!" she exclaimed. "I never *did* take to him much. I bet he did it on purpose!"

"Why—why should he do anything like that?" asked Hope in amazement.

"Oh, he's queer," said the housekeeper. "There's a lot of 'em aroun' here that's queer. They've been queerer than ever this spring."

The housekeeper paused in her work of bandaging the sprained ankle. For a few moments she looked out the door. "There, dearie; that'll fix your ankle in no time. It's a wonder an' a blessing that you didn't get killed."

Hope heard her uncle's voice raised on the porch. The tone implied that he was angry. Channing appeared at the top of the steps.

"You're staying to supper, I reckon," she heard her uncle say.

"I hadn't figured on it," Channing replied.

"Then you better start figuring powerful quick, for it'll be ready in half an hour, an' I'm expecting you to stay," said Nathan Farman.

The two of them left the porch with Jim Crossley between them.

"Mrs. McCaffy!" said Hope impulsively. "Is there liable to be any trouble because of me—because of what happened?"

"Don't you worry about any trouble," said the housekeeper. "How could there be any trouble because of you, dear? As for that, there's liable to be trouble *any* time in this country. Your uncle Nate is just naturally mad over this business, what with you coming West for the first time and his wanting you to have a good time. You can't blame him."

"This man Brood, Mrs. McCaffy—he is uncle's foreman, isn't he?"

"He is that, an' so far's you an' me is concerned he'll be doing well to stick to his cows."

"But last night—last night," said the girl in a worried voice, "he came to where we were camped in the desert and had some words with Jim and Mr. Channing. He seemed to blame us because the cattle ran away."

"He's got his nerve!" exclaimed the housekeeper. "I guess he didn't know who you was, Miss Hope. He'll soon find out for keeps. But Brood's queer. I don't like a man with his kind of eyes."

"Mrs. McCaffy, if he is uncle's foreman, why should he want to have trouble with Jim, or anybody else working on the ranch?"

"Child, there's things I know an' things I don't know," said the housekeeper, throwing up her hands. "Usually I can guess at what I don't know an' come pretty close to hitting the nail on the head. But this spring my guesser has been worked overtime, an' I've given up. The best thing for a woman on a ranch to do is take things as they come, especially if she's to have any peace of mind. If you try to figure out what the men are thinking an' doing in this country, an' why, you'll go crazy. Now I'll show you to your room an' you can get ready for supper. If there's one thing Encanto is noted for, it's its table, an' I don't mind saying it a bit!"

Hope laughed with her as the housekeeper helped her upstairs.

CHAPTER V.

FOREBODINGS.

IF Nathan Farman's welcome to his niece had seemed somewhat perfunctory upon her arrival at Rancho del Encanto, it was due to the fact that he was intensely interested in the accident and its cause. He made up for it in abounding measure when Hope came down to supper.

They sat in the living room for a time talking of the East, of John Farman, who had been Hope's father, of Nathan Farman's last trip to New England years before when Hope's mother had died. He had wanted to bring her West then, but she was too young. Only once did Hope's uncle speak of his own misfortune in losing his wife; but the girl could see that he still felt his loss and that he hungered for his own kin.

"I've sent Carlos with a team to get your trunk," he told her, "an' the Mexican will have it back here before morning. It was pure luck you wasn't killed, child." His face darkened.

Hope remembered the shadow over her as she stood before the onrushing cattle, the arm that grasped her, the play of muscles beneath leather chaps, and smiled.

"No, I don't think it was all luck, Uncle Nathan," she said. "And if there *was* any luck, it was in Mr. Channing arriving when he did."

Her uncle nodded absently. "I know —Crossley told me."

"And Jim was a hero, uncle," said Hope enthusiastically. "He did the only thing he could do, and he held on to the horses till he was knocked unconscious."

"Jim's a good ranch hand," said Farman dryly. "We've got his arm fixed up best we can. The nearest doctors are in the county seat on the other side of the mountains an' in Bandburg, across the desert. Both places are too far for him to ride for a few days yet. I'll send him to Bandburg soon's he's able to travel, I reckon. We're sort of isolated here. El Encanto is the only ranch in a hundred miles or more. There's the supper bell; let's go in."

There were four places at the long dining table. Nathan Farman placed Hope at the right of his seat at the head. Mrs. McCaffy stood behind her chair at the foot, so to speak, of the table, and the place at Farman's left was unoccupied.

"Where's Channing?" he asked Mrs. McCaffy.

"Hasn't answered the bell," said the housekeeper.

She had hardly spoken when Channing entered from the kitchen.

"I was shaving," he said soberly, and took his place while Farman regarded him curiously.

Mrs. McCaffy had not understated the facts when she had said that Rancho del Encanto set a good table, as Hope soon discovered. She told the housekeeper so and Mrs. McCaffy beamed.

"We live tolerably well," she said. "I'd left this God-forsaken spot long ago if it wasn't for your uncle flattering me about the cooking."

"It's one way I keep my men," said Farman to Hope. "When a man on this ranch makes an especial good showing some way, I invite him to eat in the house. Once he eats in here he's tryin' for another such meal from then on."

The rancher laughed loudly and looked quickly at Channing. "If I could get you to settle down here, I might let you eat in the house right along," he said, chuckling.

"It'd be worth considering," Channing commented.

"Then we'll consider it!" exclaimed Farman, striking the table with his palm. "You come on here an' that place is yours as long as you stay."

Channing's white teeth gleamed against his tan. "I'm afraid I can't be so lucky," he said slowly.

Channing's look and tone had been a bit wistful. Nathan Farman appeared provoked. "Don't you figure on settling down *some* time, Channing?" the rancher asked.

"I reckon we all have hopes," replied Channing with a faint smile; "but Old Man Time keeps his finger in the pie."

"Yes, an' time's going on right along," Farman observed with a frown. "Channing, you're a waster! You ought to be making a future for yourself. You're a regular desert tramp! I can't see anything in the desert; I never could. I hate it. I want grass an' water an' I've got 'em both. You can make a future for yourself right here on grass an' water if you want to, my boy, an' you're a fool to go on like you are."

Channing raised his eyes slowly to look into Farman's. "Your future is built on cattle, Nate, so far's you know. Isn't that so?"

Farman nodded. "You can build yours on the same thing," he said.

"Where would your cattle be if it wasn't for the bunch grass and the white sage?" Channing drawled out. "The desert supplies that."

Farman put down his knife and fork, looked at him searchingly, and shook his head. "You're hopeless," he said. "The desert's got you."

"I'm not complaining," said Channing, with a swift smile at Hope.

The girl was puzzled by the look in

his eyes, by something his tone implied but did not reveal, by the adroitness of his replies and his apparent tolerant disdain of Nathan Farman's offer and opinions. Her uncle had called him a waster! Did he then lack ambition? Was he content to be a derelict?

She remembered what Jim Crossley had said about Mendicott, the outlaw. For a fleeting moment she considered Channing in a new light—a most unfavorable light. But that flashing smile and the look in the gray-brown eyes reassured her. Still, she couldn't forget the laugh she had heard the night before.

After supper they moved to the sitting room, but Channing soon excused himself. Hope was very tired, her ankle pained, and her shoulder hurt where she had fallen when thrown from the buckboard. She told her uncle she believed she would go to bed, and he hurried for a lamp to show her up the stairs. Mrs. McCaffy accompanied them, anxious that Hope should have everything she needed to make her comfortable. Her solicitude for the girl's welfare nearly moved the visitor to tears.

When she was in her robe, ready to retire, Hope blew out the light in the lamp and sat before the open window. Her room was a large corner room with windows on the north and east. It was by the north window that she sat. The space between the ranch house and the bunk house was below; farther back, she could glimpse the barns and other outbuildings.

She marveled at the quiet beauty of the night. The shoulders of the mountains were lined against a sea of stars. A breath of wind was stirring, and it brought the scent of pine and fir from the timbered slopes. She could see the dim outline of the ridge to eastward, and her imagination pictured the silent, brooding desert that lay beyond.

Her reverie was interrupted by the sound of galloping hoofs. She looked down and saw a rider come swiftly up the road toward the house and swing around in the direction of the barns. Then she heard her uncle's voice calling from the porch.

The rider brought his horse to a stop almost directly beneath her window. As he turned in the saddle she recognized him. It was Brood, the foreman.

Nathan Farman came around the house from the porch as Brood dismounted. There was another with Farman; it proved to be Channing.

"You're a long time getting up here," said Farman crossly.

"Had trouble with the cattle," answered Brood shortly. "Stampede in a dust storm. I *guess* it was the dust. Had to gather 'em up. They're in the south flat."

Brood stood before the rancher while Channing leaned against the side of the house, smoking a cigarette. The bunk house door opened and Jim Crossley came out. He hobbled toward the trio as rapidly as he could.

"How'd those cattle happen to come out of Lost Cañon so fast?" demanded Farman.

"I guess the wind started 'em," replied Brood easily. "It blew strong up there. Lots of dust. They were away from us before they could be stopped."

"That's an excuse," said Jim Crossley as he reached them. "I was in front of 'em, but I got a glimpse of what was behind 'em. Them cattle was *driven!*"

"An' you busted into them, like a fool!" Brood exclaimed. "Busted into 'em an' split 'em an' made it all the worse."

"You mean I *ran* from 'em," said Crossley hotly. "It's just luck that Miss Hope wasn't killed."

"By your breakneck driving," Brood broke in viciously.

"Just a minute!" said Farman sharply. "This is serious business, Brood. My neice was in that buckboard with Crossley, an' she might have been killed, like he says. I'm not satisfied with your

explanation of how the cattle came to be running out of the cañon like that. An' I know that just wind won't start any stampede."

"Well, it started *this* one," said Brood, with a hint of insolence.

"You tried to blame it on me, last night," Crossley jeered.

Brood turned on him with an oath. "You an' that tramp with you made it all the worse, didn't you? You could have took things easy. I didn't know you was coming down that road or who was with you, did I?"

"That's just it, Brood," said Nathan Farman in a cold voice. "I think you *did* know. You've been acting strange of late, an' I've laid it to spring oneryness, but if I thought you deliberately stampeded that herd I'd—I'd—I might kill you!"

Brood laughed harshly. "I take it the tramp's been putting some sort of bug in your ear," he said scornfully. "Maybe he don't like me any too well."

Channing joined the group. "The tramp can talk on his own hook, Brood. If I had had anything to say about how this stampede started, I'd have said it to your face last night. But I reckon Jimmy knows what he's talking about."

"You goin' to butt in here on something you don't know anything about an' that's none of your business?" snarled out Brood.

"Oh, I'm not butting in," said Channing, waving his lighted cigarette nonchalantly. "You sort of dragged me in by hinting around about puttin' bugs in people's ears. You talk, Brood, like you had a bug in your brain."

"You're a meddler, you desert loafer!" cried Brood. "You ain't even as good as a desert rat—he'll *work!*"

"That's enough," said Farman sternly. "You haven't given me a satisfactory explanation of how the stampede started yet, Brood."

"I'm layin' it to the wind an' ain't goin' any further," retorted Brood.

"In that case I know it isn't spring oneryness," said the rancher coldly. "You're too anxious to shove the blame for this thing where *I* know it doesn't belong. I guess your usefulness as foreman on this ranch is gone. You can quit any time an' it'll be all right with me."

"*Quit?*" Brood blurted out the question in an incredulous tone. "Me *quit?*"

"That's what I said," Farman replied evenly. "Any time you want to, an' right now is just as good a time as any."

"After all I've done on this ranch?" cried Brood in a white heat of anger.

"You've been well paid for all you've done," said Farman, "an' you've done some things you wasn't paid to do."

"I suppose you're goin' to hire the tramp," said Brood sneeringly. He turned on Channing. "Been back-talkin' yourself into a job, eh?"

"I hadn't been thinkin' of goin' to work here," drawled Channing.

"But you've been thinkin' mighty hard since this talk started, I'll lay to that!" shouted Brood. "You butted in yesterday an' you're Johnny-on-the-spot tonight! Looks all regular, don't it? Pawin' aroun' the boss an' his niece! Funny you stayed away from this place so long till the girl——"

"Leave her out of it!" commanded Channing. "You know how I met Miss Farman. Nate, here, will tell you I refused to go to work here before he ever thought of letting you go. You're feelin' mean to-night, that's all."

"An' you're tryin' to pull off something under cover," shot Brood through his teeth. "You think you can get by by wearin' a gun an' floatin' a tough reputation. Here's one that ain't sidesteppin', an' you can take that any way you want to."

Brood stepped back and assumed a half crouch. Both men were looking steadily into each other's eyes, their narrowed gazes locked.

"How do you *want* me to take it?" asked Channing in a low voice.

"You're yellow!" snarled out Brood.

"No gun play!" cried Nathan Farman hoarsely, leaping between them just as it seemed the draws would come. "You've lied to-night, Brood, an' I order you off the ranch. Get out, d'you hear?"

Brood hesitated, his breath coming fast, his eyes narrowed to slits, his lower lip thrust out. Then he straightened and stepped back. "Farman, you're a fool," he said with a sneer. "You don't know why—yet; but you are. When you wake up, you'll wake up with a bang!"

"You won't gain anything by threatening me," said Farman in a voice that trembled with the force of his feeling. "Are you going?"

"I'm going," said Brood, his lips curling; "but that ain't sayin' I'll never come back. Listen!" His voice became a hiss. "You've been lucky, understand? Till *now!*" He swung on his horse and galloped swiftly out of sight in the direction of the road leading around the barns toward the foothills.

Hope Farman drew back from the window. She sat and stared straight ahead into the shadows of the darkened room. It was all incomprehensible, but appallingly real. Tragedy had stalked under her window. She realized dully that in some way her uncle was menaced, and that her coming had hastened a climax. And, though she was new in this country of man-made laws, she sensed that Brood and Channing had been on the point of drawing their weapons against each other—that her uncle's life, too, had been in danger. It was an awakening. She thrilled. And then she caught herself. *These men were not at play!*

CHAPTER VI.

TROUBLE STARTS.

CHANNING was at the breakfast table. He was silent and thoughtful. Nathan Farman, too, was in a thoughtful mood, although he strived to conceal the fact from Hope.

It was Mrs. McCaffy who was the life of the meal. She chatted with Hope on sundry topics and asked many questions about what was going on in the world beyond the desert.

Farman and Channing left the table before the women had finished eating, and this gave Hope the opportunity she was awaiting.

"Mrs. McCaffy, do you know what took place last night?" she asked seriously.

The housekeeper looked startled. "What do you mean, child?"

"Didn't you hear? My uncle, Brood, and Jim, and Mr. Channing?"

"Was you listening?" countered Mrs. McCaffy. "Dearie, you shouldn't pay any attention to the men's doings on the ranch."

"But it was over the accident we had coming here," said Hope. "And it sounded to me as though my uncle and Jim suspected Brood of deliberately trying to run the cattle on us. Why should he want to do that?"

"He didn't want to do that, child; of course he didn't. I'll tell you this much, Miss Hope, an' then you forget it. There's been some trouble around here before and your uncle was waiting his chance to get rid of Brood, I think. I always figured that man was treacherous."

"There's just one more thing, Mrs. McCaffy, and I—I don't want you to think it strange of me to ask. You see Mr. Channing saved my life and I can't help but feel an—a mild interest in him. Is it true that he is just a desert tramp—a waster, as my uncle says, and depends on his gun and his reputation, as Brood intimated last night? What do you know about him?"

It was some time before the housekeeper replied. Then she said: "I don't know a thing about him except that he's good to look at, polite in his way, and, I believe, dangerous."

"I was wondering if—if maybe he had

an occupation—oh, Mrs. McCaffy, after what Jim told me about this outlaw, Mendicott——"

The girl stopped speaking suddenly when she saw the frightened look in the housekeeper's eyes as the latter put a finger to her lips in silent admonition.

"Come out an' I'll show you my flowers," said Mrs. McCaffey, rising.

They went out on the porch and walked slowly along the flower bed, the housekeeper pointing to the roses which she had nursed so carefully. As they rounded the corner of the porch toward the bunk house, a team and wagon came up the road. A small, swarthy-faced man was driving.

"It's Mendez bringing your trunk," said Mrs. McCaffy.

Mendez stopped the team in the space between the ranch house and the bunk house where Channing was just in the act of mounting his horse, preparatory to leaving. Hope saw Mrs. McCaffy's house girl, Juanita, standing near the kitchen door. She saw, too, the look that Mendez threw at Channing—a look that was brimming with hatred and malice. It seemed to her that emotion of some kind was continually asserting itself in the looks and actions of the people about her in this new land.

Then Channing came riding toward her.

Hope looked up at him as he swung his hat low in his free hand. Her look expressed cool surprise. Then she remembered that she probably owed her life to this man, and she smiled.

He leaned from the saddle so that his words carried to her ears alone. "If you should get into a mess, an' you probably will, an' need a friend, remember my name."

With that he was gone, galloping toward the barn where his burros, packed and ready for the trail, were waiting patiently.

Hope remained standing in the same spot where she had received his message, staring after him as he urged the burros into the foothill trail and disappeared from sight among the first growths of pine.

"If she should get into a mess"—what a way of putting it! And he had intimated that she would. Why should *she* get into a mess—into trouble? She tossed her head in resentment.

A cavalcade of horsemen came riding up the road to the ranch house. In the lead was a tall, blond, blue-eyed, boyish-looking individual, dressed in regulation cow-puncher regalia.

Nathan Farman met them and called to the leader.

"What's the matter, McDonald?"

The cow-puncher indicated the men behind him with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder. "Quitting," he said laconically. "You'll have to ask 'em what's wrong; I don't know."

He rode on toward the barn and dismounted while Farman confronted the half dozen men sitting their horses.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, addressing them as a whole.

"We want our time," said one of them, a burly man with bristling red whiskers.

Nathan Farman's face darkened. "You mean you're quitting me right at the start of the spring round-up?" he asked sternly.

"That's about the size of it," replied the other, while the men with him nodded their heads. "We're plumb through an' ready to go."

"It ain't done!" cried Farman. "Men don't quit at the start of a round-up on this range or anywhere else. You'll have to stick till we get the calves branded, anyway."

The spokesman for the men shook his head. "Can't do it. You didn't give our foreman any notice, an' we don't have to give you none. We're quitting, an' we're quitting here an' now."

"So *that's* it," roared the rancher. "This is Brood's work, eh? Goin' to

cripple me by leaving me shorthanded. I've got the right to fire a foreman on a second's notice, but that's no sign you men have the right to quit the same way. You go back an' brand those calves. McDonald—*McDonald!*" He turned to the tall young cow-puncher as the latter came striding toward him. "I make you foreman. See that these men go back to work."

The men muttered among themselves and turned dark looks on both Farman and McDonald.

"You heard what he said," McDonald told them. His eyes seemed to have changed a bit in color, and he pressed his lips together tightly.

"Don't make no difference," said the spokesman of the men. "You can't make us work. We're quittin' an' we want our pay."

"You'll get no pay from me till you've branded those calves!" shouted Farman. He seemed to notice Hope and Mrs. McCaffy for the first time.

"You women go into the house," he ordered peremptorily.

Nathan Farman's face was white with rage as he again confronted the men. "You heard what I said about the pay," he said grimly. "When you've branded the calves you can have your pay, an' what's more"—he bit his lip and frowned deeply—"I'll give each man a bonus of twenty dollars. It's highway robbery, but I've got to have the calves branded, for I'm taking a big bunch of stock into the forest reserve this summer, an' some might stray an' get mixed with other cattle. Now go to it. McDonald's the boss."

But the men sat their horses stolidly, looking at their spokesman. The latter sneered openly at the rancher and McDonald.

"We don't want your bonus," he said. "All we want is what's coming to us *now*. We're here to get it. Then we'll leave."

"If you leave me this way, you'll leave without it," was Farman's retort. The rancher was shaking with suppressed passion.

A jeering laugh came from one of the men. He hurled a curse at Farman.

McDonald sprang toward the man's horse, evidently intending to pull him from his saddle; but, as he did so, the spokesman for the belligerent party drew his gun. McDonald whirled and dropped to his left knee as a bullet sang past his head. His gun barked from his hip, and the spokesman lurched forward in the saddle.

Farman, unarmed, ran to the rear door of the ranch house as Jim Crossley appeared in the bunk-house door with a pistol in his good hand.

McDonald had covered the others. They put spurs to their horses and galloped for the north trail. McDonald ran for shelter as a fusillade of shots came from the five departing horsemen.

Nathan Farman confronted the two women in the kitchen.

"I'm afraid things are coming to a showdown," he said in a thick voice. Then he dropped into a chair.

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

NEW NATIONAL MONUMENT

ON the recommendation of Secretary Work, the President has set aside the "Craters of the Moon," a lava wonderland near Arco, Idaho, as a national monument. The area covers thirty-nine square miles, and it received its name because of the similarity of its surface with that of the moon, seen through a telescope.

Snow-blind Love

By

Edward T. Glynn

Author of "Snowed Under," etc.

SEATED at a rough-hewn table built against a wall of their dimly lighted cabin, Sam McGregor and his partner, Bill Kent, furtively eyed each other in a silence that was rapidly becoming embarrassing.

Outside a cold, icy wind rattled at the cabin door and swept on down the gulch, proclaiming the coming of winter again to that bleak, barren land.

Already the first of the early snows had fallen on the hard, frozen trails; already ice was forming on the rivers, locking up the Yukon for the long, dreary months ahead. Another week—two at the utmost—and the last boat of the season would be pulling out of Dawson, bearing back to the States all those eager to escape the rigors and the risks of that swiftly approaching siege of ice and snow.

To those who thus would quit the land before the siege began, the north wind now was sounding its final warning, the only quarter those concerned could expect the elements to give.

To McGregor and his partner there was a double meaning in this warning of the gale—a meaning that held them both to silent meditations as now they sat here in the cabin waiting for a showdown each knew was close at hand.

Two years ago the partners had ventured forth from the States on a hopeful quest of gold—a quest which had finally led them to their present isolated home far up there in the Yukon wilds.

That each had been spurred on in his efforts to wrest a fortune from the frozen earth by love for the selfsame, brown-haired, blue-eyed girl was a fact neither had tried to conceal. Theirs had been a friendly rivalry in which the girl herself had played a strictly impartial rôle. She had sent them away with a smile apiece and a whispered promise that her final choice would await their susbsequent return.

This spirit of strict impartiality had pervaded the few, cherished letters which the partners had received from the girl during the long, eventful months which followed. On their own part McGregor and Kent had played equally fair with one another, neither allowing their mutual love for the girl to interfere in any way with the object of their quest.

If the passage of time had instilled a feeling of jealousy in their hearts, neither had evinced the fact. To all outward appearances they had remained as good and loyal pals as ever. Together they had patiently bucked the frozen trails for month after month, sharing

alike the hardships and the perils of the game, until, at length, just when hope of reward all seemed gone, fortune had favored them with a passing smile and each had taken from their present claim three bulging pokes of gold.

With this sudden turn of better luck and with the coming of the second winter, mutual thoughts had impelled the partners to broach a subject long on the minds of each.

Mulling matters over in their cabin home the partners had agreed that the first man back to the States would undoubtedly have the best chance to win the hand and the heart of the girl for whom they had dared the perils of the North. As the fairest means of settling their problem—of deciding who the lucky man should be—they had elected to cut the cards, gamble their all in the game of love on a single cut apiece!

It was agreed that the winner should start from the gulch in time to catch the last boat out of Dawson, leaving the loser to hold or abandon the claim just as he saw fit. It was the opinion of both that the girl had been kept waiting long enough—they had not even heard from her now going on six months—and that it would be obviously unfair, all things considered, if both should return at once.

The man who went out could tell a plausible story of his partner's failure to return, a story agreeable to both, and thus they could solve for the girl a delicate problem which otherwise she could not hope to avoid.

To-night was the night they had chosen for the show-down—the gamble that was going to mean so much in the lives of each. As the fateful evening had advanced the pair had lapsed into a thoughtful silence which neither had now broken for the better part of an hour.

At length McGregor rose, shot a glance at a battered old clock on a shelf beside the table, and smiled a bit grimly down into his partner's tense-set face. It was a moment before he cleared his throat with a little cough and ventured speech.

"Well, Bill, ol'-timer," he said, slowly, "if you're ready, we'll cut." He paused a moment, smiling anew at something in his thoughts; then added, feelingly:

"Bill, no matter how she goes, no matter who wins, we're pards—pals—friends the same as ever?"

Kent met the other's gaze squarely. "Pards, Sam," he averred tensely. "Pards—always."

The glimmer of a smile still upon his lips, McGregor crossed the room, obtained a pack of cards from a crudely made cupboard and, returning to the table, deftly shuffled the deck before his partner's eyes. In silence he slid the pack to the center of the boards and searched the other's face again. As he spoke he stood in a spot where the sputtering light of the cabin's only lamp fell full upon his own drawn visage.

"Bill, you're game?" he asked softly. "Game to go through? It's fair, Bill—fair an' square? Win or lose?"

"Fair, Sam—fair enough," came the even response. "Yeah, Sam, I'm game—game as you. It's the only way an'—well, let's draw!"

Again the two briefly held each other's leveled gaze; then simultaneously dropped their eyes to the fateful cards. Again it was McGregor who broke the momentary silence.

"All right, Bill," he said tersely. "It's up to you, cut. There's the cards. You first, me last—like we planned."

Without reply Kent rose from his chair, let his eyes rest for a moment on the top of the pack; then lowered a trembling hand and cut deep in the deck. In the deadly silence which prevailed he peeled off the bottom card and laid it face up on the table. It was the queen of diamonds.

For the briefest space both men stared

in silence down at the upturned card. In the stillness of the room each could hear the heavy beating of the other's heart. It was Kent who first found words. When he spoke there was a bit of pity in his eyes—a smile of triumph on his lips.

"Sam, pard, I guess it's me," he said tensely. "That sure looks like the little girl herself. Pard—cut!"

The semblance of a smile crept back into McGregor's grim-looking face, but he made no answer. Slowly he reached for the deck, his hand hovering above the cards for a single, tragic moment. Then he cut close to the top and turned the cards face upward in the flickering circle of light.

The card on top—the one revealed—was the ace of hearts!

As one in a daze Kent stood for a moment staring dumbly down at the card on the boards; then he slumped back into his chair, a ghastly look upon his face. He tried to speak, but couldn't; then brushed a hand across his eyes and forced a smile.

"Pard, the ace is high—you win," he finally said. "I—I sure thought——"

McGregor stepped around the table and laid a hand gently on his partner's shoulder. "Bill, it was fair?" he asked, a bit huskily. "It——"

With seeming effort Kent pulled himself together and rose to his feet. Slowly he gripped McGregor's proffered hand. "Yeah, Sam, it was fair—fair as could be," he interrupted grimly. "Just luck, Sam, an' the luck was yours." He dropped the other's hand and looked away. "Sam, you don't need to say a word," he slowly went on, "I know how you feel. I know the way I'd feel myself. It's tough on me, of course—it's hell, Sam; but somebody had to win an', well, I'll be game, even though I've lost!"

McGregor swept the other with a half-pitying, half-wondering look and made as if to speak; then changed his mind, gathered up the cards and slowly crossed the room. He returned the deck to the cupboard, repaired to his bunk and sprawled out, absorbed in his own line of thoughts.

Until long after McGregor had turned in for the night Kent sat before the cabin stove, puffing away on his pipe and staring dreamily into the shadows which danced on the walls about him.

When, finally, he sought out his bunk, it was with a haggard, troubled look on his face and a hideous thought gnawing away at his dizzy, throbbing brain. In desperation he tried to oust the thought within him—banish it in sleep; but even this he could not do and, presently, to his growing horror, he found himself yielding slowly to its evil, subtle call. At length a smile came stealing back to his lips—a smile that wasn't good to see—and when, at last, he fell asleep it was to dream of a ghastly deed already settled in his mind.

When Kent awoke in the morning it was to find his partner gone. A roaring fire was blazing in the cabin stove, and the air was laden with the fragrant aroma of coffee, beans, and bacon. Obviously McGregor had left things shipshape for his partner before pulling out. A note on the table wished the latter luck and explained the reason of McGregor's early departure.

"I couldn't wait till you woke up, pard," McGregor had written. "I couldn't bear to see your face when I pulled freight. It makes me feel like a thief doing this myself, but, as we've both agreed, it's the best and only way.

"Write me if you quit the claim, and I'll write back when I hear from you. Good-by and good luck. Sam."

A curious smile playing across his mouth, Kent read the message through, then tore it up and tossed it in the stove. He walked to the door and stood for a space gazing down the snow-filled gulch. When he turned away his smile

had taken on a sinister twist, and he voiced his thoughts aloud.

"So it was the best an' only way, eh?" he said sneeringly. "Well, maybe it's the best, but it ain't the only—not by a jugful! Didn't ever think I'd come to a thing like this, but—well, danged if one little break of the cards is a-goin' to wreck my life from this day on!"

Seating himself at the table he ate the breakfast which had been prepared and left for him by his recently departed comrade. As he ate he pondered matters over in his mind and clinched again the nefarious scheme on which he had slept throughout the long night hours.

Go through with his scheme? Carry out his plan? Why not, he asked himself. Why should he let the mere little flip of a card—a piece of pasteboard—shatter his dream of years, ruin his life, his happiness, for keeps?

What good was the gold to him—the three, bulging, precious pokes now hidden there underneath his bunk—unless he could have the girl as well? Wasn't it for her that he had slaved, struggled, suffered untold hardships to get it?

True enough, McGregor had done the same, but, well, if McGregor had lost, what would McGregor have done? Would he have calmly sat back and let the other blithely issue forth and claim the prize?

Kent sneered aloud. "Yes, he would—like blazes!" he deigned. "He'd do just what I—what any other man—would do; just what me, I'm a-goin' to do as soon as the time is ripe!

"There ain't no risk, no comeback—nothin' to fear at all. I guess I won't have to worry none over what I've done. The girl won't ever know—ever find out—and me, well, I guess I can laugh it off—forget it all—once I've got the girl myself!"

Kent's smile broadened as he fell into a further contemplation of the scheme he had in mind. This was a scheme to head off McGregor on his way to Dawson, shoot him down from ambush, and toss his body into one of the many bottomless pits that mark the treacherous Yukon trails.

With the murder committed and the body concealed, Kent would add McGregor's pokes to his own share of gold and continue on to Dawson alone. Once there he would spin a story of his partner's fatal plunge through a snow bridge and his own vain efforts to drag the other out—a plausible tale which all would readily believe and clinch with the solemn shake of wise and knowing heads.

His crime and tracks thus carefully covered, Kent would take the last boat out of Dawson, return to the States, and spin a different sort of tale to the girl they had left behind—a tale that would leave her no other possible choice than to wed the man who had come back alone—Kent himself!

He chuckled aloud as he mentally visioned the look of scorn that would come into the girl's pretty face when he told her the story he had in mind—a story which would make even of McGregory's memory a thing of anathema in the girl's own thoughts.

Kent's plan was to head McGregor off by cutting across a range of hills that lay to the rear of their lonely gulch. It was a treacherous, dangerous crossing—one almost foolish to attempt—but Kent and his partner had made it before, and Kent was convinced, especially in view of his present evil ends, that he could safely make it again.

He decided he would give his partner a good day's start—it would take McGregor all of that to circle the hills by the regular route—then cut through the hills and meet McGregor coming down the trail on the opposite side.

Kent figured he could cross the hills in less than a day—with an early-morning start he could reach the other side by midafternoon—and catch McGregor coming by in the dusk of early night.

He would pot the latter from a place of ambush, frisk him of his pokes, and then dispose of the body. One shot would suffice—a bullet in the back; and McGregor wouldn't even know who had killed him! There would be little chance that any one would come along and interrupt his game; that any one would ever find the body once he had hurled it through the ice. There wasn't a chance in a thousand that McGregor would get a shot at him—turn the tables—spike his play for the nefarious trick it was.

"Nope, there isn't any risk—no danger whatever," he assured himself as he putttered about the cabin cleaning up the breakfast dishes. "Hardest part of all will be gettin' through them hills. Got to be careful bucking those trails. Snow ice—them dog-gone air holes. Reckon McGregor would have cut through them himself only for the risk.

"Wants to be sure he gets to Dawson safe an' sound," he said to himself. "Don't blame him none, considerin', but—well, here's hopin' I make them hills myself, an' make 'em just as pretty as I'm standin' here now!"

The rest of that day Kent spent packing up his kit for the trail and musing on the happier, carefree days ahead. That night, as he lay in his bunk, he smiled to himself and deigned a thought aloud.

"Now, if it wasn't for the girl, Sam an' I we might o' stayed on here until the spring at least," he mused. "Maybe Sam is right an' there's a lot o' gold here that we never chanced to strike. Maybe there's a hidden lode—like Sam always said—an' we'd——

"But what's the use? I'd rather have Molly than all the gold in the dog-gone Yukon! An' believe me, I'm a-goin' to get her!"

It was early morning when Kent, pack on his back, mushed down the gulch and hit out along the trail which led across the hills. It was a dull, gray morning with signs of snow in the air and a swiftly falling temperature. An icy wind, sweeping down from the Circle, cut into the pilgrim's face and brought to his lips a grim little smile.

"Dog-gone, but it's cold—twenty below, at least," he averred half aloud, half to himself. "Winter sure is comin' now—here already, I'd like to say. Two, three days of this an' the river will be froze up solid. Got to get to Dawson quick, no time to spare, or there won't be any boats to catch.

"Ought to settled this thing a week ago—dog-gone McGregor for puttin' it off; but—well, I guess I can make it an' get away clear afore it's too dang late. Only sixty miles to Dawson, ought to make it in a couple o' days; an' that boat, unless this cold snap lasts, it won't be sailin' for another week."

Absorbed in his thoughts Kent was soon bucking his way through the labyrinthian maze of the snow-clad hills; dodging chasms here, circling ice fields there, picking a cautious, precarious way along each foot of the treacherous, ever-twisting trail. Half a dozen times he slipped and fell on icy inclines, once he almost plunged to certain death over the side of a snow-capped cliff; but always he got up smiling and mocked at the fates which thus, it seemed, were striving in vain to balk his evil hand.

Hour after hour he plodded on, hurrying his steps when and where he could, eager only to reach his goal within the time that was vital to his plans. At length, in the early afternoon, he came plodding out through the last of the hills and started down a long, winding slope that led to the open trail beyond.

With a grin of triumph on his lips he paused for a moment on a lofty cliff and through closely squinted eyes surveyed the great expanse of snow which lay before him. As far as he could see there was no sign of moving life—not a speck of any kind; nothing but

snow and ice and sky—a great, white, empty void as grim and silent as the Land of Death itself!

"Well, I beat him to it all right," he exulted as he started down again. "Must be an hour or two ahead of time—maybe more. Don't expect he'll be along till around about dusk. Reckon he's about crossin' them ice fields back in the basin right about now.

"Guess I'd better get down to the trail, find a clump o' trees, an'——"

He broke off with a startled cry as one of his legs slipped from under him and his body went skidding into space. Frantically he flung out his hands and gripped the edge of the trail. For the space of a single moment he contrived to hang on; then the ice gave way and he hurtled ten feet downward upon a ledge of rocks.

With a groan of pain he presently tried to straighten up and stand on his legs. Immediately one gave way and he crumpled to the floor of the ledge again. In panic he sat for a moment rubbing the injured foot; then glanced above and cursed his plight aloud.

"Sprained or busted—one leg crippled an' I can't get out," he groaned. "Ten feet down, can't stand up, an'—why did I ever do it? Why did I ever come? Why didn't I play it square—stand by the bargain—play it square like McGregor did himself!

"He won the cut; he didn't cheat! It was fair all around—fair as could be; an'—it serves me right! I've been a dog, a yellow cur! I've——"

He paused, groaning anew at the torture of his twisted, swollen leg; then, desperation showing in his face, he tried to rise again.

"I can't stay here!" he whimpered. "I can't stay here an' die like this—like a rat in a trap! I must get out—crawl out some way—got to get out! I've got to get down to the trail, see McGregor, tell him all—and he can shoot me if he likes, but this——"

He glanced toward a bottomless pit into which his rifle had fallen as he plunged from the trail, and he shuddered at something in his thoughts. With a mighty effort he dragged himself to his feet, gripped the wall of the cliff for support, and sighed in evident relief as his eyes fell upon a little gap in the ledge which offered an exit from his ghastly trap.

A cold perspiration forming on his brow, he laboriously wormed himself up through this opening in the wall of the cliff, fearful every moment that his hands would slip on the icy surface; then, once back on the trail, he slowly started downward, crawling on his hands and knees, his crippled, swollen leg dragging limply as he went.

Half an hour later he reached the foot of the hill and, half numb with the cold, half unconscious from the pain of his injured foot, crawled to the shelter of a little clump of stunted pines and sat up with his back against a tree.

"If Sam would only come, get here before I freeze," he shortly fell to musing, "maybe I'd come out safe. Ol' Jim Spencer, the mailman, has a cabin off there—up along that creek. Can't be more'n six miles off. Couldn't make it myself, but Sam could help me there, leave me with Jim, then hustle on alone.

"I'll tell Sam all, give him my gold—square it up the best I can. I'll tell him what a dog I am, tell him——" He paused a moment, smiled queerly, then went on: "I'll write to Molly myself. Tell her what I done, what a skunk I proved to be. I'll make it sure for Sam, fix it so she can't turn him down; I'll——"

The smile slowly faded from his lips and a look of mingled joy and relief overspread his face as something caught his gaze far out across the snow. It was a slowly moving speck—a man—a mere black dot on a vast sea of white. With straining eyes Kent watched it for another long moment; then cried

aloud as he saw it veer to the right and head his way.

"It's Sam—Sam!" he exclaimed, forgetful for a moment of his injured leg. "Good, ol' Sam, an' he's right on time. To think I meant to kill a pard like him—like Sam! To think—I feel like a skunk to even think I've got to ask a guy like him—white as him—to help me out of a hole like this!"

Cursing himself again Kent half rose to his feet and strained his eyes out across the snow toward the lowly approaching man. A puzzled look soon began to overspread his face and a troubled frown appeared on his brow. There was something strange in the manner of the other's progress—a weaving, drunken gait which filled the watching Kent with a sudden apprehension.

After a space the latter struggled to his feet and started limping toward the trail. Fresh panic now had seized upon him and brought back to his face a look of utter horror.

"It's Sam all right, Sam sure enough, but he's blind, snow blind, an' can't see his way!" he cried, aghast. "If only I could reach him, call him, help him! If I only had my rifle—something he could hear! I've got to help him! Got to reach him some way, crawl if I can! It's up to me to save us both. I've got to help Sam so he can help me."

In desperation Kent dropped to his knees and started crawling forward, all heedless to the racking pain of his limp and dragging leg. Five, ten, fifteen yards, he scrambled on; then paused, exhausted, and flopped face down in the snow.

After a moment he struggled back to his knees again and crawled ahead some more. As he did he raised his voice in lusty shouts; twice he tried to stand on his feet, but each time he sank to the ground again, groaning aloud in the fearful pain which racked his bruised and numbing body.

Fifty, a hundred, two hundred yards he dragged himself along, stopping now and then to shout, laughing hysterically when he glimpsed the speck again.

After what seemed to him an æon of time he saw McGregor come groping blindly out from behind an intervening clump of pines less than a hundred yards away. As he did he raised a final cry of triumph and joyously scrambled forward as McGregor paused and gave an answering shout.

Two minutes later and McGregor was kneeling in the snow at his partner's side. For a moment he stared unseeingly about; then laughed aloud in the joy of his own delivery.

"Bill, Bill—pard—thank Heaven you're here!" he finally exclaimed. "How you came I don't know—don't care. It must be Providence, Bill, but no matter. If you hadn't come——" He paused a moment, the laugh now gone from his mouth, and shuddered at a vision that arose in his mind.

"Bill, I'm blind, blind as a bat. First time it ever got me—the snow—and it sure is hell when it does! Started goin' blind back there comin' through them ice fields. Thought I could make it safe as far as Spencer's—that ol' mail runner; but they didn't last, Bill, my eyes, an'——"

Kent grimaced at a sudden twitching of his leg and laid a hand on McGregor's arm. A wan smile came to his lips as he spoke.

"Yeah, Sam, maybe it's Providence I'm here at that," he cut in grimly, "but whether or not I can help you—well, that depends. Sam I reckons it's up to the both of us to help each other!"

He waited a moment, his smile undergoing a queer little twist at something in the puzzled look on McGregor's face; then went on: "Sam, I couldn't stay in the cabin after you left—not alone. So I closed it up, cut across the hills, and planned to head you off. I—I thought I'd see you down to Dawson, an'——"

He winced again, rubbed his foot, then added abruptly: "Sam, I've sprained a leg—took a tumble comin' through the hills. Can't walk a step, had to crawl——"

McGregor gave vent to a startled cry. "Sprained a leg—can't walk," he gasped out. "You crippled an' me blind! Bill—pard——"

Kent intercepted with a forced little laugh. "Yeah, that's it, Sam, blind an' crippled—two ol' pards in a tough little box," he averred slowly. "But listen, Sam! Buck up! I've got a scheme, a hunch, a little idea that maybe saves our bacon. You got legs an' I got eyes. Ol' Jim Spencer's cabin ain't so far away—not more'n five, six miles. If you could pack me on your back, if I can stand the gaff an' not go swoonin' on the trail, maybe——"

A light of sudden comprehension broke across McGregor's face and he rose to his feet. Quickly he loosened his shoulder pack and let it fall to the ground. A smile of grim determination on his lips, he then groped down and gave a helping hand to the wan-faced Kent.

"All right, Bill—I got you. Climb aboard. Here, I'll help you. Cling on tight an' point the way. Dog-gone me, I'll make that shack or bust my own legs tryin'!

"All set, Bill? Nice an' comfy? Dang it, pard, you ain't so heavy. Carried bigger packs than you before. All set? All ready? Let's go!"

Two hours later old Jim Spencer, standing in the doorway of his cabin, first blinked in growing wonderment, then gasped a little cry of frank surprise at the sight of Sam McGregor plodding up the creek—weaving from side to side—the limp and semiconscious form of Bill Kent half clinging to his back, half dragging in the snow.

"Look what's comin'!" cried the ancient, and bolted from the cabin. "Sam McGregor, blind as a bat, an' Billy Kent—what a team—what a pair—what a coupla pardners them boys are!"

It was late the next afternoon when Sam McGregor stirred from a bunk in Jim Spencer's cabin. Though his eyes were still half closed and smarting he could see across the room and make his way about.

A curious smile appearing on his mouth, he sat for a space on the edge of the bunk staring at the form of Bill Kent still fast asleep on another bunk a few feet away. He observed that Kent's injured leg was now encased in a bandage and carefully placed on an improvised prop.

Old Jim Spencer was nowhere in sight, but very plainly he had done all possible for the comfort of his guests before proceeding on his way. A good fire was blazing in the stove, food was on the table, and places set for two.

Slowly Sam rose, crossed the room, and stood for a moment staring thoughtfully out across the wilderness of white which met his gaze on every side.

"Two pards—Bill an' me," he mused half aloud, "two ol' pards—one little girl—an'——"

He stopped, blinked, and smiled again. His gaze had fallen on a piece of paper, a note, which lay atop one of the tin plates on the table. He picked it up, opened it, and slowly read it through. It was a note from old Jim Spencer, and it said:

"Guess you boys are all right now, and so I'll mush along. Am runnin' mail up to Candle City an' won't be back for a week. You boys stay here as long as you like and make yourselves to home.

"That leg of Bill's ain't so bad, and he can hobble around in a day or so. Guess them eyes of Sam's ain't so bad either, an' reckon he can see by now. Just a litle snow blindness an' nothin' serious at all. I've seen a lot o' cases an' Sam's is just a touch.

"Had a letter for each one of you boys an' you'll find 'em in the table drawer. Last boat has gone out of Dawson—river froze up three days ago—so if you boys was figgerin' to make it you might as well turn back. Jim."

Folding up the note Sam stepped to the drawer, opened it, and fished out the letters. Something about them brought a new little twist to his smile. They were both alike in size and shape; two letters from the girl back home.

A moment Sam stood staring down at the missives in his hand, the smile on his lips slowly fading out; then, attracted by a stir on the bunk across the room, he glanced around to see Kent slowly sitting up.

A moment the pair held each other's gaze; then McGregor stepped to the bunk and dropped one of the letters into his partner's lap.

"Two letters, Bill, both from her—Molly," he said. "One for you and one for me. I—I reckon I can guess what both of 'em say. They're cards, Bill, cards, an'——"

He opened his own, winced a bit at what he read, and then shot a hasty, furtive glance into the face of the man on the bunk. He winced again and then half smiled at the look of open pity which Kent presently turned his way.

It was Kent who broke the momentary silence. As he spoke the latter slowly laid aside his own opened mail—a small, neat engagement card which linked the name of Molly Standish to a man whom neither of the partners knew.

"Sam, pard, I'm sorry," said Kent, a wealth of feeling in his tones. "Sorry, Sam, dog-gone sorry, an' all for you. But we might of known this," he hurried on. "We might have known a girl like her—like Molly—couldn't wait. Two years is a long time, Sam—two years—an' a woman—well, a woman is a woman!"

Again he briefly paused; then continued: "Sam, we been a pair of fools—two dog-gone lunkheads, an' me—well, I guess I've been the worst. Sam, I ain't nothin' but a cur, a sneakin', yellow dog, an' now I'll tell you why! Yesterday when I cut across them hills I was——"

McGregor held out a hand and cracked a faint, quizzical smile. "Yes, Bill, I know—you don't have to tell me nothin' here at all," he cut in easily enough. "Last night when I was fetchin' you in—well, twice you fainted on the trail an' I had to pound the life back into your hide. You said a-plenty when you was comin' to, spit out the whole darn story, an' didn't spare yourself at all!

"Bill, pard," and his voice abruptly lowered and a new look flashed across his tense, drawn face, "I'm glad you didn't do it—kill me like you meant; but even if you had—well, Bill, I guess you'd only evened up the score, squared accounts, done for me in the same dirty way that I myself had tried to do for you!

"Bill, pard—listen," and his voice dropped again and one of his hands fell gently on the shoulder of his puzzled, staring partner, "that ace—the other night—Bill, it wasn't in the pack at all! I had it palmed in my hand all the time! I didn't want to lose, couldn't bear to lose; Bill, I guess I'm a bigger cur than you, an' one what's dog-gone lucky he didn't get what a cur deserves!"

He waited another moment or so; then held out a hand for the other to grasp.

"Bill, that's the first time, the only time, I ever cheated in all my life. It's the last time I'll ever cheat again. It's the only game I never played square—the only time I didn't shoot straight.

"Bill, you're right! We've been a pair of fools—two big lunkheads, a couple of boobs. But now we've found it out, squared accounts, saved each

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other's lives, Bill, let's forgive an' forget! Bill, here's my hand. Let's shake. Let's still be pards!"

Slowly Kent gripped the other's proffered paw; in silence each briefly looked into the other's eyes. Then Kent smiled and gave a little cough.

"Yes, Sam, pards it is—an' that forever," he said fervently. "Sam, soon's we're able, let's go back to the gulch, to the Molly O—home! Sam, I reckon you're right. I reckon we're camped on a hidden lode—a mother vein, an' we'll hit some real gold yet!"

WASHINGTON WATER POWER

AN important contribution to the study of the resources of the State of Washington and the means of future development has recently been made by natural scientists of the State University, who heretofore have given to the public the benefit of their researches as to clays and ceramics, forestry and lumbering, hydraulics, coal mining, and the fisheries.

The latest contribution is a survey of the hydroelectric power of the State, made by Doctor Magnusson. He recommends the establishment of a permanent State water-power commission for the development of all the available power resources of the State, as a unified and interwoven power system.

He places Washington's available maximum hydroelectric development at 16.04 per cent of the total maximum for the entire United States. This estimate, he says, is conservative, and may be increased by fifty per cent in actual practice. Present power development in Washington amounts to but 5.02 per cent of the available maximum. He makes no specific recommendation for or against public ownership.

THE NEW CODY MONUMENT

THE town of Cody, Wyoming, unveiled on July 4, a bronze statue to the famous Indian fighter, Colonel William Cody, better known as Buffalo Bill. The statue, which is the work of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, was first exhibited in New York, before it was sent west and placed near the entrance of the city which was named after the great frontiersman.

In connection with the celebration the mayor of Cody, R. C. Trueblood, began the compilation of incidents and anecdotes relating to the life of Colonel Cody. His plan includes the collection of signatures of Buffalo Bill's friends into a big book, to be known as "The Register of Colonel W. F. Cody's Friends." Additional volumes will contain incidents in his life. The register of friends is expected to contain the names of all high officials of the United States government as well as those of several ruling monarchs of Europe, with several of whom Cody was intimately associated. It is said that Cody had more friends than any man living in his time. The Cody archives are expected to furnish to posterity intimate glimpses of life in the early West.

The Rustlers of Rabbit Butte

By James Roberts

CHAPTER I.

A MAN OF WORDS.

MAN and horse wore an air of weariness as they broke through the trees along the river and struck west into a sea of gray bunch grass. The man pulled down the brim of his hat against the bright rays of the early morning sun and, twisting in the saddle, scanned the prairie to eastward. It was bare and endless. In the north a series of low buttes showed like pin points beyond a vast waste of plain. He looked toward the blue mountains in the west and shook out the bridle reins.

The horse broke into a lope. It was a homely beast—tall, bony, long necked, rather peaked in the face and muzzle—a cross between a dun and a sorrel. It was such a horse as a self-respecting cow-puncher would shoot at first sight rather than turn in with his string. But the animal's appearance belied its performance, for, though obviously ridden through the night, the gelding carried on tirelessly across the bunch grass.

The rider, by crude comparison, presented a different aspect. He was tall, slim but well-muscled, as his movements attested; gray-eyed, firm-lipped, square of chin, with a clean skin stung a dull bronze by wind and sun. He might have been twenty-five or thirty-five; when his eyes twinkled, as they did by spells for no apparent reason, he appeared to be the former age; when he squinted in long-distance gaze he seemed the latter.

His hat, shirt, boots, and chaps displayed the unmistakable signs of travel; but the butt of the gun in the holster at his right side was free of dust as though it had been fondled often in the course of the long ride.

As they left the river behind, the rider's interest in the country increased. He grunted in satisfaction when he saw, finally, a herd of cattle grazing on the open range to northward. He pushed back his hat and swung his right foot free of the stirrup—an infallible sign of contentment on the part of a rider—when he descried a clump of willows about a tall, stately cottonwood straight ahead in the west.

"Hoss, prick up your ears," he said aloud; "where there's willows an' a tree that a way ahead there, there's a spring. An' where there's a spring there's bound to be cattle close. An' where there's cattle, there's liable to be habitations. We see the spring an' the stock, an' I reckon we're on the right track, hoss. Put 'em down a little faster—let's slope!"

The horse increased its pace as if it understood its master's logic. In half an hour they reached the willows and the tree and found a deep, natural spring, or slough, with banks trodden by cattle and horses.

The horse refused to drink, for it had been watered at the river, and the man sat his saddle and looked about him. His interest centered on the trunk of the tall cottonwood. A square of white gleamed against the gray bark. He dismounted, stepped to the tree, stood with legs braced well apart, his hands on his hips, and read a printed notice.

REWARD!

For the capture of LONG PETE, dead or alive, two thousand dollars; For any of his gang, five hundred dollars each; For the outfit, five thousand dollars will be paid in cash.

JAMES LYNCH, Banker.
ED. FURNESS, Sheriff.
Rangeview, Rabbit Butte County.

The rider read the notice through twice, stepped away from the tree and squinted at it.

"That's what I call a right generous, easy-to-understand offer," he said in a hearty voice. "Two thousand for the old sport himself, five hundred for any of his playmates, or five thousand for corrallin' the bunch. Everything there except their descriptions an' what they're wanted for!"

He grinned and went back to his horse. He swung into the saddle and leaned thoughtfully on the horn.

"Now, hoss, the way to make money on a deal like that would be to capture or kill Long Pete's cohorts one by one, collectin' five hundred a head, an' leaving the old boy till the last for a cleanup of two thousand. If he had twenty men with him, let's see, that would be——"

"Throw 'em up—*way up!*" The command came from behind, and the rider raised his hands above his head.

"All right, stranger," he sang out, "but it's shore an ignominious proceedin' any way you look at it, an'——"

"Shut up an' keep 'em up there," came the order as a man walked from the screen of willows into sight near the head of the horse. He was tall and spare, black-eyed, with a long nose and a bristly mustache; swarthy of skin thin-lipped, scowling. He wore town clothes, riding boots and a derby—a black derby hat. He covered the man on the horse with a forty-five.

"What do you think of that notice?" he asked sharply.

"I was just thinkin' to myself that it's one of the plainest notices I ever saw," was the drawling reply. "There can't be any mistake about the amounts—they're all set out clear an' exact. I reckon Long Pete himself couldn't kick at that notice—'specially since it don't tell what he looks like."

"What's your name?"

"Brent—Steve Brent. I'm actually givin' you my real name, sheriff."

The other man's eyes widened a bit. "What makes you think I'm a sheriff?" he inquired in a tone of suspicious surprise.

"I heard south of here that there was a tough sheriff up here that wore one of them derbies," was the cheerful rejoinder. "I was right curious to meet you, sheriff, but I didn't figure I'd meet you just when I needed to meet somebody who could wise me up as to the proper direction to take to get to town."

The other's gun hand wavered ever so little. "I wear a derby hat because I like 'em," he said in a voice that suggested he might be pleased because of Brent's reference to him as being tough; "but I'm not out here to give directions to strangers that's travelin' light an' far. You've been ridin' quite a piece, I take it."

"You're Ed Furness, then, for shore?" asked Brent.

"Yes, I'm Ed Furness," said the other, his scowl deepening. "I don't know why I should be tellin' you."

"Well, Ed, it's this way"—Brent's tone was earnest—"I *have* rode quite a piece, an' my hoss an' me are lookin' for something in the way of a town

where we can put up an' hang on the nose bag an' rest a spell, an'——"

"Your horse looks as though he needed a powerful lot of both them things you mentioned," the sheriff broke in with a faint smile. "Don't know if he'd make it to Rangeview or not."

"How far is it, Ed?"

"Now don't lay down too heavy on that Ed stuff," said the sheriff tartly. "You ain't acquainted with me much yet. But you're liable to be if you can't give a good account of yourself."

"Ain't you forgettin' something, sheriff?"

"Not as I know of an' I don't intend to, if I can help it."

"I still got my hands up, sheriff, an' I'm pretty tired."

The sheriff's gun stiffened in his hand to a full bead on Brent's heart. "You can put your left hand down. Just keep the other up a minute." He stepped around the horse to Brent's right and drew the latter's weapon from its holster. "You can ease your right now."

"Say, sheriff," said Brent in a confidential tone that quickened the official's ear, "I just saved your life!"

"Go ahead, I'm ready for it—I'll bite," said Furness. "But I know what you're going to say. You're going to tell me that you could have pulled your gun an' plugged me while I was walkin' aroun' the horse."

Brent leaned back in his saddle with a look of admiration on his face.

"S'help me, sheriff, that was just what I was goin' to say. I didn't think you'd comprehend what I was gettin' at so quick."

"You spill a lot of big words," the sheriff observed.

"I've got twenty of 'em," Brent confessed; "an' even twenty. I've all but got 'em numbered. I had a schoolmarm down on the Musselshell once an' she taught 'em to me. That word *comprehend* was the second one she taught me—so it's number two."

"It won't do you any good to spill 'em on me," scowled the sheriff.

"I sling 'em naturally," said Brent with an easy gesture. "But I wasn't kiddin' about bein' able to draw when you stepped past that hoss' head. I meant that!"

His quick gaze met the sheriff's—cool and convincing. Ed Furness showed by his manner that he was puzzled. "What's your business up here?" he asked finally.

"I come up here for a change of range, sheriff." Brent leaned on his saddle horn. "I've worked cows, an' I've flirted with the blue checks. But I've never sneered at the white ones. I'm a restless spirit. I figured I'd come up in this north country an' see what it looked like an' maybe hook on to a job somewheres. I was goin' on into the first town I saw, if my hoss could make it. But the first thing I see is a reward notice, an' the second is a sheriff. I reckon this country is plumb onfriendly."

The sheriff's scowl returned. "You want to go to Rangeview?"

"If that's the nearest town, that's where I want to go."

"It's the only town within a hundred miles or so," said the sheriff, half to himself; "an' I guess I could get you any time I wanted you. I been watching this spring, but I been lookin' for somebody from the north. You don't look so bad to me, even if you *can* sling a gun like you say. Maybe you could have done what you said you could when I stepped aroun' the horse, but I dunno. I expected you to *try* it."

Steve Brent's teeth flashed white against his tan in a broad smile. "Ed, I reckon you're the goods. But I didn't intend to try it. That notice don't bother me none. It's the first time I ever heard of Long Pete or his gang. You can look in my slicker pack behind

on the saddle an' you won't find nary a thing but a spare shirt or two, some socks, a few sacks of tobacco, an' some knickknacks I carry aroun' for—sentimental reasons. That's another of my words, sheriff. But if you want to take me in, let's start, for I'm hungrier than a steer in February."

Sheriff Furness looked at him steadily for a full minute. Then he looked at the horse, and his gaze changed to one of pity. He pointed west with his gun.

"Rangeview's eleven miles straight as a string in that direction," he said slowly. "You can go on in, an' I'll be following you shortly. When I come in I'll give you your gun—providin' you haven't attracted too much unfavorable attention. You better walk an' lead your horse. You're liable to bust him down."

"Thanks, sheriff," said Brent, grinning, "but I can't walk. I'm too—I'm too—ongainly."

He touched his mount lightly with his spurs and as he started he called back: "Don't forget about the gun, sheriff; I feel totally ondressed!"

He rode through the willows and out into the sea of bunch grass.

"Talked him out of it, hoss," he sang in a low, vibrant voice. "Let's beat it for the oat bin."

His mount broke into a swinging lope, and they headed straight for town.

CHAPTER II.

A FORCED LOAN.

IT was barely nine o'clock when Steve Brent rode jauntily into Rangeview; that is, Brent bore himself in a jaunty manner, but his horse walked slowly, with hanging head, seemingly on the point of collapse.

Rangeview was a typical old cow town. The buildings on either side of its short main street were sadly weather-beaten, with false fronts suggesting a second story that didn't exist, and which had long since lost the brilliancy of their illusion through the cracking and peeling of paint. The street was nothing but a road, and filled with dust. The hitching rails were grooved where ropes and reins had worn into the wood. The glass in the windows was a dull opaque, almost impervious to light. It was a drab perspective save for the green of the cottonwoods, which grew in profusion, and a number of freshly painted signs left as blazes on the trail of some itinerant artist.

Brent was riding slowly along the street, looking for the livery stable where he could put up his horse, when he heard a hail. He saw a man approaching from in front of one of the more pretentious buildings. He was a portly man, displaying an ample expanse of vest and watch chain, red-faced, with heavy jowls, brown of eye with a gray mustache and bushy gray brows. He wore a gray suit, a white collar with string tie, and a stockman's hat of very light tan.

He stopped close to Brent and looked up at him, throwing his head well back and hooking his thumbs in the armholes of his vest.

"Stranger here?" he asked in a heavy voice.

Brent lifted his right foot from the stirrup and leaned with his left forearm on the horn. He regarded his interrogator gravely. "Do you live here?" he asked pleasantly.

The bushy, gray brows came together in a frown. "You'll do better to answer questions instead of ask 'em, young man, coming in here on a spent horse an' the dust of three counties on your shirt. We're not partial to strangers here these days."

"Shucks! I expect I'm onlucky that a way," said Brent. "Always askin' questions. Where's the livery barn?"

The other glared at him for a few moments and then his gaze roved over Brent's mount. "You're not going to

the expense of puttin' that horse in a barn to die, are you? Haw, haw! Say, young fellow, are you lookin' for a job?"

"I'm lookin' for the livery barn," said Brent easily; "an' I don't reckon this town is so big but what I'll find it."

"You watch your knitting or you may find this town *too* big," said the large man with a scowl. "I see you're not packing a gun. Well, that's a peaceful sign, unless somebody took it away from you. Do you know anything about cows?"

"My friend," said Brent slowly, "it pains me to think what I've forgotten about cows—an' I've got a powerful good memory."

"Meaning you're a top hand?" asked the other with fresh interest. "If you *are*, I'll give you a job."

"Well, now, that's right kind of you," Brent drawled out. "I had thought some of goin' to work up here, but I figured it would take me a day or two to pick my outfit. I'm particular that a way. There's outfits couldn't hire me at any price, an' there's outfits I'd almost work for for nothing. I'm peculiar that a way. I've got to be in good company."

"I have the largest outfit in this country," boasted the big man. "I own the Rabbit Foot."

"Say, this country sort of runs to rabbits, don't it?" asked Brent with an innocent expression on his face. "This is Rabbit Butte County, an' yours is the Rabbit Foot outfit. I reckon it ought to be lucky, eh?"

The other appeared undecided as to whether this was intended as a joke or not. He looked Brent over appraisingly. "I'll give you fifty dollars a month to start," he said, nodding his head and smiling affably. "That's five dollars a month more than the usual starting wages. You can go out this afternoon."

Brent scratched his head and appeared bewildered. "That's all right, I know you're surprised," said the large man; "but I guess I can spot a cow hand when I see him, an' I'm banking on my judgment in your case."

"I'm tryin' to figure out what I'd ever do with that extra five dollars a month," Brent explained.

"You're smart, that's the trouble with you. Well, listen to me, I'm James Lynch, owner of the Rabbit Foot and that bank over there. I'm a good man to work for, I am. You can't do better up here."

"So you're James Lynch," said Brent, leaning down for a closer view of the other's face. "Well, Jim, I read your notice an' I met Ed back there a piece. What you got against Long Pete?"

Lynch's jaw dropped for an instant. "You mean Ed Furness, the sheriff? Don't you know who Long Pete is?"

"Yes an' no, that answers both of 'em," replied Brent.

"Long Pete's the worst rustler that ever worked in here," said Lynch, his face darkening. "I'd pay those rewards myself if I could get him and his gang. I'll pay half of 'em, anyway. But he'll be hard to catch, for we don't know what he looks like. Where'd you say you saw Ed Furness?"

"Back by the big spring," Brent answered with a yawn. "I reckon he's figurin' on Long Pete showin' up there to get a drink. Well, Jim, I got to put my hoss up an' get a bite an' a few winks of sleep. So long."

"Wait a minute!" Lynch commanded. "Are you going to take that job an' do business with me?"

"I don't guess I want your job, but I might want to do business with you at your bank," said Brent. "I might want to borrow some money if you've got any to lend."

"You can borrow money from me any day if you've got any security," said Lynch in a sneering tone. "If you want to go to work for me and

are broke, I'll advance you a month's wages."

"I might give you my hoss for security," said Brant, smiling.

"Your horse! Haw, haw, haw! Well, young fellow, in the first place that ain't a horse, but whatever it is I couldn't let you have more'n five hundred on it. Haw, haw, haw!"

The banker wiped his eyes as though his mirth was real instead of simulated.

"I reckon that would be enough," said Brent with a grim smile. "So long."

"You better think over that job, if you're going to hang around *here,*" Lynch called after him as he rode down the street.

Brent found the barn at the farther end of the street and put up his horse, giving explicit directions as to the animal's care and waiting to see that they were carried out. Then he went to the hotel, ate breakfast, and retired to a room, requesting that he be called in six hours.

It was half-past three in the afternoon when he was wakened. He went at once to the barn.

"Pretty well done up," said the barn man, referring to Brent's horse.

"I reckon he needs rest," Brent admitted. "I plan on leavin' him here a spell. Don't forget his name is Hunchy, an' that my name is Brent—Steve Brent. That's Steve Brent's hoss, Hunchy."

"I ain't the forgettin' kind," answered the barn man, grinning.

A third man came swaggering into the barn. He was a large, swarthy man, dressed in leather chaps, mackinaw shirt, riding boots sadly in need of cleaning, and wore a huge, wide-brimmed hat, pushed far back on his head.

"Why don't you buy a *real* horse?" he blustered out.

"What makes you think I want to buy a hoss?" Brent asked mildly.

"Why, you ain't got none," said the other with a loud laugh. "I seen what you brought in." The whole barn echoed with his roaring laugh as he nudged the barn man.

"You got a hoss to sell?" Brent put the question quietly.

"Sure. I'll sell any horse I've got if I can get enough for him." The man looked Brent over with a deprecating grin. "C'mon an' look at this one."

He led the way to a corral at the rear of the barn, pointed out a beautiful black gelding fully fourteen hands high. Every line of the animal suggested speed and endurance. He paced about the corral with impatience. He had a good eye, and Brent veiled his gaze of admiration. Here was a horse in a thousand for spirit.

"There y'are," said the dark-faced man. "You can have that horse for five hundred."

"How soon do I have to pay the money?" asked Brent almost in a whisper.

"Oh, you ain't got it, eh? I thought so. Goin' out to rustle it? I'll give you till six o'clock. Hear that, Jake?" The big man turned to the barn man. "If he brings in five hundred by six o'clock, sell him the horse. But remember, I'm startin' back for the ranch 'bout six one." He left the barn chuckling.

The barn man, Jake, smiled. "He's worth it, Brent. But it's too much to pay for a horse in this country. Your horse will be all right in another day. He's got more in him than most of 'em think."

Brent nodded. "Who was that fellow?" he asked.

"That's Bill Lawton, foreman out at the Rabbit Foot."

Brent grew thoughtful. "Put my saddle an' bridle on that hoss," he said after a time. "If I ain't back for him by six you can take it off an' nobody'll be any wiser. If I come back an' hand you five hundred, well—you know the deal."

Brent left the barn and walked up

the street. Almost the first man he met was Sheriff Ed Furness. The sheriff greeted him almost cordially.

"Step in here to the justice's office," he invited.

They entered a little, one-story building and the sheriff opened a drawer of the desk in the center of the front room. He took out Brent's gun and handed it to him.

"You said your name was Brent? All right. Brent, if I was you I'd go over to Lynch's bank and do business with him." There was a veiled command in the sheriff's tone.

"Maybe you're right, Ed," drawled out Brent. "It seems right nice to have so many folks 'round here interested in a wanderin' cow hand. I may do that very little thing."

He left the sheriff with a queer smile and proceeded across the street and back down to the State bank of Rangeview. When he entered he saw a small cage in the front of the room and a private room in the rear. The door to the private room in the rear was open, and it was unoccupied. But there was a man in the cage, evidently a clerk. Lynch was not in sight. Brent stepped to the window of the cage over which appeared the word *cashier* in brass letters.

"Let me have a note blank, please," he said in a soft voice.

"For yourself?" asked the clerk, staring at Brent through thick lenses.

"Yes," replied Brent in a pur.

"Have you an account here?" asked the clerk politely. It was evident he did not know all the bank's customers and was inclined to treat Brent with respect.

"No, I have no account." Brent frowned. "An' I haven't much time."

"It's against the rules," said the clerk. "I——"

"Can anybody take one of your note blanks out an' get money on it?" asked Brent.

"No—of course not." The clerk hesitated.

"Then hand one over," Brent commanded. "Jim Lynch an' I have already had some talk about this."

At mention of the banker's name, the clerk readily complied with the request and pushed a note form through under the wire network.

Brent took the blank, stepped to the wall desk, and quickly filled it out. He returned to the window and slipped it through.

"Give me the money on that," he said briskly.

The clerk looked at the note and smiled uneasily. "I can't give you five hundred on this. I don't know about the security, and Mr. Lynch has to approve all loans."

"The security is my hoss, Hunchy," said Brent. "He's in the barn below here. Jim Lynch told me just this mornin' that he couldn't loan more'n five hundred on my hoss, an' that's all I'm askin'."

"But——"

The one word was all the clerk was able to speak. There was a quick movement of Brent's right hand and forearm and the bank employee found himself staring into the black bore of a six-shooter. His face went white.

"In fair-sized bills—*an' quick!*" said Brent sharply.

The clerk looked for an instant into Brent's eyes. His hands trembled as he counted out the money.

"Now beat it back into that room behind there," Brent ordered, stuffing the bills in his hat and putting the hat back on his head. "I told you once I didn't have much time. *Do you think I'm foolin'?*"

The clerk backed toward the rear room with Brent walking along on the outside of the cage, keeping him covered. At the farther end of the cage was a door.

"Unlatch it!" Brent snapped out.

The clerk complied and Brent entered the cage. In a few moments he had locked the clerk in a closet off the rear room. Then he hurried out of the building and walked rapidly to the barn. He thrust the bills into Jake's hands.

"Count 'em," he said with an easy smile; "an' I'll be on my way."

He went out to the corral and found the big black saddled and bridled. He led him out as the barn man approached. "All here," said Jake, "but——"

"So long," sang Brent as he swung into the saddle. "Give my regards to Jim an' Ed an' Bill Lawton, an' take good care of Hunchy."

With that he tickled the black with his spurs and swept out under the trees to the open prairie. The big black snorted, tossed his head, and struck west at a ringing gallop toward the mountains, running red with the blood of the dying day.

CHAPTER III.

CORNERED!

BRENT saw a low butte some miles ahead in the west and rode in that direction. Before he reached the vicinity of the butte, however, he saw cattle and a group of ranch buildings. The buildings were in the center of a large plot of ground seeded to grain, evidently well watered, to the south of the butte.

"I wonder now if we're headed for Rabbit Butte an' the Rabbit Foot Ranch," he muttered to himself, scanning the lay of the land.

There were some riders with the cattle and two of these started out to meet him. He turned north, intending to ride around the north end of the butte. But the riders approaching had no intention of permitting him to continue on his way until they had talked with him. They cut north to head him off. Brent let the black out and raced for the north end of the butte toward what was apparently open country, though broken by coulees and miniature ridges where there was a growth of scrub pine and considerable buck brush.

"I reckon we're goin' to look this country over in our own way," said Brent to the horse. "An' it's mighty queer those fellows would be so much interested in a rider comin' along unless —well, if nobody knows what Long Pete looks like, they're maybe givin' every hombre the once-over that hits these parts. Just the same, delays ain't what we want right now."

The big black was rapidly outdistancing the pair of riders coming from the south when Brent became aware of a new factor in the situation. Glances behind him to eastward disclosed other mounted men approaching from that direction.

"They've woke up in town," he said with concern. "Hoss, you'll have to step!"

There was no doubt in his mind as he spurred the black but that the riders in the east were a sheriff's posse, led, probably, by Ed Furness himself. Bill Lawton likely was with him. Whether or not they could tell who he was at that distance he did not know; but he decided to take no chances. He called on the black horse for everything he had, and the magnificent animal fairly flew over the ground, straight north.

The sun had gone down and the first blue shades of the twilight were drifting across the land. The prairie wind was freshening—sure harbinger of night. Brent took advantage of everything in the way of trees, brush, and rises of ground to screen the movements of himself and horse. He saw the two riders in the south stop in the gathering shadows and then turn back. The riders in the east were evidently cutting due west to the ranch.

Brent veered into the northwest. He now was north and east of the butte. Soon he reached the broken country that reached to the foothills of the moun-

tains. Here he found it necessary to slow his pace, but he soon was aware that the horse he rode knew something of the country.

"Must be that Bill Lawton's been ridin' in here," he thought. "If that's the Rabbit Foot south of the butte it stands to reason that Bill's job as foreman would take him up here now an' then to look over the range. Funny there are no cattle up here. Good grass."

He struck a wide, hard trail leading into the heart of the tumbled country and followed it. As he rode in and out of coulees, through long ravines, over ridges and across patches of meadow and gravel, with the scrub pines waving their short, grotesque arms on either side, he hummed a song.

I'm ole Steve Brent, an' on trouble I'm bent,
Expectin' to find it in bunches;
I'll find it you bet, for I've never failed yet,
When playin' a pair of my hunches.

The song was obviously original, and Brent evidently liked it, for he sang it time after time. The shades of night deepened and the first stars pierced the velvet canopy of the sky with pin points of light that gradually expanded and increased until the heavens swarmed with constellations.

Brent rode free with the wind in his face, humming his verse, but keeping a sharp lookout by the light of the stars along the trail ahead.

"Looks like we camp out to-night, hoss," he said cheerfully. "But I reckon that ain't nothing new to either of us. I forgot to ask your name, but you sure appreciate bein' rid by some one who knows the feel of saddle leather."

He ceased his prattle and drew rein as he glimpsed a light ahead. It was a steady, yellow light such as would shine from a window—lamplight. He proceeded cautiously until he reached the edge of a small meadow in the center of which was a cabin. He could see a small shed or barn behind the cabin and some corrals. The light was shining from a single window on the side of the cabin toward him, but another beam, lower and longer, from the end of the house indicated that a door was open.

He circled the meadow on the side opposite the door and found the shed and corrals empty. He shrugged his shoulders in sudden decision and rode swiftly around to the door. As he pulled up in the beam of light a boy appeared in the door.

"Who's there?"

"Why, sonny, I reckon it's me," sang Brent, dismounting and stepping into the light where he could see the boy and be seen himself.

The youth looked at him searchingly out of wide, dark eyes.

"You from the ranch?" he asked.

"I'm from a couple dozen ranches, son, but if you're meanin' the one below the butte, I'll say no an' ask you what place it is."

A glance into the lighted room of the cabin showed Brent that it was unoccupied.

"That's the Rabbit Foot down there," the boy said wonderingly. "You a stranger?"

"I'm that an' more," replied Brent with a smile. "I'm a hungry stranger, son, an' your light looked plumb friendly."

"Put your horse in the shed," said the boy, "an' come in an' eat."

"Those are true words of hospitality," approved Steve Brent. "An' it's good advice in the bargain. I'll do those things pronto."

He put up his horse and entered the cabin. The boy was at the stove.

"There's the wash bench," he said, pointing to bench, wash dish, and a pail of water beside the door. "If you don't want to use it, you don't have to; but pa says a man eats better with a clean face."

"Words of wisdom," said Brent with

a friendly smile. "Your pa has some good ideas."

Brent looked at the boy closely. He was a good-looking youngster, about fourteen years old, a bit dark, clear skinned with clean-cut features, brown eyes and a shock of tousled, chestnut hair. He was well built and would one day be a large, powerful man. He wore riding boots, faded blue overalls, and a light-gray flannel shirt, evidently made over from one of his father's.

"What's your name, son?" Brent asked when he had finished washing.

"Alan," the boy answered with a flashing smile; "Alan Carman."

"That's a good name," Brent observed soberly. "Mine's Steve Brent. I reckon we ought to get along."

"Don't see many folks in here," said the boy with a wide gaze. "You—traveling far?"

"Well, that'll depend," Brent evaded. "I'll maybe have to ask some questions 'bout this country in here. I sort of stumbled in."

He noted that the boy looked at him quickly.

"You're traveling alone?"

"Yes, I'm alone, Alan. That's the way I like to travel. I reckon I'd like to visit a while with you an' your pop."

The boy caught the veiled question instantly. "Pa's away for a day or two. Don't expect him back to-night. He leaves me alone often an' I don't mind it. I ain't askeered. There's two bunks here, if you'd like to put up here to-night."

"Might not be a bad idea," said Brent as he sat down at the table where the boy had put his supper. "You needn't be skeered of me, now, that's sure an' certain."

"I knew it first time I saw you," said the boy with a short laugh. "I didn't reckon you was Long Pete or anybody like that." His eyes flickered as he mentioned the name of the rustler. Brent caught him surveying him intently to see the effect of his words.

"Who *is* Long Pete?" he asked casually.

"Ain't you heard of him?" asked the boy in surprise.

"Yes. But all I've heard is that he's a rustler nobody seems to know much about, an' that there's a good-sized reward out for him an' his gang."

"I don't guess any of 'em has seen him," said Alan. "But Bill Lawton down at the Rabbit Foot has got a note or two from him kiddin' him when he ran off cattle. Pa says he must be pretty slick an' know the country, for he takes the cattle where they can't find 'em no matter how hard they look."

"What does your pop do, Alan?"

"He works for the Rabbit Foot sometimes, but we got some cattle of our own back here a piece. Pa says he's worked other folks' cows long enough an' he aims to get into business for himself."

"Quite right," praised Brent. "I come to that same conclusion long ago; but it ain't done me much good—yet."

"You a cow-puncher?" asked the boy.

"Have been. Right now I seem to be ridin' aroun' lookin' at the country."

"Oh!" The boy bit his lip in inspiration. "Maybe you're a—sheriff!"

"Nope. Hardly that—*hardly* that, son," returned Brent, grinning.

The youth stared at him with a dawning look in his eyes. "You're—you're a *long rider!*" he whispered.

"Now, Alan, can't we be friends without tellin' each other all our history?" Brent complained. "You, bein' a boy, might be likely to imagine a lot. Don't you think that's so?"

"I guess so," said Alan doubtfully. "I allers wanted to see a *real* long rider—an outlaw. You sure you ain't one?" His question was put hopefully.

Brent laughed heartily. "You're a regular kid, all right," he said. "You want me to tell you about runnin' from

posses, an' holdin' up stages, an' robbin' banks, an' turnin' my gun loose on folks an' gettin' 'em the first shot; that's what you'd like to hear. Well, now, you just imagine I've done all those things an' it'll be just as good as if I'd told you an' it'd really happened."

"I believe it has!" exclaimed the boy in triumph. "You don't look as if you'd be afraid of *any*body!"

"I might not run away from 'em exactly," Brent reflected. "But a man that don't never feel a little oneasy when things are gettin' too hot for him is either a fool or wantin' to kill himself. It pays to be careful."

The boy considered this while Brent finished his supper. The visitor then offered to help with the dishes, but Alan wouldn't hear of it. His attitude was that of a host entertaining a distinguished guest. He listened intently while Brent rambled on telling of the south range, of Texas, of the sheep wars; putting a question now and then about the surrounding country and getting a satisfactory answer. In this way Brent learned that Rabbit Foot cattle were not ranged north of the butte; in fact, Lynch, who owned the big ranch, had had a fence strung across the north end of the butte shutting off the tumbled lands. There was no town for nearly a hundred miles north to the main line of the railroad. The boy didn't know where his father had gone.

When it came time to turn in, Alan took Brent into the bedroom of the cabin where there were two bunks. Brent was invited to sleep in the elder Carman's bunk. The boy volunteered the information that his mother had been dead since before he could remember, and that his father was his only living relative so far as he knew. He had no boy companions and had had very little schooling.

They talked in the darkness after they had gone to bed. When they finally dozed off it seemed to Brent that he had hardly closed his eyes when he was wide awake listening to sounds outside the cabin. He heard the youth stirring. Then came a loud knocking on the outside door.

"Who's there?" called the youth.

"Open up!" came the command.

Brent got out of the bunk and hastily pulled on his clothes in the darkness as the boy moved into the other room.

"I don't intend to open up till I know who's there," said the boy loudly.

"You better, if you know what's good for you," was the reply from outside the door. "Whoever's in there better hold himself easylike; there's a man at every window."

"There's nobody in here," called the boy. "What do you want?"

Brent smiled at the boy's attempt to protect him. "Better open up, son," he said softly. "Light the lamp first."

Alan struck a match and lighted the lamp. After a few moments of hesitation he went to the door and drew back the heavy bar.

Sheriff Ed Furness and two others pushed inside, holding their guns in readiness.

"Come out here, Brent!" cried the sheriff. "We saw the horse you stole in the corral, an' we know you're here. There's a bunch of men aroun' this cabin, an'——" He stopped speaking and brought his gun up as Brent stepped into the lighted room.

"Sheriff, couldn't you see fit to let a fellow get a little sleep?" complained Brent, rubbing his eyes.

"No man can sleep when I want him an' know where he is," replied the sheriff gruffly. "Maybe you've got one of those big words that'll fit this case," he added with a sneer.

"I sure have," said Brent with a grin. "It's *inopportune*—you know what that means? If you hang aroun' with me a while you'll get a regular vocabulary." He winked at Bill Lawton, who was one of the men with the official.

Ed Furness turned on the boy with a a scowl. "Tryin' to harbor a criminal, eh? I guess you know that's against the law."

"I don't know much about law, an' I didn't know he was a criminal," said the boy stoutly.

"That's the stuff, son," said Brent cheerfully. "The sheriff don't know it either!"

"I know you stole a horse," said Furness grimly.

Brent looked at Bill Lawton in mock surprise. "Didn't you get your money for that hoss?" he asked.

"He had to give the money back to Lynch," said the sheriff impatiently. "That makes it a matter of getting away with the horse. It won't do you any good to sling language, Brent; you're up against it."

Lawton was frowning at Brent. It was evident that he was puzzled.

"Can't you make me out?" Brent inquired easily. "Don't you know me?"

"I know you from seein' you this afternoon, you four-flusher," retorted Lawton. "That was raw stuff. You must be just startin' in."

"Now that ain't hardly right," said Brent plaintively. "You know I'm no four-flusher. Why don't you tell his nibs, here, who I am?"

"I don't know what you're tryin' to pull, but it's a fool stunt," said Lawton, his face darkening.

"Why, Bill?" Brent appeared crestfallen. "Didn't you lead 'em here? Ain't you goin' to claim the reward?"

"What—what——" Lawton's speech trailed off into muttered oaths as he stared at Brent under lowering brows.

"Go on, Bill, tell 'em," Brent urged.

"Go to blazes an' tell 'em yourself!" shouted Lawton, apparently at sea.

"Why, I thought everybody knew," said Brent with a wondering look. *"I'm Long Pete!"*

Lawton's jaw dropped and the sheriff tipped his derby back on his head with a snort while the boy cried out in astonishment. The faces of other members of the posse appeared in the doorway. The lamplight glinted on the barrels of many guns.

Then Steve Brent drew back his head and laughed loud and long.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ESCAPE.

"IT won't do you any good to laugh, Brent," said Ed Furness slowly. "I wouldn't wonder if you was tall enough to be the man we're looking for at that. But you're not Long Pete. You can't bluff with me, an' I'm used to grins."

Brent stood smiling, rolling a brown-paper cigarette in his slim fingers. Lawton leaned on the table, a sneer on his lips.

"Aw, he ain't Long Pete!" cried the boy.

Lawton swung about. "Shut up, you brat!" The back of his left hand stung the boy's mouth.

Alan staggered back, the look of pained surprise on his face quickly changing to one of furious anger.

The cigarette had dropped from Brent's fingers with the slap. The smile froze on his lips. His eyes narrowed.

"Never mind him, sonny," he said; "he's just givin' us his pedigree."

"I'd give *you* more than that if you wasn't a prisoner of the law!" cried Lawton.

"What a fine hombre you'd be to work for," said Brent, arching his brows. "Maybe I'll take that job Lynch offered me yet!" He turned to Ed Furness. "Ed, I came out here with one hoss an' two hunches; now I reckon I ain't got any hoss, but I've got *three* hunches. I just got the hunch that if you want to release me, an' let me get my gun, which you notice I ain't wearin', or tell Bill, there, to put his away, I can make him crawl under that table!"

"That's enough," said Furness sharply. "I'm takin' you in, Brent." He motioned to the men at the door to mount, and they disappeared in the darkness. The other man with him and Lawton went out, leaving him, the Rabbit Foot foreman, Brent and the boy in the lighted room of the cabin.

The sheriff pointed a finger at Alan Carman. "I'm taking you in, too, to teach you a lesson," he said sternly.

"I don't care," said the boy defiantly.

"Oh, shucks! I don't reckon I'd take the boy in, Ed." It was Brent who spoke in a rather chilly tone. "I don't think it would make any better citizen out of him to have any such experience, do you, sheriff?"

"It's time he was taught a lesson," said Furness. "Show 'em what they're up again an' it'll maybe stop 'em from going bad—if he hasn't gone bad already. Or maybe you told him to say you wasn't here, eh?"

"He didn't!" flared out the boy.

"An' he didn't know what he was doin' or why he was doin' it," said Brent, looking the sheriff steadily in the eye. "The boy just took a likin' to me an' I guess I let him think I was a shady character. A kid'll always stick up for the under dog, Ed."

"I'm not so sure that it looks what it is on the surface," snapped out Furness. "You an' him seem to know each other pretty well. Maybe you know old Frank Carman, too. I'm goin' to take the boy in an' question him."

"Why not do that here?" inquired Brent.

"We'll quit talking," said the sheriff, compressing his lips. "Get your hat an' coat, boy."

"An' I'll get mine," said Brent, turning swiftly and stepping into the darkened sleeping room.

It was done so suddenly and unexpectedly that Brent was in the other room before the sheriff could stop him. Furness had not been watching Brent as closely as he might because of the fact that Brent wore no gun.

The boy had preceded Brent into the other room.

"Watch out how you come out of there, Brent!" called the sheriff as he leaped to one side of the door while Lawton stepped quickly to the other side.

Brent's laugh floated out to them. "You must think I'm a fool, Ed, if you figure I don't know when I'm cornered. Besides, I sort of want to go back to town now anyway. I'm just feelin' around for my hat here, an' if you're scared of me making a break you can pot me when I step into the light."

While he was talking Brent secured his gun belt and hat. The boy held something cold against his hand, and Brent took it. It was another gun. Then the boy tugged at his sleeve, urging him to a corner of the small room. Brent threw the second gun out the door into the lighted room.

"If you're scared of me comin' out a-shootin', kick that gun under the table, sheriff," he called out with another laugh.

He felt a cool draft of air strike his face and slipped to the corner of the room where he saw a dim square of light. He found a small door, and the boy just outside. He shut the door quickly, and they stole from the dense shadow by the cabin to the shed.

"They've took your horse aroun' front," the boy whispered. They were on the side of the shed away from the cabin.

"Listen," said Brent softly. "Do you know where you can hide aroun' here?"

"Sure, when we get in the woods," Alan replied.

"All right. You dig for the woods an' I'll draw their attention away. They'll take after me, but I figure on dodgin' 'em. No sense in you goin' in. Maybe I'll be back an' see you again, sonny."

"You got to come, too," the boy insisted. "There's horses back here a ways," he added in an eager whisper. "Come on with me." His hand found Brent's.

Brent bit his lip in the darkness and pressed the hand. "You can't go with me, son. You'd only get into trouble an' there's no need of it——" He broke off as he heard the loud voice of Ed Furness in the cabin.

"Get aroun' to those windows, you fellows out there. I believe he's trying to beat it!"

They heard the pound of hoofs as the men again surrounded the cabin. Then:

"Brent, I'm coming in with the lamp! You haven't got a chance to get away, for my men have orders to shoot an' shoot straight. You can take a chance on me if you want to, for here I come!"

"There's nerve along with that derby hat," Brent muttered. "Come on, son, we'll scramble for the timber with the shed between us an' the cabin."

They heard Furness shouting in the cabin as they started for the dark shadow of the trees behind the corrals. The boy ran ahead along a path that led beween the two empty corrals.

The shouts multiplied as the members of the posse called to each other. The escape of the pair had been discovered. Furness was roaring instructions to "get around the meadow" and not to shoot the boy.

They had almost reached the trees when shadows swept around the shed and shouts came from the horsemen who had discovered them.

"Run, son!" commanded Brent as he whipped out his gun.

There was a dart of flame from one of the rushing shadows and a bullet whined over their heads. Other riders turned toward them and the darkened space about the cabin was streaked with red as guns roared their warning.

Brent backed toward the trees and his own weapon spit fire. The nearest rider pulled his horse up short. Another rider swerved to the right, his mount crashed into the rails of the corral and sent the man spinning in the air.

Then Brent fell backward over some brush, turned swiftly and crawled into the shelter of the trees. As he stood up he felt the hand of the boy on his arm.

"Back this way," Alan cautioned, slipping his hand down until it met Brent's.

He dodged swiftly in among the trees which were too thick to permit a horse being ridden among them in the darkness. They came to a trail, and the boy led the way at a swift pace, whispering words of encouragement over his shoulder.

The shots ceased as the pursuers realized the futility of so spending their ammunition. The shouts died down, and Brent knew that Furness was holding a parley with his men. Brent knew also that while pursuit was impossible on horseback in that wilderness, the sheriff would realize quickly enough that the fugitives could not expect to proceed far afoot.

It was safe to talk in an ordinary voice now, and he put a question. "Does Lawton know where the horses are back here—if there *are* any?"

"Nope," answered the boy. "We keep 'em in here where it'd be hard to find 'em. We don't want 'em stole. You ain't Long Pete, are you?"

Brent laughed softly. "Do you *think* I am, sonny?"

"Nope, I don't. Dad says a cow thief can't laugh natural, but *you* can."

"I'm afraid I've got you in a peck of trouble," said Brent in a worried voice. "An' we've made it all the worse by gettin' away an' you bein' along. Remember, if they catch us you'll have to agree to everything I say. I've got to take the blame, or it wouldn't be right,

an' I've got to do what's right in this, Alan—do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," replied the boy slowly. "Anyway, this is just fun for me, an' they couldn't put me in jail, could they?"

"I reckon they could," said Brent. "But they couldn't keep you there long," he added grimly.

"Pa says you've got to protect a man when he's your guest," the boy volunteered soberly.

"By Jupiter! Your dad has some regular-man ideas."

"I don't think he likes Bill Lawton any too much," said the boy; "an' me—I *hate* him!"

They were climbing a steep grade and now came out on the crest of the ridge. All sounds of pursuit had ceased. The stars lighted the top of the ridge and Brent seized the opportunity to look at his watch. He exclaimed in surprise when he saw it was half past one in the morning.

"Only about three an' a half hours till daylight," he muttered.

"The horses are right down here," said the boy, leading the way down the other side of the ridge.

They came into a little meadow that was fenced. Brent saw several horses and watched in admiration as the boy caught one up and brought it to him.

"This is Hard Ribs, the best in the bunch," said Alan. "You can use him. There's a couple of saddles in that lean-to by the gate, an' you take the best—it's the biggest, anyway."

They bridled and saddled the horses and the boy rode ahead out of the meadow, along the base of the ridge to another trail.

"Which way you want to go?" he asked.

"Son, I want to hit the open country toward town—Rangeview."

"You goin' back there?" said the boy in surprise.

"Yep. I sure am. Just lead the way out, Alan, an' then I'll tell you something."

They started to the left on the trail in a direction which Brent concluded was east. Again he sang.

"It's hunches I'm playin', an' playin' 'em right;
I'm playin' 'em now on this ride in the night;
I'll be playin' 'em still when it comes daylight,
An' I'll bet that the hunches I'm playin' are right."

"How's that, sonny?" he asked with a light laugh.

"You made that up," the boy accused admiringly.

"I sure did," Brent agreed. "But I borrowed the tune."

They rode on in silence till finally they reached the edge of the sparse timber and Brent saw the shadowy plain ahead. He reined in his horse.

"Listen, sonny. Here's where we break company—for a time, anyway. I'm goin' on into town, an' I've got to go alone. I'm borrowing this hoss, understand? An' if I can't get back right away I'll see that he's sent back. You tell your dad just what happened—the whole works, straight. An'—but where'll you go now?"

"I'd like to go along," said the boy wistfully, "but if you don't want me to—anyway, pa ought to be back this mornin', an' I'll hang aroun' out of sight till he shows up. Lawton an' the others'll be combing the country hereabouts for you probably, an' they'll never think you'd go into town."

"That's the way I've got it figured," said Brent. "I'm bankin' on it, although that derby-hatted sheriff's no fool. But I've got to make the play. I'll be on my way now so's to make it by daylight. I know you can take care of yourself, sonny, an'—let's shake hands."

The boy brought his horse close, and Brent took his hand in a warm clasp.

"You got the makin's of a real man, Alan," he said soberly, "an' I'd hate to

think I wouldn't see you again. So long."

"So long," called the boy.

When Brent was riding swiftly eastward on the prairie, Alan Carman turned about and rode straight back into the tumbled land the way they had come.

CHAPTER V.

LAIRD OF THE RANGE.

BRENT rode eastward for some time at a fast gallop—until the tumbled lands behind him were shrouded in deepest shadow and the morning mists, and he knew he could not be seen from that section. He entertained great respect for the courage and shrewdness of the sheriff who wore the derby.

"Ed Furness is no fool," he muttered; "not by a long shot. Well, c'mon, Hard Ribs, we'll drift down into town."

He turned into the southeast and slacked his pace, for his horse was lathered. After the manner of men who are much on the long trails alone, he spoke softly to himself, voiced his thoughts aloud to make his reasoning seem the more convincing.

"There's Furness; now he's on the square. An' he's dangerous. He means business. Lynch is the laird of the country—the biggest ranch owner, with his fingers on the county's finances through his bank. He's the big guy, an' he wants everybody to know it. I reckon I don't like him any too much for that reason. Bill Lawton's the bugaboo—Lynch's right-hand man in the cattle business. But he ain't above insultin' a stranger by makin' fun of his hoss, an' he ain't above slappin' a kid a quarter of his size an' less'n half his age. The kid's true blue. Sizes a stranger up, sees good in him, an' is ready to fight for him. Says he's got to protect a guest in his house. Dog-gone! His dad ought to be a good sort. An' tney don't like Lawton an' Lawton don't like them. Some deal all around. An' nobody knows anything about Long Pete except he steals cattle in bunches an' leaves notes for receipts. An' everything named after rabbits! Some layout. Well, Steve, old boy, what say we copper a few bets!"

The eastern horizon took on a shade of gray and slowly brightened until its rim gleamed with the silver of the dawn. Brent saw the tall cottonwoods of Rangeview straight ahead and made for them at a canter. The sun was a disk of gold rising out of the eastern plain as he rode into the west end of town and around to the livery barn.

He found Jake, the barn man, already about. Jake stared at him with bulging eyes while Brent greeted him pleasantly.

"You will notice that I have still another hoss, Jake," he said amiably. "I am a man of many hosses, it seems—an' many enemies. Did you look after Hunchy?"

"I did," gasped out the barn man. "He's in that stall there. I know you spotted him the minute you came in. What—how——"

"Two good words, Jake," approved Brent. "What an' how can explain almost anything; only I ain't explainin' so early in the mornin', Jake. Now *you* ain't got anything against me, have you?"

Jake grinned. "No, I ain't. I'm supposed to tend to this barn an' the horses in it. What the men who own or—or——"

"Steal," supplied Brent.

"Rent," corrected Jake; "what the men who own or rent the horses do or are I don't care. You want that new horse looked after?"

"Watered an' fed," instructed Brent. "An' tied loose to the corral fence back there. Jake, do you mind spillin' a wee bit of information?"

"I don't know much," said Jake with a wink. It was quite plain that he liked Brent.

"But you know where the grand-sovereign-inspector-general of these rabbit parts lives, don't you?"

"Mr. James Lynch," said Jake impressively, "lives in a yellow house in a bunch of trees behind his bank, the State Bank of Rangeview. There's a white gravel walk from the street alongside of the bank to the house."

"Jake, I'll buy a drink of white likker if you know where we can get it."

"Come right along," said Jake heartily, as he led Brent's horse from the rear of the barn to a corral where there was water and hay. "Just a second an' I'll lead you to it. If there's one thing I know you *ain't* it's a revenoo man. An' whatever it is you *are,* I ain't askin'."

In a few minutes they were entering a small resort several doors up the street on the same side as the bank building. There was but one man in the place except the man behind the short bar. Jake spoke to this man—a short, stout individual with a shifty eye, a bristly, brown mustache, and an aggressive chin, dressed in mackinaw trousers tucked into mud-splashed riding boots, a gray shirt, and a stockman's hat, much the worse for wear. He was armed. The man paid scant attention to Jake; he looked straight at Brent with a frown.

Brent motioned to the man behind the bar to serve them. When the drinks had been put before the three, the man who had been in the place when they came in, edged around Jake and confronted Brent.

"Ain't you the feller that rode away on Bill Lawton's black hoss yesterday?"

"I'm the same," admitted Brent.

"What'd you do with the hoss?" demanded the other.

Brent's brows lifted a trifle. "Why, let's see," he said, scratching his head. "Oh, yes. I traded him to a circus man for a giraffe. You probably saw the giraffe in here this mornin', the way you're weavin' aroun'. This must be powerful stuff." He fingered his glass.

"Well, if I saw any giraffes or not, it's a cinch I'm lookin' at a pup now," retorted the other thickly.

Brent reached over, took the man's glass, and spilled its contents on the floor. "When a man begins seein' *big* things an' thinks they're *small* things, he's had enough," he said coolly.

"You think *you're* big?" sneered his accoster. "I never seen a hoss thief yet that was very big."

Brent's eyes narrowed. "It's too early in the mornin' for trouble—with *you,*" he said. "You better go get some sleep. You've wore out your welcome with us. Go call me names from the front or back door, but don't stand round so close."

"I'll——" The man's voice broke into a snarl, and he drew back to strike.

Brent caught his arm, whirled him about, and sent him spinning toward the rear door. The man lost his balance and fell on his left hand and knee. His right hand darted to the weapon at his side.

"Don't draw that gun!"

Brent's words rang on the stillness in a tone of unmistakable command. But the other's eyes were glowing red, and the hand on the butt of the gun snapped into action.

Jake leaped aside and the bartender ducked in a flash.

Brent's right hand shot downward, and the room echoed with the roar of his forty-five. The man on the floor dropped his weapon with a howl of rage and surprise. He scrambled to his feet and stood, shaking, staring at Brent. Blood dripped from the fingers of his gun hand. He was sobered, awed. The anger left his eyes.

"Maybe you better take that drink now," Brent invited with a nod to the bartender. "You're welcome."

The man advanced to the bar, took the drink the bartender put out for him

in his left hand, and downed it in a single gulp.

"I didn't figure on hittin' your hand," said Brent, "but your gun was too close in against your side an' I just had to, I reckon."

The man looked at him, turned abruptly, picked up his gun in his left hand, and walked out the front door.

"Ain't nothin' serious," said Jake. "He started it, anyway. You're a tolerable shot, I'll say."

Brent raised his glass. "Who is he?" he asked, ignoring the compliment.

"Oh, that's Frank Carman from out Rabbit Butte way," was the answer.

Brent put down his glass. *"Who?"* he asked foolishly.

"Carman—Frank Carman," replied Jake, surprised at Brent's manner. "Why, you know of him?"

"Has he got a boy out there?" asked Brent.

"Yep. Right upstanding lad. Frank don't never go home when he's the way he was this mornin'. Fact is, Frank's a sort of puzzle 'round here."

"Let's make it snappy," said Brent with a frown. "I've got business to tend to."

They took their drinks, and Brent paid the score, refusing to take another with Jake with the explanation that he was a "one-drink" man. They went out to the street and Brent left the barn man at the bank and walked back to the yellow house in which James Lynch lived.

He knocked at the front door. When it opened he stepped back and hastily removed his hat. In the doorway stood a girl. The rays of the morning sun, filtering through the leafy branches of the cottonwoods, struck golden gleams from her hair. Her cheeks glowed with the tints of rose petals, fresh with dew. Her full lips were red; her eyes were gray—questioning, but hinting of a cool confidence. Her figure would have driven a sculptor mad.

"I'm Carol Lynch," she said. "Whom do you wish to see?"

"Your—your—is he—your father?" stammered Brent.

"If you mean James Lynch, he is my uncle," replied the girl. "He is the only Lynch in town, except me. Do you wish to see him?" She smiled. Brent was not hard to look at as a specimen of the handsome male.

He nodded. "Yes, I'd like to see him."

As the girl turned there was a heavy step in the hall behind her. Then Lynch appeared, minus coat and collar.

"What are you doing back here?" he roared. "You got away from the sheriff, eh?"

"I was talkin' with the sheriff last night," said Brent, deliberately smiling at Carol Lynch. "I left him early this mornin' to come back to you an' report. I'd like to see you a few minutes."

"Oh, you would, eh? I suppose you'd like to have me take you over to my office so you could pull your gun on me an' go through the bank. Carol, go inside! You ain't got nothing in common with outlaws."

"Nor with gents she ain't acquainted with," said Brent pointedly. "I reckon she knows that without you tellin' her, Jim. But you better let her take my gun with her while we're talkin'. Maybe it'll ease your mind."

His right hand moved with incredible rapidity and he proffered the gun, butt first, on his open palm.

The girl's eyes cleared of doubt, and she took the gun. "Go see what he wants, uncle," she said sweetly. "If he *is* an outlaw, it's best I had his gun."

She retreated into the house with a ghost of a glance at Brent.

Lynch scowled, and then a grim smile hovered on his lips. "Brent," he said in a hard voice, "I'll give you credit for *one* thing: you certainly are a great actor."

"Better than you thought, Jim," said

Brent quickly, "because I ain't actin'. Think that one over while we walk to the bank. I reckon the best place to talk business is in your office, after all."

Lynch hesitated. "Wait till I get my hat," he said and disappeared into the house. He returned shortly with his coat and hat on and Brent smiled as they started for the rear door of the bank.

"I see you're packin' it in your right coat pocket, Jim," he said cheerfully. "I should think a man like you would use a shoulder holster."

Lynch turned on him as he unlocked the door. "I couldn't hit a barn across the street," he said. "That weight in my pocket is a package of rare coins I had over to the house showing my niece. They're worth a lot of money." And he stood aside to allow Brent to enter.

When they were inside, Lynch led the way into his private office in the rear. He motioned Brent to a chair and sat down at his desk. He drew the package from his pocket and tossed it in a drawer.

"Now what do you think you want to see me about?" he asked, leaning on his elbows on the desk.

Brent took out tobacco and papers and began to fashion a cigarette. "I've been out toward the Rabbit Foot an' met your man Lawton for the second time," he said slowly. "I'll take that job, I reckon."

The banker leaned back in his chair and pursed his lips. But he didn't whistle. He broke into a short laugh. "It seems like I've got to keep on giving you credit," he said. "This time it's for nerve, pure an' simple. Just nerve!"

Brent touched a match to his cigarette, leaned toward Lynch, and looked him squarely in the eye. "Jim," he purred, "you haven't any idea how much nerve I've got!"

CHAPTER VI.

SADDLE LOGIC.

LYNCH regarded the man across the desk from him with an awakened interest. He looked into the gray eyes that met his own fearlessly, noted the square chin, the clear, bronzed skin, the wavy brown hair above Brent's high brow. He frowned with a puzzled expression.

"Seems to me you could be in a better business than robbing banks," he observed. "A man that'll turn the trick you did, will do things worse than that."

"Was it robbin' you to borrow five hundred on security?" asked Brent mildly.

"Security!" exclaimed the banker. "You didn't leave any security."

"I left my hoss, Hunchy, an' I value him at about that sum—if I should think of sellin' him, I mean. You put a price on him yourself when you said you couldn't lend more'n five hundred on him."

"I was joking, an' you knew it," said Lynch angrily.

"I might have suspected it; but I didn't *know* it," replied Brent, smiling. "I always thought bankers didn't joke about loans. An' you wanted to do some business with me."

"It was getting money by force an' under false pretenses," sputtered Lynch. "Just the same as robbery. The sheriff looked at it that way."

"No," said Brent, shaking his head. "The sheriff accused me of stealin' the black hoss. You say I robbed the bank. You two can't seem to agree on the charge."

"It's serious any way you look at it," declared Lynch.

"But there's no harm done," declared Brent. "The sheriff an' Lawton met up with me last night out north of the butte. Ed said Bill had given you back your five hundred, so you

ain't out anything. Lawton got back his hoss so *he* ain't out anything. I've got my security back—Hunchy's in the barn down there—so *I* ain't out anything. I can't see how a jury'd make much of a case out of this thing. Seems to me, the only man that's got a kick comin' is your clerk. *He* got scared an' got locked in the closet in the bargain."

Lynch looked about as if he had lost something. Then his gaze once more focused on Brent. "You're not bad," he said, stroking his chin. "It's refreshing to meet a clever talker like you once in a while."

"That ain't talk, it's logic—saddle logic," Brent pointed out with a gesture. "There's just one point that ain't satisfactory to me. My saddle is on Lawton's hoss."

"How come?" asked Lynch. "Why didn't you ask for it when the sheriff let you go?"

"I reckoned it would be on the hoss an' that the hoss would be in the corral when I left where we was, but the hoss an' saddle an' bridle was gone."

Lynch looked at him shrewdly. "Does Ed know you're here?"

"I don't think so; but I wouldn't wonder if he did."

"What did you want that horse for when you had one, or something that looked like one, of your own?" demanded Lynch. "Oh, wait a minute—I know. You wanted a real *good* horse."

"No an' yes," drawled out Brent. "You see *my* hoss was dead tired, an' I wanted him to have a good rest. But I wanted to travel an' I needed a hoss for that. So you an' me an' Bill Lawton made our hoss deal."

"You didn't strike out like you thought it was any regular deal," said Lynch with a fierce glare. "You acted like you was going somewhere an' wanted to get there quick."

"I did," admitted Brent. "I was hittin' it fair an' good to try an' run across a gent's trail."

"Whose trail?" asked Lynch skeptically.

"Long Pete's trail," declared Brent. "You see the cards an' one thing an' another hasn't run any too free lately, an' I could use that two thousand reward—one thousand from *you,* an' one thousand from the county."

It was too much for Lynch. He banged a fist on his desk and swore. Then a crafty look came into his eyes. "I wonder if you *mean* that?" he exclaimed.

"Two thousand dollars' worth," said Brent.

"You know this Long Pete's been stealin' my cattle?" asked Lynch.

"I heard so, Jim—that's a fact, ain't it?"

"It is," grumbled the banker. "An' you want to go out on the Rabbit Foot to work because you think maybe you can get a clew to how Long Pete's working?"

"Exactly," Brent affirmed.

"Well, why didn't you do that in the first place? I offered you a regular job."

"Because Lawton made me sore, for one thing, an' I thought maybe I could do more if I sort of looked the ground over in my own way, for another."

"You have an answer for everything," said Lynch thoughtfully; "an' they seem to tie together."

"Another reason I didn't take the job yesterday was because you an' Ed tried to force it on me," said Brent.

"Now *that* sounds reasonable," mused Lynch. He wore a studied air. "What do you want to do out there?"

"Report to Lawton," said Brent shortly.

Lynch's eyes widened. "You an' Lawton got it in for each other?"

"It wouldn't be diplomatic for me to answer that question, would it?" Brent countered. "Lawton's your foreman,

an' I'm figurin' on goin' to work for you, under him."

Lynch rose and began to pace the room. Several time he stopped and looked at Brent. Finally he spoke in a tone of quick decision. "All right, you can go out there. I'll give you the fifty a month I first offered. Tell Lawton I said——"

"I'd rather you wrote it," Brent interrupted. "Just write a note sayin' you've hired me to work on the Rabbit Foot at fifty a month an' to take orders from Lawton. Date it this mornin' at nine o'clock. This means the hoss deal is all over, I take it."

"Oh, all right," said Lynch, sitting down at his desk. "Yes, the horse deal is all over—unless you try to pull something else." He wrote rapidly on a sheet of the bank's letter paper. He folded the message and handed it to Brent who read it, nodded, and put it in a pocket.

"I'll be goin' out directly," he said with a smile.

"I don't know exactly why I'm doing this, Brent," said Lynch with his usual frown; "but I'm taking a chance. I wish you luck. We'll go to the house an' I'll get your gun." He led the way out of the bank, locked the door, and they walked to the house.

"Maybe the young lady would prefer to return the gun herself," Brent suggested.

Lynch snorted. "Don't be a fool!" he said loudly as he went into the house.

But Brent had been right, for Carol Lynch appeared on the porch a few moments later with the weapon.

"I assumed you were no longer an outlaw when my uncle asked for this to return it to you," she said with a merry challenge in her voice.

"Your uncle has hired me to work for him on his ranch," said Brent. "You don't suppose he'd be hirin' an outlaw, do you?"

The girl looked doubtful. "What are you going to do out there?"

Brent shrugged. "Cow hands are not choosers of their tasks," he said, smiling.

"A pretty speech," approved the girl. But she looked at him keenly. "Have you ever killed anybody with that?" she asked, handing him the gun.

"If I had, ma'am, I sure an' certain wouldn't be boastin' of it to a lady," he replied, shoving the weapon in its holster.

"You are polite but evasive," she said, lifting her pretty brows.

Brent gazed at her in frank admiration. "It isn't hard to be polite to you, if that's what I'm doin'," he said.

"Maybe my uncle has hired you to teach his men manners," she said with a toss of her head. "I hope he hasn't hired you to kill anybody." She looked at him quickly.

"Carol, come in the house!" called her uncle.

"So long," said Brent with a flashing smile. "You better ask *him.*" He walked rapidly to the street and met Frank Carman, who had his right hand bandaged.

"Hurt much?" he asked.

Carman eyed him malevolently. "What do you care?" he asked gruffly.

Brent frowned. "If I'd known it was you, I'd found some other way," he said. "I didn't want any gun play with you."

"Oh, I ain't so fast with my gun," returned Carman sneeringly. "You don't need to run away from me. I ain't any faster when I'm out of likker than when I'm in it."

"Listen, Carman!" Brent spoke sharply. "Have you a hoss here with you?"

"Why—yes," said Carman.

"Then I want you to lead home a hoss I borrowed at your place last night. It's aroun' back of the barn. I'll have to keep your saddle an' bridle a while

longer till I get back my own. You aimin' to start soon?"

"You was out to my place?" asked Carman, his gaze alert. How did that happen?"

"Your boy will tell you all about it. Just you lead that hoss back. We'll get a halter an' rope at the barn, although you've probably got a rope. The boy's expectin' you this mornin'. I don't suppose you'd want him to know how we come to have trouble. You better be startin' back."

Something in Brent's tone caused Carman's eyes to glitter. Then, for a moment, they seemed frightened. "I was just goin'," he said finally.

"I'll walk down an' see you start," said Brent.

He went with Carman to the barn, saw him get his horse and saddle it. Then he unsaddled the other horse and took off the bridle. The barn man supplied a halter and Carman attached his own rope. Without a word to the barn man or Brent, Carman rode away toward the west.

Brent put the saddle and bridle Alan Carman had loaned him on his own horse Hunchy. "Seems to be in pretty fair shape, at that," he commented to Jake.

"He's all right," answered the barn man, grinning. "There's more horse there than the rest of 'em think."

"Well, don't try an' wise 'em up, Jake," said Brent with a wink.

"I ain't tryin' to edgycate anybody," was the reply.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," said Brent. "I'll leave Hunchy tied to the corral."

He went around to the hotel and entered the dining room. "Ham an' eggs," he ordered tersely. His brow was burrowed in thought as he waited for his breakfast.

"Old coins," he muttered to himself. "Old coins an' worth a lot of money. An' I thought he had a gun. He wasn't scared of me, at that. He's no fool, either. Both of 'em smart—Ed an' Jim. Now what about Lawton?"

He was lost in thought as he ate his breakfast. He paid for it and walked to the barn, still thinking. The barn man untied his horse and handed him the reins. When Brent was in the saddle he leaned toward Jake and spoke.

"What do you know about Long Pete, Jake?"

"As much as you do—if that's little enough," was the ready reply.

"Does any of his gang ever hit town?"

"Not as anybody knows of," informed the barn man.

"How long has he been workin' his game aroun' here?"

"Just last fall an' this spring. There's some big rewards out."

"I know," Brent said with a nod. "I was wonderin' if *any*body knew what he looks like."

Jake shook his head. "I reckon not; but Jim Lynch has some specimens of his handwritin' that he left for Lawton thankin' him for the cattle he made off with."

"Then he's what you'd call a polite rustler," answered Brent laughingly as he rode off with a wave of farewell.

He struck westward across the prairie and almost immediately began to whistle cheerfully. Coming at a furious pace toward town were a number of horsemen. Brent burst forth in song.

"The cat found the rat hole an' hung aroun' all night;
But the rat went out another hole an' never came in sight.
So the rat watched the cat while the cat watched in vain,
An' finally the two of them got caught in the rain.

He laughed boisterously at his own composition. But his eyes were hard and cold as he leaned forward in the saddle and patted his horse on the neck.

CHAPTER VII.

HUNCHY PERFORMS.

THE approaching riders came on apace and Brent grinned with the reflection that they were not riding so fast because of his presence on the plain, because they could not possibly have made him out at that distance, but because Ed Furness must have arrived at the conclusion that he, Brent, had gone on into town. He had rather expected the sheriff to so decide; for he did not underrate the official's ability.

He jogged on, singing his new song with quaint variations in the text; but as the riders drew near and he saw by their gestures and shouts that he had been recognized, he swerved to the right and reined in his horse.

Ed Furness was in the lead when they rode up, and his gun was in his hand. He stopped close to Brent, turned in his saddle, and spoke.

"So you lied to me, eh? You told me he'd gone north when he went east." He turned and looked at Brent savagely. But Brent disregarded him and smiled at the boy on a horse behind with the other five members of the posse. Lawton wasn't with them.

"I reckon you thought I *was* goin' north, sonny, an' I don't blame you, the way I acted," he said as the boy flushed.

"You can't put that over, Brent," said the sheriff sharply. "The boy rode into the meadow before daylight an' told us you'd gone north. Either he was trying to throw us off the track on his own hook, or he was following your orders."

"Then you can believe he was followin' my orders, Ed," said Brent coldly. "You seem powerful anxious to take somebody into town, even if it's only a boy."

"I'll take both of you now," said the sheriff, scowling. "You had a poor hunch this time if you thought you could get to town, grab your own horse, an' beat it to the mountains this way while we were hunting you up north."

"I wasn't hittin' for the mountains, sheriff," said Brent, leaning on his saddle horn and regarding the official gravely. "I'm hittin' for the Rabbit Foot ranch to go to work."

"Not bad—not bad at all," said Furness with a glimmer of admiration in his eyes. "I suppose you think Lawton would be scared to take you on. An'—you might have been easing back this way thinking to get your saddle," he added as a startling afterthought.

"I aim to do that, too," said Brent. "An' I expect Lawton will take me on. He's workin' for Jim Lynch, ain't he? An' Jim Lynch gave me a job."

"We're losing time here," said Furness with a significant look at his men.

"You sure are, sheriff," said Brent. "Take a look at that." He drew out the note Lynch had written and passed it to Furness.

Furness read it, studied it, and became thoughtful. "You went in there to see Lynch?" he asked.

"I sure did, an' had the good luck to meet Miss Carol, too. Jim understands why I didn't take the job first time he offered it to me yesterday. He says the hoss deal is all over an' nobody hurt. He gave me a job on the ranch an' he realizes there's nothing to prosecute about. I'll take that note back. I've got to give it to Lawton."

Furness handed back the note, pushed his derby back on his head, and surveyed Brent with a queer smile. "There's one man in this country that I know a lot about an' can't lay a finger on," he said slowly, as if measuring his words; "but I can lay a finger on you an' I don't know much of anything *about* you. When a man has me guessing I don't mind telling him so to his face. But I'd bet you've got no

idea of goin' to work on the Rabbit Foot."

"Well, sheriff," said Brent, returning the smile, "you can't very well spare the time to go out there an' watch me work, but that's just what I aim to do. An' I reckon there's something you've overlooked. I *could* have gone north; an' I could have gone east or south out of Rangeview this mornin' instead of comin' back out this way. As for the saddle—if I'm an outlaw like I think *you* think, I could have picked up a saddle most any place."

"You couldn't have got far on that horse," declared Furness.

"No? Watch this!"

Before the sheriff or any of the men with him realized his intention, Brent shook out his reins and drove in his spurs. Hunchy lurched ahead, swept past them in mighty bounds, and was running west of them.

Furness shouted and gave chase, the others following him, except the boy, Alan, who sat his horse and watched the unique exhibition—temporarily forgotten.

The sheriff evidently concluded it was a trick, for he pushed his horse to its utmost in pursuit of Brent. He even fired several shots, but aimed wide and shook his head at his men. He did not want to drop Brent, for if it was true that Lynch had hired him, and would not prefer charges, Brent was not a fugitive from the law.

Brent rode west for a distance, then cut south. Hunchy easily kept his lead while the sheriff swore and wondered. Then Brent edged around to the east again and Hunchy flew past them for the second time in an even greater burst of speed. Now Brent rode straight for the boy, Alan, sitting his horse and marveling at the spectacle. When he reached him he shouted to the boy to get up behind him. Alan obeyed, his eyes shining with eagerness, and then they were off, barely twenty feet ahead of Furness and his men, with Hunchy carrying a double load.

They rode north, and if the sorry-looking horse had shown speed before, he now displayed an ability to all but fly. The sheriff, mounted on an excellent horse, left his men behind in the pursuit, striving his best to overtake Brent and the boy. But Brent's horse steadily increased his lead. It seemed to Sheriff Furness, swearing and marveling and losing ground fast, that Hunchy was all legs and neck and that his feet never touched the ground. He had never witnessed such speed in a horse. Nor did Hunchy seem to tire, although the sheriff's horse was showing the effects of the strain; he was slowing. Furness swore now in admiration. Hunchy was so far in the lead that he couldn't hope to overtake him, although he had outdistanced his own men. And if anything, Hunchy was increasing his pace!

The sheriff checked his mount in acknowledgment of defeat. Then Brent turned about and came racing back. As he brought Hunchy to a rearing stop he covered Furness with his gun. The sheriff had been so amazed at the performance that he had had no thought of the weapon he had returned to his holster. His men were far behind and coming slowly.

"Two convincers!" said Brent evenly. "I've got the drop on you, Ed, like I could have had it once or twice before, if you only knew it. An' I've shown you that I *could* have got away if I wanted to. Also, Jim Lynch had pretty good security in this hoss if he'd only known it. Now, Ed, I don't give a hang if we get along or not, but I want you to lay off this kid. Whatever the play is, he ain't in on it. I reckon you can see I'm tellin' you the truth. Does he go home or doesn't he? Hurry up an' talk, Ed, for I ain't goin' to wait till your crowd gets here."

"He goes," said Furness, his eyes narrowed to slits.

"Get down, Alan," Brent ordered. Then as the boy slipped to the ground: "The sheriff'll have one of the men bring you your hoss. Then you hit for home. I 'spect your dad's there by now."

Furness' men were nearly up to them. Brent thrust his gun back in its holster.

"Now, I'm goin' on to the ranch an' report," said Brent coolly.

The sheriff made no reply, nor did he attempt to draw his weapon.

Brent wheeled his horse and struck west toward Rabbit Butte. Looking back, he saw the sheriff's men join him. They sat their horses for a spell and then turned toward town. Brent smiled.

"But he ain't satisfied," he thought to himself. "Furness is smart an' he's takin' no chances. He'll talk with Lynch first thing an' maybe convince him he's wrong in takin' me on. Then he'll come bustin' out here with blood in his eye. I've got to move fast if I'm goin' to play my hunches."

His thoughts were interrupted by a sight that held his gaze for several minutes. There were cattle north of the butte. He had understood from the boy that the Rabbit Foot did not range stock north of the butte. True, this herd was not far north—not as far as the rough country—but they were a long way from the cattle grazing to southward.

"Looks like prime stuff, too," Brent muttered. "Reckon I'll look aroun' a bit before I report."

He turned north and jogged along, leaning forward, bent in in the saddle, looking exactly like a rider who was making his way home, half asleep. The ranch and the butte were a considerable distance away. He gained the screen of a bunch of willows growing in some marshy ground and stopped.

Looking toward town he saw a rider proceeding west, leading a horse.

"He's keepin' his word to the kid," said Brent to himself. "I knew I could trust him to do that."

He could not make out the boy because he was probably sitting on the ground, waiting for his horse. Then he looked toward the butte again, whistled in surprise, and rubbed his eyes. The small herd of cattle north of the butte had disappeared!

CHAPTER VIII.

SWIFT TURNS.

BRENT puzzled over the disappearance of the cattle for a few minutes and then laughed to himself.

"Steve, you're a plumb fool—you're loco," he said aloud. "Now you see a bunch of cattle an' now you don't. Do you reckon they was rustled or something right under your eyes? Didn't the boy say there was a fence along here between the rough ground an' the north end of the butte? He did. Do you think they jumped the fence? They didn't. Is there a break in the fence? There might be. But it's a better bet that they was drivin' that bunch over to the range west of the butte."

After this soliloquy he thought rapidly for several minutes.

"I reckon it wouldn't do any harm to look that ground over north of the butte," he concluded, again speaking aloud. "But it ain't noon yet an' it might be better to wait till long in the afternoon. I'll wait for the kid an' ride up to his place for dinner."

He looked and saw the rider with the led horse stop. Then the boy appeared on the horse the man had brought, and they separated. The man rode toward town and the boy started north.

Brent dismounted to wait. He rubbed Hunchy's nose and complimented him on the morning's performance. "You're sure worth five

hundred of *any*body's money, old hoss," he declared in the dun's ear; "an' I wouldn't sell you for twice that much!"

He rolled a cigarette and smoked while the boy came at a gallop. When the youth was nearly opposite him to eastward, Brent mounted and rode out to join him.

Alan Carman's face lit up with genuine joy and admiration when he saw him. He started to praise Brent and his horse, But Brent shook his head. "You shouldn't have gone back there an' tried to steer 'em wrong, son," he said. "I know you was tryin' to help me, an' I sure do appreciate it; but you was gettin' yourself in wrong. You don't want to be so quick to help strangers, Alan."

"But I don't figure you're a stranger —any more," said the boy eagerly. "I feel like I'd knowed you a hundred years!"

Brent frowned, bit his lip, looked vaguely about and then back at the youngster. He seemed to be having trouble to frame what he wanted to say.

"Well, you're a nice kid," he finally blurted out, "an' I ain't had many trustin' friends lately, an' that's a fact. I kind of got on the off trail, son. An' that's what you've got to be careful about. The time to keep out of messes, Alan, is when you're young. If you can steer clear of trouble when you're young you're pretty apt to be able to steer clear of it right on through. But that doesn't mean you should let anybody hang anything on you. Stick up for your rights an'—oh, I reckon I'm gettin' in too deep. How far is it to your place?"

"Only about five miles from here," replied the boy.

"Well, if you've got enough in the cabin to eat, I'll jog along with you an' have dinner," said Brent, grinning.

"There's lots to eat," Alan declared. "Thought you was goin' to work on the Rabbit Foot."

"I am," replied Brent. "But I can report in the afternoon just as well as now an' be more likely to find Lawton there. He's probably out on the range this time of day."

"No he ain't," said the boy. "He took some men an' started north this mornin'. The sheriff kept me with him while they hunted aroun' our place an to the west. Then he got the idea suddenlike that you'd gone into town. Lawton said he'd bet a thousand dollars you was one of Long Pete's gang, an' if they could catch you again they could probably use you to round up Long Pete an' the others."

"Oh, that was Lawton's idea, eh?" Brent said, half to himself. "How long has Lawton been the foreman out here?"

"Five years," the boy answered. "He's done quite a lot. Got Jim Lynch to put in better cattle, thoroughbreds; hired men as knew all about handling such cattle. He says it was puttin' in the good cattle that brought the cow thieves here last fall."

"Did he put the good stuff in the first year he was here?" asked Brent.

"Second year," said the boy. "It took him a year to talk old Lynch into it."

Brent drew his right foot out of the stirrup and swung it idly. "Well, let's see. He must have had his first lot of good beeves last fall, then."

"Sure did," confirmed the boy. "An' as soon as they were ready to ship they began stealin' them. They lost a hundred an' fifty head last fall an' a hundred head this spring, or something like that."

The boy talked eagerly, sincerely, willingly. It was plain he was glad to tell Brent everything he could; that he trusted him and liked him.

"How do you an' your dad get along?" Brent asked suddenly.

"Fine," replied the boy. "He's good to me. Oh, once in awhile——" and

his young face clouded for an instant but brightened immediately.

"Yes," prompted Brent; "once in a while——"

"He comes home feeling kinda bad from town," admitted the boy. "But all the men do that, don't they? I heard they did."

"Yes, most of 'em do," Brent agreed. "There's another thing, son. You want to be careful of towns. Treat 'em like you would a good horse an' they'll be good to you; but try to *ride* 'em an' they'll buck an' throw you. Know what I mean? Don't be too hard with the spurs."

The boy laughed with delight. "I know what you mean," he said. "You mean to stay away from the rough houses."

"You said it," returned Brent, pleased. "But I ain't no preacher."

They turned into the trail that led into the tumbled country north of the butte where the Carman cabin was located. It was the same trail by which Brent had left after midnight. As before, the boy rode ahead. When they came to the corral, Alan cried out.

"Why, there's the horse I let you take. I didn't ask about it because I thought you left it in town."

"An' I didn't mention it because I sent him back with your dad," said Brent, nettled that he was compelled to disclose the fact that he had met the elder Carman in town.

"Oh, you met pa?" asked Alan, his face brightening.

"Just for a minute," said Brent. "We better ride right on to the cabin, don't you think?"

"Sure. Must be pa is there."

But when they reached the meadow where the cabin was located they failed to see Carman's horse in the corral. The boy seemed disappointed, but said nothing as they dismounted, unsaddled, and looked after their horses. They found the cabin empty.

"Guess he rode down to the ranch," the boy decided. "I'll get us some dinner."

"An' I'll help," Brent offered.

But the boy would not accept his assistance. So Brent went out into the meadow and looked around. He crossed to the west side and found a trail which ran through that side of the meadow north and south.

"Must be the trail I came in on last night," he muttered. He found the tracks of horses that had gone north, and there was one fresh track leading south.

"I reckon the kid's right," he thought to himself. "Old Carman's gone down to the ranch."

He went back to the cabin and in a short time dinner was ready. After they had eaten, Brent confessed that he could do with an hour or two of sleep. He did not wish to go down toward the ranch until late in the afternoon, for he wanted to look the ground over at a time when he thought there would be no one north of the butte.

He sought the bunk he had occupied for a time the night before and was soon asleep. He was awakened by the boy shaking him gently.

"You've been asleep more'n three hours," said Alan. "It's after three o'clock."

"Then I'll be on my way," said Brent, getting up. "Your dad home yet?"

The boy shook his head. "He's gone down to the ranch, I guess. He'll be home by supper time, though."

Brent bridled and saddled his horse and asked the boy about the trail south. He learned that the trail leading through the west side of the meadow led south, but that there was a trail turning off from it about three miles down that led to a gate in the fence directly north of the butte. He thanked the boy, promised to come to see him again, and started down the trail.

He rode slowly, trying to see what he could of the tumbled country through which he was passing. From the tops of the small ridges he crossed he got a fair idea of the lay of the land. He saw that the rough ground extended to the foothills of the mountains some miles west.

When he came to the fork of the trail, leading to the right in a southwesterly direction, he took it. He saw the imprints of hoofs in the trail and surmised that Carman had gone that way. He noted, too, that many other trails merged with this trail as he rode along, and decided that the rough country was a network of game and old cow trails to westward similar to the labyrinth of trails and paths in the bad lands of the river far to eastward. The district was, in fact, a bad lands on a small scale.

He came to where the trail he was following merged with another well-worn trail that led up a high ridge to the right—on the west. He decided to climb this trail for an observation from the crest of the ridge. When he reached the top of the ridge he found he could see over all the country for many miles.

The foothills were close at hand in the west; northward the rough country extended as far as he could see; eastward it extended for three miles or so, and beyond was the open prairie; southward was Rabbit Butte and the range where Rabbit Foot cattle were grazing.

Brent looked southward with a puzzled expression on his face. He could find no sign of the small herd of cattle he had seen north of the butte. The herd was not west of the butte as he had thought. Had the cattle been driven back to the south range?

Nearer the southern edge of the tumbled country, about a quarter of a mile away, he saw a sight that caused him to whistle. Two horsemen were gesturing, their horses moving uneasily. It was plain, even at that distance, that the men were engaged in a heated argument of some sort. Brent could not make out who they were, and as he watched they suddenly separated, one riding south, shaking his fist at the other who rode north, straight for the rough country.

Brent hurriedly descended the slope of the ridge to the main trail and galloped southward. When he thought he had covered half the distance to the edge of the bad lands he turned off the trail behind a screen of cedar bushes.

In a few minutes he heard the ring of hoofs on the trail below him and a rider came into sight, pulling up his horse against the grade. Brent recognized Carman. It had been he who had been arguing with the horseman at the edge of the rough country. It did not take Brent long to make up his mind. He waited until Carman had nearly gained the top of the grade and then rode out from the shelter of the bushes and trees and blocked his way in the trail.

Carman recognized him with an inarticulate cry that sounded like a snarl.

"Hello, Carman," he greeted, as if he hadn't noticed the other's displeasure at sight of him. "Been home yet?"

Carman's manner suddenly underwent a striking change. Suspicion shone in his eyes. His manner lost its aggressiveness. He became almost meek.

"Yes, I was home," he said mildly. "Left the horse an' rode down to the Rabbit Foot to see if I could get a job for the rest of the summer."

"I'm lookin' for the same thing," said Brent with a smile. "Did you have any luck?"

"No," replied Carman shortly. "They're not takin' on any men. Guess you'll have to go south of Rangeview if you want work. You can make town by a little after dark an' get down there

in the mornin'. Lots of good outfits down there."

His effort to direct him away from the Rabbit Foot was not lost on Brent. "Who is the boss down below?" he asked.

"Cow boss is Nagel," said Carman with a light frown. "Won't do you no good to see him."

"Did you see him?" Brent inquired.

"Yes," replied Carman uneasily. "Turned me down flat. Why don't you hit south? I would, but I live up here."

Brent edged his horse closer to Carman's and looked at him steadily. "Ain't Lawton the big gun down there?" he asked.

"If you knew it, why'd you ask me?" flared out Carman. "You've got a funny way of talkin' an' actin'. What *are* you? An association man?"

"I never worked for a cattlemen's association in my life," said Brent. "I'm lookin' for somebody."

The uneasy manner returned. "Who you lookin' for?" asked Carman.

"I'm lookin' for *Long Pete!*" said Brent, leaning forward in the saddle.

He saw Carman start. The man looked at him quickly in a wild way. He looked aside an instant later and wet his lips. He gave Brent the impression that he was afraid of him, or, he might be terrorized at mention of the rustler's name.

"What you want him for?" he managed to ask.

"I want to give him a message."

Carman shifted in his saddle. His gaze, when he again looked at Brent, was puzzled.

"Who from?" he asked with a crafty glint in his eyes.

Brent's brows went up. "I reckon I can't tell you that," he replied coldly. He couldn't decide whether it was cunning or understanding that gleamed in Carman's eyes.

"You know where my place is, an' how to get there?" asked Carman. "You said you'd been there an' seen my boy."

"I know where it is," Brent said with a nod.

"You be there at midnight," said Carman.

"That's straight goods, Carman?" said Brent soberly.

Carman shrugged. "I said it."

"I'll be there," said Brent, turning out of the trail so the other could pass.

He sat his horse quietly for some minutes, staring after the man until he had disappeared around a turn in the trail.

"Now, dang it!" he muttered. "I wanted to see what effect the name would have on him an' look what I stepped into. Hunchy, this is sure gettin' interestin'. An' I can't make that hombre out. Well, anyway, I've got time to size up the ranch an' beat it back."

He rode down the trail and in a short time came to the gate. It was plain from the condition of the trail that no cattle were moved through the gate. He passed through and rode west along the fence. He continued for two miles, but could see no sign where any considerable number of cattle had been driven in that direction, nor were there any evidences that there had been any breaks in the fence.

"Maybe Long Pete just naturally drives 'em south," he thought. "Why not? But where this bunch went to that was up here to-day's got me."

It was sunset and he turned back. He rode within a quarter of a mile of the gate, so as to fix its exact location in his mind, and then turned south, directly toward the butte. He looked closely at the grass, but could not determine whether there had been much grazing there or not.

When he reached the rolling slopes that formed the lower part of the north side of the high butte he turned westward. It was a flat country around

the butte, and he estimated it was fully fifteen miles around the four sides. The butte itself was a miniature mountain on the plain.

The twilight was falling, veiling the land in blue and purple mists, as he turned along the west side of the butte. Then he heard the echoes of flying hoofs. He looked behind and saw two riders dashing around the north side toward him. He hesitated, in doubt as to whether to wait and meet them or make away. Then he remembered Carman's advice to be at his place at midnight. If he should wait for the two horsemen he might be delayed for some reason and fail to keep the appointment at Carman's. He decided to avoid the two oncoming riders, and even as he arrived at the decision, he wondered which way they had come from.

He tickled Hunchy with his spurs and the dun broke into a gallop. At that instant there were two streaks of red in the dusk and two guns barked.

Brent turned west, letting Hunchy out. The pursuers cut west also. As they were north of Brent, the direction in which he wanted to go, he had to pass them. He pushed his horse, edging northwest, with the pair of riders coming for him at a tangent. There were more shots, and lead whistled past his ears.

Brent's eyes flashed. He saw that they might be able to cut him off from the gate even if he made the edge of the timber on the west slope; for he would have to turn back. A bullet nearly tore the hat from his head.

"That means business!" he cried aloud, and turned his horse on a straight line for the gate.

One of the men was closer to him than the other and this man rode directly at him, his gun blazing.

Brent drew his weapon, turned his horse slightly to the left, rose in the stirrups, and fired.

The approaching rider leaned far to the right in his saddle while his horse reared. Then he tumbled, and his horse lunged forward dragging him with a foot in the stirrup.

Brent turned and raced toward the horse's head. The other rider was coming up and firing. The stricken man's foot came loose from the stirrup and he lay motionless on the ground while the horse dashed away.

Bullets were flying again and Brent once more struck for the gate. He found the man who was following was mounted on the best horse ridden by any man he had met that day. For a moment he wondered if the pair could be members of the band of rustlers. He spurred Hunchy and gained. The man behind had quit firing. Then Brent approached the fence and the gate.

"Here's where we show 'em something, hoss!"

He kept his spurs against the horse's flanks and the animal sailed over the fence and gate, struck the hard trail on the other side, and plunged into the shadow of the trees.

CHAPTER IX.

MAN TO MAN.

IN the shadows Brent drew his mount up sharply. He listened and heard the dull echoes of hoofs retreating across the plain. The rider who had followed him was going back to the aid of his injured companion; perhaps he would find him dead. Brent shrugged. He had wanted no trouble of the kind, but he had had no alternative. He had fled from the second man to avoid the necessity of shooting him. He was lucky, indeed, that he hadn't been shot himself.

He considered two phases of the situation for a few moments. If he had waited for them and they had proved to be Rabbit Foot men, he would have had no trouble in establishing his right

to be on that range. But he could not have avoided going back to the ranch with them, a thing he did not wish to do. He had no intention of not being at Carman's cabin at midnight. On the other hand, if the men were rustlers, he might not have got away with his life; at best he would have been taken away captive. He shrugged again. He had taken the only course open to him. If he had shot a Rabbit Foot man, they would have to acknowledge that he was justified under the circumstances, although Lawton could make trouble for him for a time.

His thoughts reverted to the strange behavior of Frank Carman and his strange answer when Brent had said he wanted to see Long Pete.

"Why should I wait for midnight?" Brent asked himself. "Why not get on the ground an' keep an eye on the place? Where's your dog-gone brains, Steve?"

He chuckled to himself as he reloaded his weapon. He started up the trail into the bad lands by the way he had come. It was dark now, and the stars were out. He passed the intersection where the trail led up the high ridge and later passed the other trail leading southeast—the trail by which he had first entered the bad lands. He now knew he couldn't get off the trail to the meadow where Carman's cabin was located, for there were no more intersections.

He rode slowly, keeping a wary eye on the starlit vistas ahead. He could not bring himself to believe that Carman could get into communication with Long Pete; but he was not convinced that the man had no connection with the rustlers. He had spoken of a cow boss named Nagel. Perhaps Carman really *had* been down there asking for a job. It might have been Nagel he was arguing with north of the butte. That would seem to explain the matter.

After all, Carman appeared a rather timid man. He had shown fight in Rangeview that morning, but he had been fired by the raw white liquor. It had died out of him quickly enough. And he gave the impression of being shiftless. The boy had said his father was trying to get a start in the cattle business for himself, but he hadn't seemed to know much about him.

And the two riders—where had they come from? And the vanished herd!

I want excitement for a middle name,
An' here, I reckon, I've found the same;
Trail a loose rope an' gather it in,
For you're sure in a country that's steeped in sin.

Brent hummed softly. And so he came to the meadow and saw a light in Carman's cabin window. He dismounted and led his horse off the trail. Hunchy had been well fed that noon and had grazed until nearly four o'clock on the rich grass of the meadow. Therefore he was in good shape. Brent tied him to a tree and loosened the cinch of the saddle. Then he rolled a cigarette, lighted it in the shelter of the trees and bushes and, keeping its glowing end cupped in his palm, went back to where he had a good view of the meadow and the cabin. He sat down to wait.

There was no movement about the cabin; nor could Brent see any horses in the corrals behind the shed. After a time he became uneasy and decided to investigate. He rose and walked slowly in the shelter of the trees to the east side of the meadow. Then he proceeded north until he was close to the corrals behind the shed and cabin. He had ascertained that the cabin door was closed. Light shone in both windows of the larger of the two rooms.

He waited again for a spell near the corrals and then stole softly to the shed. He looked in and found there were no horses there. The cabin windows were open, but he could hear no sound from within. He made his way cautiously

to one of the windows and peered in. The boy, Alan, was sitting by the table, asleep in his chair. There was no one else in the room.

Brent stepped back with a frown and looked quickly around. Carman had left the cabin. Still it was to be expected, he reflected. If the man was in earnest when he intimated that some one would be there to meet Brent, he would naturally have to go for him. Brent was undecided, but finally he went around to the door and let himself in.

He woke the boy, who jumped up with a start and threw up his hands as if to ward off a blow. When he recognized Brent he dropped them, looked foolish, and then smiled.

Brent wondered if some one had struck the boy—his father, perhaps. "Where's your dad?" he asked.

"Dunno. He went out soon's he had supper an' rode away." The boy's tone was worried, and there was a glimmer of doubt in his eyes.

Brent sat down. "What's the matter, son? Didn't your dad like it because I'd been here?"

The boy smiled again, apparently reassured. "Guess he didn't," he confessed. "Reckon he heard how we sort of traveled together last night, an' he gave me the dickens."

"Was he—rough?" asked Brent.

"No—no," stammered the boy loyally, although Brent could see he had hit the mark.

"Looks like the two of us is bound to be tied together in trouble, sonny," said Brent, patting the boy on the knee. "But I reckon we'll pull out. I'm goin' to get out of here because I don't want anybody to come along an' find us here chinnin'. I wouldn't care so far's *I* was concerned, but you've got to stay outside this business from now on."

"You had your supper?" asked Alan.

"I sure have," lied Brent cheerfully. "I was expectin' somebody to show up here, maybe, an' later I want to see your dad. But if anybody comes before I show up, just forget I was here—mind?"

The boy nodded with another smile as Brent slipped to the door. But Brent didn't go out at once. He stood frowning for a moment, then his brow cleared. "You don't have to forget I was here, son," he said slowly. "You just needn't *say* I was here onless your dad or somebody asks you. Then tell 'em the truth." He went out the door.

Before he could reach the shed he heard horses galloping into the meadow from the south trail. There was no time to make the shadow of the trees. The riders were coming at a gallop—two of them. Brent ran behind the cabin into the shed which was a three-sided affair, open on the side toward the cabin.

He was hardly in the shadow when the horsemen rode up to the first corral and dismounted. He leaned out in an effort to catch a glimpse of the men, and a weight hit him, throwing him to the ground with a force which nearly knocked the wind out of him. An arm twisted around his neck.

"I've got him!" his assailant cried in hoarse satisfaction.

Brent recognized Bill Lawton's voice. He hunched his back in a tremendous effort and literally doubled under, breaking Lawton's hold around his neck and partly throwing him off. This gave him a momentary advantage, and he was quick to avail himself of it. He jerked free of Lawton's right arm and brought his left elbow up with all his strength. It struck Lawton on the jaw, and the Rabbit Foot foreman grunted. Then Brent came clear and leaped to his feet just as Lawton's companion rushed to his aid. It was Carman, and Brent planted his right square on the point of the man's chin. Carman went down like a log.

But Lawton was up and rushing in.

Brent leaped clear of the shadow of the shed with Lawton after him. He side-stepped. and Lawton's fist shot past his face. Brent got in a left uppercut and as the larger man turned for another swing he drove his right to the face. Lawton staggered back.

The boy had come out of the cabin and was shouting to his father. "You stay out of it, pa; one on a man is enough!"

Carman was getting to his feet. Lawton came in with another swing, and Brent caught a glancing blow on the head. He dove under the larger man's guard and landed another uppercut. Then Lawton attempted to clinch.

Brent kept out of his way. Lawton had the advantage of weight, and he was strong. Brent had no wish to indulge in a give-and-take wrestling match. He danced about with both Lawton and Carman trying to get hold of him. He was watching, too, for one of the men to go for his gun, but evidently they had no thought of resorting to such measures.

It was Lawton who finally threw Carman out of the way with a curse, and rushed headlong at Brent in an effort to either get a hold on him or hit him. Brent slipped in the grass and received the big man's right on the left side of his face. The blow sent him spinning to the ground in front of the shed, but before Lawton could leap upon him he scrambled back into the darkness and got to his feet. As he did so he realized instantly that he had lost his gun.

Lawton retreated from the shadow, doubtless fearing that Brent would leap upon him or trip him and escape in the darkness.

"Stay where you are!" rang Brent's voice. "I don't figure you want any gun play, Lawton, but if you make another move, *I'll let you have it!*"

The command, coming out of the darkness, while Lawton was in the light of the stars, had its effect. The big man stool still, breathing heavily.

Brent stepped softly toward the front of the shed, "feeling" of the ground with his feet. His booted toe came in contact with a hard object. He stooped and recovered his gun. But its possession did not change his attitude. And he was thinking faster than he had ever thought before.

"I reckon you better put 'em up, Lawton," he said in an ominous voice.

The Rabbit Foot foreman obeyed. Brent stepped out into the starlight, keeping an eye on Carman, who was standing with the boy some distance away.

"What's the idea in the merry festivities?" Brent inquired.

There was no answer.

"You want to do me up? Is that the idea, Lawton?"

"I want to put you where you belong," said Lawton harshly.

"That's just what I wanted to see you about," said Brent, cheerful again. "But I didn't figure on bein' so rough about it."

"Go ahead an' shoot your fool mouth off," snarled out Lawton. "We didn't try to get the drop on you with a gun."

"But you fell on me like a ton of brick when I wasn't lookin'," Brent complained. "I might have known you were comin' too fast across the meadow for me to make the shed without bein' seen. You still actin' for the sheriff?"

"There's no sense in answerin' your questions," growled out Lawton.

"Then turn aroun' an' march to the door of the cabin," said Brent sternly. "You, too, Carman—I'm watchin' you."

Carman raised his hands of his own accord and the pair walked to the front of the cabin.

"Wait a minute!" Brent commanded. "I reckon I better go ahead."

He stepped past them, backed into the cabin, and ordered them to follow. He kept them covered as they entered.

"Was this the gentleman who was to lead me to Long Pete, or take the message?" he asked Carman.

Carman appeared too befuddled to talk.

"If anybody knows anything about Pete, you're that hombre," said Lawton with a black look.

"So *that's* it," said Brent smilingly. "Carman thought he better report the matter of my little request to headquarters, eh? An' have me here so you could pick me up. Well, Lawton, you ain't overburdened with brains. Funny you got back from the north so quick."

Lawton glared. "Go ahead. Get to the point, whatever it is."

"It ain't a point," said Brent in a smooth voice; "it ain't a point, Lawton, it's a letter." He drew the note Lynch had written from a pocket and held it out to the Rabbit Foot foreman.

"Take it with your left hand an' read it, Lawton; but don't get careless with your right."

Lawton took the note as directed and scanned it. A look of stupefaction showed on his face. He stared at Brent in bewilderment. Then his eyes blazed.

"I had you pegged as a four-flusher from the start!"

Brent's eyes narrowed, and he pressed his lips into a white line.

"I believe you poked a gun in Lynch's ribs an' made him write that," said Lawton with a sneer.

"That might have happened," Brent agreed.

Lawton was nettled at this retort. "What do you want of me?" he asked darkly.

"Nothin' much—if you think that letter's a fake or was forced," Brent said coolly.

"You're playin' a crafty game," said Lawton. "You didn't come here just to make trouble. You've been movin' aroun' quite regular. Callin' yourself Long Pete!" He sneered again. "An' wantin' to send a message to him. I wouldn't be surprised if while you've drew me up here the rest of your gang was workin' at my stock!"

"That could be," Brent admitted.

"You've called yourself what you are, you—you—*cow thief!*"

"Lawton, you can drop your right hand!"

Brent slipped his gun in its sheath.

The letter fluttered to the floor. For a space of several seconds the men looked into each other's eyes as Lawton's hand come slowly down. It hung at his belt line for an instant, then flashed into action as Brent dropped to the left, whipped out his weapon, and fired twice before Lawton could complete his draw. There was a crash of glass and the room was plunged in darkness as Lawton's gun roared.

Brent had fired at the lamp!

Again Lawton's gun roared, and again—until it was empty. Then silence. After a time there was a rasping sound and a match flared into flame. Lawton peered about in the faint light.

"Get another lamp," he commanded hoarsely.

The match went out. Some one was moving. Lawton struck another match, and the boy came with a new lamp. Lawton touched the wick with a burning match and when it lighted, he looked around. The curses streamed from his lips.

Brent was gone.

CHAPTER X.

A FORCED HAND.

AT nine o'clock next morning Steve Brent sauntered into the little office of Sheriff Ed Furness in the brick jail in Rangeview.

Furness was at his flat-topped desk, and when he saw who his visitor was he sat back in his chair, tipped his derby over his eyes, and thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his vest.

"Good mornin', Ed," said Steve Brent.

"Did you come in to give yourself up?" asked the sheriff pleasantly.

"I thought you was goin' to say give myself away, sheriff," answered Brent.

"You're already done that," declared Furness, tipping back his derby.

"So?" Brent looked surprised. "I thought I was playin' my hand sort of neat."

"You was—till you failed to show up at the Rabbit Foot yesterday noon," said the sheriff.

"How news travels in this country," Brent complained. "That must be why everything's named after rabbits. Everything is on the hop, skip, an' jump."

"Including you," the sheriff added. "Where from this morning?"

"I've had a deplorable—there's a good word, Ed—a deplorable experience," said Brent in sorrowful tones. "I had to spend most of the night on top of a high ridge in that bad-land country north of the butte."

"Watching for smoke signals from Long Pete, I suppose," said Furness with a wry smile.

"Well, I might have seen a signal, at that," replied Brent. "An' then I might have imagined it. I've got a good imagination, Ed."

"You have," Furness agreed. "Almost too good. I sometimes think you're a little cracked."

"It would look that way from the way I've flirted with you, Ed; but then, it ain't every man in this country that knows how to handle you."

"What's *that?*" exclaimed Furness, bringing his feet down off the rungs of his chair.

"No offense, your worship," said Brent with a wave of the hand. "Just an idle thought."

"No, it ain't an idle thought!" thundered the sheriff, slamming the desk with his fist. "You're playin' me for a sucker!"

"I'm glad you see finally that there's something serious in this," said Brent coolly.

"I'm goin' to lock you up," said Furness with determination, "till I can get your pedigree."

"I'm wearin' it on the right-hand side, mister," said Brent in a hard voice, "an' I'm ready to save you the trouble of goin' to Texas or blazes to find out about me *any* time!"

"Oh, you're coming clean," said Furness, his eyes narrowing.

"Call it that if you want to," was Brent's retort; "but I'm here on business an' the pleasantries are all over, so far's *I'm* concerned."

The sheriff smiled. "I'm givin' you plenty of rope," he hinted.

"An' I'm goin' to start takin' up the slack," said Brent. "The hoss deal ain't over as I look at it. You're the sheriff of this county. I want you to go out to the Rabbit Foot an' get my saddle an' bridle that was on the black hoss when Lawton took him back."

"You *what?*" exclaimed Furness with a gasp.

"Now you're not hard of hearin'," said Brent impatiently. "I want the saddle. I can't go near that ranch without some of those hombres out there opening up on me with their six-guns. They must need practice or else they reckon I'm a natural target. I didn't think Lawton would be there at noon yesterday, an' I drifted up to the Carman place with the kid for dinner. I had another reason for that move that I ain't explainin' right now. I met Lawton later, an' he laughed at Jim's note an' the guns came out. I passed him up. He's still breathin' the good old prairie air. If he's got any sense, he'll probably ride in to-day to find out if the note was O. K. But I ain't waitin' for that. I'm goin' out there an' get my property, the *first* thing. All I'm askin' *you,* sheriff, is do you want me to go *alone?*"

Ed Furness showed by his manner

that the pleasantries also were all over with him. He looked into Brent's eyes for some moments. Then he looked out the window and frowned. When he again looked at Brent it was with a certain measure of respect.

"I think I understand you," he said. "An' maybe I better go out there with you. You still want to work on that ranch?"

"Not with your assistance," answered Brent.

The sheriff raised his brows. "But you're askin' me to help you get your saddle," he pointed out.

"I'm protectin' myself an' Lawton," said Brent coldly.

Furness drummed on his desk with his fingers a few moments. "I'll step over an' see Jim Lynch a minute an' then we'll go out," he said, rising.

"I reckon I wouldn't do that," said Brent sharply.

"Why not?" asked the sheriff quickly.

Brent put his hands on his hips and looked squarely at the other. "Sheriff," he said slowly, "how long have you known there isn't any Long Pete?"

Ed Furness never batted an eye. "Since I saw the first note he was supposed to have left," he replied.

Brent smiled, and his eyes twinkled. "You ain't got any ideas about his—his ghost, have you?" he suggested.

"If I have, I'm keepin' 'em to myself," Furness returned.

"I reckon that reward is the straight goods, Ed."

"It is. My name's signed to it."

"I suppose you can raise a bunch of men here on short notice for—special duty?" asked Brent.

"I didn't lose much time gettin' started after you," said Furness.

Brent reached in a pocket and drew out an object. He laid it on the desk. The sheriff looked at it and saw a blue poker check with the white outlines of a miniature Goddess of Liberty on it. He looked at Brent questioningly.

"If a messenger brings you that reminder of the blue-cloth tables, sheriff, you hustle your bunch an' beat it where he, she or it tells you." With which remark Brent replaced the check in his pocket.

Furness regarded him closely. "You seen the ghost?" he asked, almost politely.

"You can't put your fingers on a ghost, Ed—but you can pay rewards on one! Are you ready to start?"

"Yes, we'll go," decided Furness.

They went to the barn for their horses and in a few minutes were riding at a fast gallop for the Rabbit Foot Ranch. They rode half the distance before a word was spoken. It was Brent who broke the silence.

"The thing I can't understand, sheriff, is what you were doin' out at that spring east of here the day I arrived in the country."

"If you'd been a little sooner you'd have caught me tacking up that reward notice on the cottonwood tree," replied Furness.

Brent grinned amiably. "I see now why you wear a derby hat," he said.

For the first time during their association, Sheriff Ed Furness smiled in genuine pleasure. "You said that thinking I'd tell you, Brent; but I'm not goin' to do it."

When they arrived at the ranch, Furness asked at once for Lawton. They found the Rabbit Foot foreman in his little office in the front of the ranch house.

"This man wants his saddle and bridle," said Furness to Lawton in a businesslike voice.

Lawton looked keenly at Brent, but gave no sign that he was thinking of what had taken place the night before. Brent waited for him to tell the sheriff of the shooting of the man west of the butte, but Lawton made no mention of it.

"Sure," he said. "Come right along

and I'll get it." He led the way out of the house to the barn.

Brent was puzzled. Hadn't he shot one of the Rabbit Foot men? And if he had, why should Lawton choose to conceal the fact? Perhaps the explosion would come later.

Lawton pointed to the saddle and bridle on a peg near the door. "Help yourself," he said.

Brent brought his horse and quickly changed saddles and bridles. "This outfit belongs to Carman," he said as he hung the other bridle and saddle on the peg. "I reckon you'll see that he gets 'em when he comes down again—or maybe I'll take 'em back later." He saw Lawton's eyes narrow.

But the Rabbit Foot foreman recovered and smiled at Furness. "Nice day," he said. "Did this gent swear out a warrant?"

The sheriff shook his head. "He was figurin' on coming after his property alone, an' I thought I might as well ride out. Ain't taking on any new hands?"

"Not recent," said Lawton, without looking at Brent. "Had some applications, but I ain't looked up the references."

Brent swung into the saddle. "Where's Nagel, the cow boss?" he asked Lawton.

"On the lower range," replied Lawton, frowning.

"So long, Ed," said Brent cheerily.

"Where you goin'?" demanded the sheriff.

"I'm goin' down an' see Nagel an' report for work," Brent called over his shoulder as he tickled his horse with his spurs and galloped away.

CHAPTER XI.

SLIPPERY RANGE.

BRENT reported to Nagel, showed him the letter he had retrieved from the floor of the Carman cabin the night before, and then waited for orders.

Nagel looked at his horse with a grin. "Expect that's a good hoss for cuttin' out," he said.

"He can get in among 'em," said Brent. "All I've got to do is point out the cow an' calf I want out of the bunch an' then I can go to sleep."

"Did Lawton send you down?"

"Nope. He saw the letter first, though. He was talkin' with the sheriff an' I asked where you was an' came on down."

Nagel eyed him narrowly, and Brent noted that the man had a cruel face.

"Wasn't you the man that made the hoss deal with Lawton?" Nagel asked.

"I was," replied Brent.

"An' the sheriff chased you, caught you an' made you go to work, eh?" said Nagel with a coarse laugh.

Brent winked. "The sheriff ain't given me any orders that's bothered me," he said. "But I don't mind workin' cows."

Nagel laughed again. "All right. Slope down there where that lower bunch of whitefaces is an' see they don't get too close to the Mexican border."

"Which ain't more'n a thousand mile south, I reckon," answered Brent, grinning. "I've ridden it."

"You from down that way?" asked Nagel, interested.

"I've played it from Sierra Blanca to Nogales," boasted Brent. "An' I've seen longhorns blown clean across the Rio Grande by dust storms." He rode off, leaving Nagel sitting his horse looking after him.

"I had an idea," he muttered to himself. "This crowd has been in those same dust storms. He knew what I meant; I saw it in his eye. An' that sheriff is wiser than Billy-be-damn!" he concluded in a tone of admiration.

He worked the rest of the day without seeing Lawton. That night Nagel ordered him to the bunk house.

"Won't break you in night work yet," he said, looking sharply at Brent.

"I've been known to see things in the dark—an' miss others," was Brent's only comment.

For the next three days he was on the southernmost part of the range. He saw Lawton, but the foreman took no notice of him. Nor did he hear anything of any Rabbit Foot man having been shot. The men in the bunk house were close-mouthed and eyed him surreptitiously. He, in turn, seemed to take no notice of them, although he was studying them closely.

When a week had passed Lawton rode down to see him. "Sheriff told me your letter was all right," he said coldly.

"Glad you got your reference," Brent retorted.

"You must have some kind of a pull with the old man," Lawton commented.

"Think so?" Brent inquired. "He asked me to go to work for him the first day I hit town."

"So I hear," said Lawton, leaning on his saddle horn. "I reckon Miss Carol thinks you're a top hand, too."

"She ain't had much chance to get acquainted with me," said Brent, looking him in the eye.

"Don't know but what she wants to know you better," said Lawton with the ghost of a smile."

"That's her privilege, any time," said Brent.

"Guess to-night's as good a time as any, then,' suggested Lawton. "Report at my office at six o'clock." And he rode away leaving Brent scowling in perplexity.

"*Now,* what's the play?" he asked himself. "Lawton maybe thinks he has *me* thinkin' he's actin' natural, but I ain't been eatin' loco so's he could notice it."

When he walked into Lawton's office at the ranch house at six o'clock, the foreman scowled as though he had to give an order that was distasteful to him.

"Get your supper, slick up a bit—if you want to—an' beat it on into town," he said crisply. "I think there's a dance or something in there to-night."

"So? How many of the boys are goin' in?"

"Just you an' Nagel," said Lawton with a half sneer. "I expect you'll be guests of honor."

"Invitation from his nibs, the big boss?" inquired Brent jovially.

"Go do as you're told an' don't be standing there askin' questions," snarled out Lawton. "You're not receivin' invitations; you're takin' orders!"

"An' this ought to be an easy order to fill," Brent shot back over his shoulder as he departed.

He left the ranch with Nagel soon after supper. The cow boss seemed in a happy mood and explained that he only got one chance for a visit to town, except on business, between the spring round-up and the fall beef shipment.

"We'll make a night of it," he said with a wink. "You do the dancin' an' I'll look after the pasteboards. I reckon we're both gamblin', only——"

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," said Brent coldly.

Nagel laughed loudly. But Brent was trying to figure it all out. Had Carol Lynch told her uncle she would like to see him again and had her uncle ordered Lawton to send him in to a dance? It seemed preposterous. Yet in their only meeting, Brent had divined that Carol Lynch was a girl of spirit. An imp of devilment had lurked in her eyes. She might do such a thing as have him ordered into town if she felt a passing interest in him. He experienced a thrill, and then laughed at himself inwardly. Well, she was a mighty likable girl, and if she wanted him for a guest at a dance or a party—he was willing.

They galloped into town after dark and put up their horses at the barn. Nagel suggested that they visit one of the three resorts of Rangeview and

Brent agreed. But with one drink, which he insisted on buying, Brent ended his activity in that quarter, and Nagel's arguments proved in vain.

Brent ascertained that there was indeed a dance in town that night, and that it had started. He had shed his chaps and spurs and gun at the barn and he now proceeded direct to the hall where the dance was being held, accompanied by Nagel, who said he "wanted to see what it looked like" while he could "still see."

The hall was a one-story building and was well filled when they arrived. Brent took up his position to one side of the door, and it was not long before he saw Carol Lynch. She saw him at the same time and left the bench, where she was the center of attraction between numbers, and came toward him.

"How do you do, Mr.—there, I came near saying it right out loud," she laughed in greeting, holding out her hand.

Brent took the hand, conscious that the red was burning through his tan.

"You might as well say it, ma'am; I reckon it wouldn't startle anybody."

"But it wouldn't be polite," she said; "for I'm giving this dance and you are one of the guests. Do you dance?"

"I dance at it," he answered her smilingly, "but it's been some while since I had any practice."

"Then you must start right now to get back into form." The orchestra had struck up, and she led him out on the floor. He still held his hat. He held it in the hand he put about her waist when they went into the dance.

"Did you send word out to the ranch for me to come in?" he asked as they began to waltz.

"There! He starts out dancing perfectly and asking questions. You are indeed accomplished, Mr. Brent."

"You mustn't jolly me, Miss Carol, because I'm a very serious-minded person. You see, I had a girl once who was a school-teacher———"

"I knew it," said the girl. "You're a top hand with the ladies as well as the men!"

"I see it's no use," he complained. "But I really *would* like to know if you sent an invitation out for me."

"All right—I did. Wasn't that all right?"

"It sure was, ma'am. I was wonderin' why."

"I wanted to tell you I'd heard some good things about you," she said.

"Somebody must have a good imagination, ma'am."

"Not unless it's the sheriff," she said merrily. "He told me how you insisted on protecting that young Carman boy."

"Shucks, that wasn't anything, ma'am. I got the boy in trouble an' it was up to me to try an' get him out of it again."

"Still, I'm inclined to believe you are more of a Samaritan than an outlaw, Mr. Brent."

"A Samaritan? That's a good word, Miss Carol. So first I'm an outlaw an' then I'm a Samaritan. *I* don't know which I like best!"

"Maybe you're both," she answered. "The Outlaw Samaritan. I don't think you're *all* bad, Mr. Brent."

"Don't be too sure," he warned. "Did you invite Nagel, too?"

"Who is Nagel?"

"Our cow boss."

"Oh, I remember him. No, I guess I overlooked him. Is he here, too? I don't see how Mr. Lawton can spare two such valuable men at once. Last fall when *he* was in to a dance this Pete person made away with some cattle."

Brent sobered. The dance was over, and he led her to her seat. She was immediately surrounded and told him she would introduce him around.

"You'll have to excuse me, Miss Carol. I'm still holding my hat." With

that he backed away and retreated behind the ring of admirers that formed about her.

He did not see Nagel on the way out, but he met the sheriff.

"Ed, I'm a Samaritan!" he said to that astonished official. "But I'm still packin' the blue check!"

He hurried down the street and in the shadows near the barn he stopped to think. Nagel hadn't been invited. Had Lawton sent him along to keep an eye on him, Brent? And cattle had been stolen when Lawton was at a dance the fall before!

Brent hurried into the barn. He put on his chaps and spurs and gun. Jake, the barn man, was out and Brent bridled and saddled his horse. He led him out the rear door and through the trees to the prairie. Then he mounted, drove in his spurs, and raced like mad in the direction of Rabbit Butte.

CHAPTER XII.

HUNCHES WIN.

BRENT rode as swift as the gallant horse could carry him. Straight for the butte at first, and then in a northwesterly direction toward the bad lands.

"Maybe we're wrong, old hoss," he cried aloud; "but we're goin' to play our hunches to win."

In less than two hours he was in the shadow of the tumbled ridges and gnarled trees north of the butte. He rode in around the fence on the trail by which he had first entered the bad lands. He followed this trail until he came to the intersection where the other trail led to the gate in the fence. He turned into this trail and proceeded slowly until he reached the gate. There he halted in the shadow of the trees and looked at the north side of the butte and listened. Faint noises came to his ears—dull echoes that barely sounded on the light breeze.

He watched for half an hour and then turned and retraced his way along the trail. But when he reached the intersection he did not turn. He kept on the trail to the north. He quickened his pace, for his horse was sure-footed; took advantage of every starlit meadow to urge his mount into a gallop. And finally he came to the meadow where was located the Carman cabin.

He galloped to the door, dismounted, and entered unceremoniously. The fact that the door was not barred was proof that Carman was not there, that the boy had left the door unbarred in anticipation of his father's return.

He struck a match and looked into the bedroom. The boy was asleep in one of the bunks. The other bunk was unoccupied. Brent woke the youth.

"Alan," he said as soon as he had lighted a lamp and the boy was thoroughly awake, "will you do something for me? Something to-night—*now?*"

The boy nodded, struck by the earnestness of Brent's manner.

"All right, get your clothes on in a hurry, son."

While the boy was dressing, Brent took out a handkerchief, dropped into it the blue poker check with the white impression of the miniature Goddess of Liberty, and tied the handkerchief in a knot.

He gave it to the boy when he was ready. "Put that away in a pocket, son, where you won't lose it." He watched while the boy obeyed. "Now get your hoss an' ride like the devil himself was after you till you get to town. Leave your hoss anywhere an' find Ed Furness. Give that knotted handkerchief to Ed, tell him to look into it an' to come to the lower trail into the rough country north of Rabbit Butte. Do you understand, son?"

The boy nodded soberly and repeated his instructions.

"All right, Alan," said Brent, taking the boy's hand. "Now ride as fast as

you can, an' find Ed Furness as fast as you can, an' tell him as fast as you can. He'll know what to do. Then you take your hoss to the barn, go to the hotel an' get yourself a room an' some sleep, or come back slow—just as you like."

He stuffed a bill into the boy's boot top. "While you're gone, I'm goin' to try to do something good for your dad an' you. Now slope, son!"

The boy went out on the run and disappeared in the shadows on his way to the hidden horse corral.

Brent mounted and rode back the south trail, past the first intersection, to the intersection where the trail led up to the crest of the high ridge. He climbed this, and on the top he dismounted and looked below to the south.

"Hunches win!" he exclaimed softly.

Trailing along from the north side of the butte was a weaving, black shadow. One end was near the butte; the other was lost in the shadows of the foothills at the northwest corner where the prairie was shut off by the bad lands. A low murmur of sound rode on the wind, with an occasional bellow.

Cattle were on the move!

Other shadows sped swiftly on either side of the strung-out herd—riders keeping the cattle in hand.

Brent kept his gaze on these riders, straining his eyes to watch them. Finally one, riding more slowly than the rest, came down from the northwest corner, halfway between the herd and the fence.

Brent flung himself on his horse and rode down the ridge. He dashed along the trail to the gate and sent his horse flying over it. Then he raced toward this lone rider and was upon him in the shadows almost before the other was aware of his nearness.

"Carman!" he said in a sharp undertone, bringing his horse around in front of the man's mount.

Carman recognized him by voice and posture in the saddle. He caught the glint of the faint starlight on the dull metal of a gun barrel.

"Ride slowly with me to the gate!" Brent commanded.

Carman obeyed, making a dejected picture in the saddle.

When they reached the gate, Brent looked back while Carman leaned from his saddle and opened it. Brent could not see that they had been observed. He ordered Carman through the gate ahead of him and closed it himself.

He rode in close to the man on the right and took his gun from its holster and slipped it into a pocket.

"Now we'll go on to your place."

They rode at a brisk jog along the trail north until they reached the meadow and the cabin. At the door they dismounted and left the horses with reins dangling. Carman lighted a lamp.

Brent looked at him sternly. "Now tell me about it as quickly as you can," he commanded. "The game's up, Carman; my hunches have all proved to be the goods. I got you out of that because there's goin' to be the devil to pay sooner'n anybody expects, an' I got you out because of your boy."

Carman stared at him dully for nearly half a minute. He looked toward the darkened bedroom and Brent shook his head.

"I've sent him away," he said quietly.

Carman buried his face in his hands. Then he looked up almost with defiance. "I wanted to get a start," he said in a thick voice. "It was for him as much as anything else. But I took the wrong trail. I saw a chance that looked good, an' I took thirty Rabbit Foot steers. I left the first Long Pete note. Lawton caught me an' then he had me. But I was wise to his game, too, an'—but I had to help him. It drove me to drink, but he let me keep the steers an'——"

The man broke down and Brent looked away, his eyes flashing.

"Listen," said Brent, "put that light out an' *stay* here, understand?"

Carman nodded in a paroxysm of grief.

Brent laid the man's gun on the table, blew out the light in the lamp, and hurried out. He threw himself into the saddle and galloped across the meadow into the trail. This time he took the trail to the left when he reached the first intersection, and after a time he came out at the southeast end of the bad lands, around the fence.

To eastward he saw a number of bobbing shadows, and he raced to meet them. The shadows took form, appeared as horses, and Brent swept up with his hat held aloft as a signal.

"Long Pete's movin' his cattle north," he said to Sheriff Ed Furness, who was in the lead of a posse of a dozen men. "Trailin' 'em from the north side of the butte to the northwest corner of the open range an' into the foothills. Quite a string."

Ed Furness looked at him with a squint for a moment. Then he turned in the saddle and gave a number of hurried orders. The posse swept on. When they reached the southeast corner of the bad lands they split into two groups. One group rode west along the fence and the other dashed for the north side of the butte. Brent rode with Furness along the fence.

Before the riders with the cattle, preoccupied with their work to a certain extent, realized what was happening, the riders along the fence had passed them. Furness, Brent, and the others closed in. The line of moving cattle broke, and the herd began to bunch. Then shots sounded from north of the butte.

Everywhere on the triangle of range north of the butte the shadows were pierced by red streaks of fire. The cattle snorted, bellowed, and began to run. Some of the riders were caught in front of the stampeding herd and were forced to flee toward the members of the posse nearest the butte. The rest of the posse dashed for the riders who were left behind in the open. Guns barked and horses raced. In the northwest corner sounded other shots, and Brent saw a lone rider dashing toward him. He recognized him by his bulk in the saddle and his great horse. It was Lawton.

He spurred the dun toward the oncoming rider, raised in the stirrups, and brought up his gun. Lawton fired—once, twice, three times at long range. Then he dashed eastward with Brent in pursuit. Ed Furness came down from the west. But the black was too much for either of the pursuers' horses. He left them behind, lost them, and disappeared in the shadows of the bad lands.

The first gray glimmer of dawn was in the east as Brent and Furness met.

"We've got 'em pretty well rounded up," said Furness, "except Lawton. We'll have to comb the bad lands for him an' keep watch in the north, I guess. How'd you find out they had the cattle cached on top of the butte? I didn't know till to-night there was a way up there."

"I lost a herd up here a few days ago," said Brent absently. "Then I caught sight of a fire on top the butte from that high ridge where he spent the night after I met him in Carman's cabin, an'——" He bit off his words and cried out:

"I forgot! He'll probably pass Carman's cabin—it's on the best trail north. But he won't pass it—he'll look in." He stared at Ed Furness.

"Well, what of it?" asked Furness.

"What of it? Why, *Carman's there!*"

Brent spurred his horse toward the gate in the early dawn with Furness in hot pursuit. He jumped the gate and galloped into the trail, keeping the dun

at a breakneck pace. He reached the meadow and raced for the cabin door where Lawton's big black was standing with reins dangling. As he flung himself from the saddle the roar of a gun came from within. Brent leaped to the door.

Frank Carman was lying, face downward, on the floor. Lawton was standing with one hand on the table, his gun hand, grasping the weapon that still smoked, hanging at his side. His eyes, when he met those of Brent, were pin points of red fire. His lips curled in a sneer. He saw that Brent's gun was in its holster.

"That's what he gets for double crossin' his pardner an' spillin' the works to you, you rat!" he said hoarsely.

"You're wrong, Lawton," said Brent. "I had a hunch about you from the start. Then I saw a bunch of cattle vanish at the north end of the butte. Next, two men chased me down there an' I plugged one of 'em an' you never peeped. The night I left you here I went to the top of the ridge west of the gate. I saw a fire on top the butte an' *I saw you go up there!*"

"Smart," sneered Lawton. "An' you came on an' took the job to keep an eye on us, eh?" His face was livid.

"You guessed it, Lawton. What's more, you knew it all the time. But *I* knew I'd have to catch you in the act of movin' those cattle, for they were still on Rabbit Foot range when they was on top of the butte. You were slick. A little remark a lady passed at the dance last night gave me a tip that you'd sent Nagel in to watch me an' see I stayed there while you got the cattle out. I had a hunch Nagel would play the bars too strong, an' even *that* hunch came true."

Lawton leaned toward him, his eyes blazing, his lips purple.

"Have you got a hunch *now?*"

"Yes, but it's up to you to make it come true. *Drop that gun, Lawton!*"

Brent leaped into the air as Lawton's gun struck up. Then the cabin seemed to burst with sound as two weapons roared almost together. Lawton sank down, his head striking against the table. He toppled on the floor. Brent leaned against the door jamb and smiled wanly at Sheriff Ed Furness, who looked in with an expression of utter amazement on his face.

CHAPTER XIII.

A COLLECTION.

IT was morning in the tumbled lands north of Rabbit Butte. The scrub pines, buck brush, stunted cedars, willows and scattered cottonwoods were a vivid green in the brilliant rays of the sun. Grouse strutted in the fragrant meadows; wild canaries and meadow larks flew like flaming darts of color; a scented breeze filtered down through the hills.

Steve Brent stood in the doorway of the Carman cabin looking out upon the world with a troubled look in his eyes. In the meadow his rangy dun horse cropped the luscious grass. Behind him, in the large room of the cabin, there were sounds suggestive of the washing of dishes.

Brent turned and looked at the boy who was attending to the domestic tasks that are the aftermath of breakfast. It was four days since Frank Carman had been shot to death by Bill Lawton, renegade foreman of the Rabbit Foot. Carman had been buried the day after, and the boy had displayed a fortitude that had won Brent's heart. Since then, Brent had tried to keep the lad's mind occupied with other things than thought of his father's mistake and death.

They had rounded up and returned the thirty head of cattle Carman had taken from the Rabbit Foot. They had sold all of Carman's horses, except the one the boy rode, to the ranch. They had packed up the father's effects for storage in town. They had walked and

ridden together and had had long talks. They had gone with the sheriff to visit the top of the butte, where cabins and corrals had been found, and where, the morning after the attempt to move the cattle, the man Brent had wounded in the fight north of the butte had been captured. He had confessed the plot.

Lawton had got Lynch to put in breeded cattle intending from the very beginning to steal them. He had brought Nagel—since arrested and jailed—and the others from the south to help him. Wholesale rustling operations in the district had been planned. The scheme had been frustrated in time to prevent big losses to stockmen south of the river as well as north.

The sheriff had known Carman was implicated in the thefts of cattle, had recognized a peculiar way the man had of making a "t" in the first Long Pete note; but he had held off in hopes of finding out who was associated in the deal with him. And he had suspected Lawton, but had said nothing to Jim Lynch about it.

Brent had been interested from the first, owing to the lack of description of Long Pete. Then, too, he had been attracted by the reward. And Lawton had aroused his suspicions. Now, his quest successful, he looked longingly at the dun horse, the clear sky, the verdure, and back to the boy with the brown eyes and the chestnut hair.

"Let's take a walk in the meadow, son," he said when the boy had finished with the dishes. "It's sure a pretty mornin'—an' I want to talk to you."

A few minutes later they were walking at the eastern edge of the meadow.

"Alan, what do you reckon you want to do?" asked Brent, after clearing his throat.

"I want to go away from here," replied the boy without hesitation. "I've been hemmed in by these brakes a long time, it seems like. I want to get out where I can see some country."

He looked up at Brent with a wistful expression. Brent threw away the butt of a cigarette and hastily rolled a new one.

"Do you know where you want to go?" he inquired as he lighted his smoke.

"Sure I do. I want to go with you, Steve." The boy's eyes were glowing as he looked into Brent's.

Brent stopped in his tracks. "Why, sonny, you don't know where *I'm* goin' —I don't know *myself!*"

Alan laughed joyously. "I don't care," he declared. "You won't get lost, will you?"

Brent grinned, but sobered right afterward. "Might be all right for us to travel together for the rest of the summer," he said. "But you ought to have some schoolin', Alan. Now don't shake your head, young fellow; I didn't have much schoolin' myself, an' that's why I know it's a good thing." He eyed the boy with mock severity, although he meant what he said.

Alan took one of his hands. "You wasn't figurin' on runnin' off an' leaving me, was you, Steve? I seen you lookin' at that dun horse."

Brent looked about the sunlit meadow. "How old are you, Alan?"

"Going on fourteen; but I'm big, ain't I—for how old I am?"

"You're quite a youngster," Brent affirmed. "You'll probably grow up into a man—an' break some woman's heart with your good looks." He turned in the direction of the cabin.

"I've got to run in to town this mornin'," he said. "You hang aroun' till I get back."

"I'll get your horse ready," said the boy, starting on the run.

Two hours later Steve Brent sauntered into the office of Ed Furness, sheriff of Rabbit Butte County. The official was at his desk.

"Mornin', Ed," he greeted. "Nice day. I could hardly push my way into

town, the meadow larks was so thick."

The sheriff tipped back his derby and looked at his visitor appraisingly. "Thought you'd probably left the country," he said, caressing his mustache.

"It ain't good policy to start anywhere else till you've finished your business where you're at, Ed," said Brent amiably. "Our business started when you tacked that notice on the cottonwood tree out by the big spring east of here."

The sheriff smiled to himself, drew a paper from a drawer of his desk, and passed it to Brent.

"There's a voucher for a thousand—the county's half of the reward," he said. "Lynch is county treasurer."

"Thanks," said Brent, folding the paper and putting it in a pocket. "I suppose Jim's in town?"

"He's over in his bank," said Furness. "He may make you wait till the end of the month for that, though. It might cut into the interest or something."

"Well, now, maybe I can think of a way to circumvent him," drawled Brent. "*There's* a good word, Ed; that was number twenty. I lost my school-marm right after I learned that one."

"Who'd she marry?" asked Furness with a grin.

"The town banker," said Brent dryly. "Well, so long, Ed."

"Wait a minute," said the sheriff, rising from his chair. "What you goin' to do now, Brent?"

Brent slowly rolled a cigarette. "Ed, did you ever notice the cottonwoods when they're sheddin'? Know those little white veils they send driftin' on the wind? I see you do. You ought to; you live here. Well, Ed, sometimes those flecks of cotton will come settlin' down to the ground pretty as pretty. An' sometimes one'll go rearin' up in the air and float away. Seems as though you just can't tell what one of them cotton specks is goin' to do. Kind of interesting to watch 'em, Ed. Some folks is just like that."

"Why don't you stay here?" said Ed, frowning. "By George, I'll make you a deputy!"

"I'm packin' all I can carry, Ed," returned Brent. "A star on my shirt would plumb weigh me down!"

"Well, think it over," said Furness, offering his hand. "I won't ask for any —references."

"You've had 'em a long time," said Brent cheerfully, as he took the sheriff's hand.

He walked down the street to the bank and in front of the building he met Carol Lynch. His hat came off automatically.

"I was going to take you to task for leaving my party the way you did," she said, smiling at him. "But in view of what happened, I guess I won't."

"That was a good tip you gave me, Miss Carol," he said.

"Me? Why—I don't remember——"

"When you said some cattle disappeared once when Lawton went to a dance," he answered her. "It gave me a hunch, an' whenever I have a hunch, I play it."

She laughed and veiled her eyes. "I'll have to give another party so you can stay it out," she suggested.

"Tie the invitation to the wind, Miss Carol, an' I'll come a-tearin'! But don't have it till fall. I've got to get some store clothes so these town boys won't have the edge on me."

"Are you afraid of competition, Mr. Brent?" Her eyes were a laughing challenge.

"If I was, I'd stampede after what I wanted," he answered, grinning.

"Stampedes aren't popular in a cattle country," she returned as she started for the house. "But—they *do* happen."

Brent smiled after her in frank admiration. Then he entered the bank and strode to Lynch's private office in the rear. He found the banker at his

desk and tossed the voucher for one thousand dollars on the blotter before him.

"In fifties, if you've got 'em," he said briskly.

"These vouchers are payable at the end of the month," said the banker, examining the slip of paper.

"I didn't wait till the end of the month to find out who was stealin' your cattle," Brent pointed out. "If I had, the whole bunch would be across the line by now."

"Ahem!" Lynch looked at him quizzically. "You want to open an account with this?"

"I've got room for it in my clothes," Brent drawled out. "I got more room than time."

"You're leaving?" asked Lynch in surprise.

"Mebbe. Let's settle our business before your clerk gets so nervous with me in here that he can't count."

Lynch rose, went out into the banking room, and soon returned with a packet of bills which he handed to Brent.

"You can count it," he said.

"I'll take your word for it," said Brent cheerfully. "An' now I'll take the other thousand."

Lynch raised his brows. "There's no other thousand," he said quietly.

Brent's eyes hardened. "I thought we'd be able to avoid an argument," he said slowly. "That notice said two thousand for Long Pete, Jim, an' you told me yourself it was one thousand from the county an' one from you."

"But you didn't *get Long Pete,*" said Lynch. "You couldn't get him because there wasn't no such person. An' if I hadn't offered you a job out there, an' give it to you later, you wouldn't have got the thousand from the county."

"Listen, Jim." Brent's voice was chilly, but clear. His eyes had narrowed. "If there's anything I won't argue about, Jim, it's money. You fork over the thousand or I'll just naturally *take it away from you!*"

His right hand moved in the wink of an eye and his gun covered the banker.

"I was goin' to offer you a good job on the ranch," said Lynch darkly.

"Well, you sure went about it a pore way," said Brent grimly. "Trot out that other thousand, Lynch, an' don't waste no time doin' it."

The banker moved toward the banking room.

"I've—I've got it ready," stammered the clerk, thrusting a packet of bills toward Lynch.

"Right over his shouulder," called Brent. "That's the boy. Now there's a well-trained clerk, Jim," he chuckled as he put the bills in his pocket. "He don't believe in arguments no more'n *I* do."

"The argument would have terminated in your favor whether you'd drawn your gun or not," snapped out the banker, turning back to his desk. "An', anyway, I'm much obliged."

"Thanks, Jim. Next time you see Ed Furness tell him that last word I slipped him is a good one to remember."

Steve Brent rode into the meadow in the bad lands whistling merrily. He saw a horse in one of the corrals back of the cabin. Then Alan Carman came to the door to greet him.

"Pack what you want to take with you, sonny, an' we'll be on our way," he sang out.

"It's all rolled in my slicker an' on the back of my saddle," said the boy with a glad smile. "I'm ready to go, Steve."

Brent's eyes sparkled. "All right, saddle up!"

Three quarters of an hour later they rode out of the tumbled country to the flowing plain and turned north toward the purple cones of the Sweetgrass hills, a hundred miles away.

Calamity Jane Has a Hunch

by

Paul Ellsworth Triem

Author of "The Man on the Barrel," etc.

THE sheriff, Bob Westover, turned from the window through whose grimy panes he had been inspecting a glossy chestnut mare tied to the railing outside the courthouse. There was a hint of apology, almost of wistfulness, in the young man's manner as he faced old Doc Laney, his chief deputy.

"I was just thinking, Doc——" he began.

Laney raised his crabbed old face from the newspaper into which for the last twenty minutes it had been thrust. His eyes focused themselves disapprovingly on the sheriff.

"Sure, and I know what it's about! You got up some excuse for busting away from the office and goin' galloping around the county on that no-account grasshopper hoss of yourn! Don't tell me—I'm onto your curves!"

The apology remained in the younger man's face, but a twinkle of protest came into his good-natured eyes. Doc had cast aspersions on "Calamity Jane," the chestnut mare; and Calamity Jane was the center of Bob Westover's universe.

"She ain't what you could rightly call 'no-account,' Doc," he protested. "She's Eastern bred, and the smartest saddler in Carter County. Calamity Jane knows more than most men do. It was her made a set at 'Crazy' Bill Goodwin, last month, when he was hiding in the sagebrush waiting to take a crack at Tim Sanford. Jane went in like a bull pup after a tomcat and drug him out by the back of his trousers. After Bill got sober, he said he'd have plugged Tim sure as heaven made green little apples. An' it was Jane——"

"I'll admit the hoss makes a better sheriff than you do!" Doc declared. "But 'less you intend to turn the office over to her entirely, I reckon you better stay here and look after business!"

There were limits beyond which even the young sheriff's temper could not be safely ruffled. His cheeks were beginning to flush, beneath their coating of healthy tan; and a sparkle of resentment showed in his eyes. He sometimes wondered why he appointed Doc Laney his office deputy, term after term. Doc never failed to run against Westover for the office of sheriff, and never failed to be defeated. Sheriff Bob was one of the county institutions.

"All right, Doc, I guess that's settled," he remarked after he had got his temper in hand. "I'll be riding, and you'll stay here and keep track of the office. If any one comes in that has a right to know, you can tell 'em I'm riding down Santa Cadenza way. There's a little matter I've got to see to."

He strapped on his cartridge belt and six-shooter, which had been hanging on a nail behind his pine desk, and crossed without more ado to the outer door. Doc Laney looked angrily after him, but even Doc knew when to keep still.

The trail had faded by imperceptible degrees into the hard-packed sand of cañon and arroyo bottom. Calamity Jane ambled forward, single footing so smoothly that the young man in the saddle seemed to be sitting in a rocking chair. His kindly hazel eyes were focused on the patches of wind-swept sand, interspersed with clumps of mesquite and palo verde. Gradually a frown gathered in his face.

"Looks like some one had give me a bum steer!" he mumbled to himself. "Any one can see there ain't been no traffic out this way for some time, and unless these hombres are delivering their hooch by airplane, old man Laney is going to hev the laugh on us—for oncet! What you say, old lady?"

Calamity Jane thrust one ear forward and the other back. Otherwise she said nothing; and in the midst of this silence, horse and rider rounded a spire of rock and headed up into a boulder-littered cañon. Here an occasional whisky bottle or tomato can spoke of the thirst of former travelers. The growth of desert plants thickened and grew more luxuriant as they approached the head of the sloping cañon floor, and presently they came into sight of an adobe house, flat roofed and desolate. Its door swung half open, and not so much as a wisp of smoke came from the low chimney.

Sheriff Bob's eyes swept the little house and its immediate vicinity. He rode up to the lean-to porch, dismounted, and dropped his reins to the ground. Next moment he was peering inside. The room was empty, save for a litter of tin cans; and, in one corner, a heap of broken bottles.

The newcomer's eyes narrowed as he looked at the bottles, and he turned back and walked around the house. Twenty yards distant was an ancient stable, its roof starting to cave in at one corner. Westover approached the door. He walked soundlessly, his ear attuned to the slightest whisper. No sound reached him, however. Once he turned to look back at Calamity Jane. She was snuffling at the dusty earth, trying in her fastidious fashion to winnow a few blades of bunch grass from the pulverized adobe at her feet.

"There ain't no one here, or Jane would be more interested!" Sheriff Bob told himself with conviction; and the next moment he had thrust open the door of the old stable and was inside.

There was no one in the building—this was apparent at the first glance; but it was not entirely empty. A massive contrivance of rusted sheet iron stood in one corner, supported with blackened boulders. A section of dirty copper tubing curved away from the top.

Westover approached the abandoned still and with some difficulty unscrewed the lid, which had rusted into position.

"Pugh!" he exclaimed next moment, backing hastily away. "No wonder the boys was willing to tell me where this here fire-water factory was located! They been fortifying their stuff with wood alcohol—by gum, now ain't that a dirty trick? But they have sure moved out and departed hence. Wonder why?"

He went out and for a time stood looking appraisingly around. The still had evidently not been in operation for some time, and not so much as the print of a hobnailed shoe spoke of the moonshiners who had run the place. Sheriff Bob returned to his horse, still pondering over the problem, mounted, and headed Calamity Jane for the ancient water hole he remembered in a cove above the buildings. A deeply worn path led up into a niche in the cañon

wall, but this path also was destitute of hoof and shoe prints. Then they reached the rock curbing of the water hole, and the sheriff understood: the spring was dry.

"Might have knowed it!" he grumbled. "Them boys knowed the moonshiners hed done moved away from here. Well, old lady, it's kind of hard on you and me, ride fifteen miles and not find so much as a swaller of water. Come on—let's get out of here!"

Calamity Jane pricked up her ears and turned her slim, intelligent face back up the cañon. They had left the moonshiner's cove and were headed toward the distant county seat.

"Hello!" commented her rider. "That's the first time you've come up for air since we started on this here miraculous voyage. What's up?"

Calamity Jane stopped and switched her tail. A full minute later there reached the ears of the sheriff the drum of hoofbeats, and still later there came into view, riding around a turn of the distant rock walls, a solitary horseman. He pulled his cayuse to a walk as he descried Westover, but continued to come forward.

"Reckon we don't know the gent—mos' likely a geologist for some wildcat oil company," Sheriff Bob communed. "All right, commander, just come ahead and let's hear what's on your mind!"

The horseman advanced till he was close enough for Calamity Jane and her rider to examine him at close range: A strongly-built man with a heavy, expressionless face, who returned their scrutiny under drooping lids. He rode a buckskin gelding, with a blanket roll tied behind his saddle, and a pair of serviceable-looking six-shooters at his hips.

"Heard you coming, or the mare did," Westover explained, his face breaking into its habitually good-natured smile. Sheriff Bob owned to the distressing affliction of liking human beings, as well as horses. "Thought we'd pull up and pass the time of day!"

The man on the buckskin nodded, still studying the outfit of the sheriff. His eyes lingered a moment on the peace officer's silver badge, and on his gun. Then he spoke.

"Rather glad you did. I'm looking for an old ranch house—used to belong to a man named Pastana—Joe Pastana. I was through these parts a good many years ago, and stopped there overnight. I'd kind of like to see the old man and thank him for his kindness to a stranger!"

Bob Westover stared wonderingly. Then he shook his head. "Well, I kin tell you where his place is—or was," he commented. "But it'd take some one that sabes a lot more than me to tell you where old Joe is. He's been dead these four years!"

"As long as that? Time sure does fly—doesn't seem any time at all since I stopped at his place!"

Bob was about to comment politely on this remark when he was unexpectedly prevented. Calamity Jane had been edging closer to the buckskin cayuse, ridden by the stranger. Now without warning she laid back her ears, shot out her slim neck, and grabbed the dun-colored animal by the loose skin just in front of the flank. The buckskin squealed a shrill protest, wheeled, and lashed out with both hoofs. Sheriff Bob clamped his knees to Calamity Jane's sides as the bay mare pivoted and betook himself to a position of safety.

The stranger, who had asked for the residence of Joe Pastana, smiled somberly. "Your critter has a bad disposition!" he commented. "You were about to tell me where I could find what is left of this old place?"

"I sure was. You'll have to excuse the old lady—she gets peevish unexpected like that once in a while. Well, if you want to see the heap of 'dobe

dust that's all that's left of Joe's ranch house, you got to cut off toward Cuttlefish, over yonder in the next ridge. You can see it most of the time over the hills. You'll pass within a mile of the mouth of Black Cañon, which you'll see at your right. Keep right on, but if I was in your place, I'd stop at Bethel's Springs. You'll know the spring by the willows you'll see growing around it. I reckon there won't be much more than a trickle there, but you may not find any water up at Joe's place. This country is terrible dry!"

A change had come over the young sheriff's manner, and he stared uncertainly after the retreating figure of the man on the buckskin gelding. Then he headed his own mount down the cañon, and for a time plodded forward, head sunk on breast, reins dangling idly from behind the pommel of his saddle.

Then unexpectedly Sheriff Bob checked the progress of Calamity Jane, wheeled her in her tracks, and headed back toward the spot where he had parted from the traveler.

"You sure started something, old gal!" he mumbled. "I never thought of it, till you give me that there gentle little hint of yourn, but that gent *didn't* look none too convincing! I reckon he might want to see that old heap of dust, just fer old-time's sake, an' then again he mightn't. Reckon you and me'll just head for Bethel's Springs, ourselves, and get a swoller of water. Then we'll sache along and see what this critter is up to! It was your hunch, and if you don't like it, you got no one to blame but yourself!"

Calamity Jane switched her tail, laid her slender ears close to her neck, and broke into a gallop. She kept this up till they had reached the spot where they had had their encounter with the stranger on the buckskin cayuse; then, with the reins hanging loose on her neck, she struck into the trail toward Bethel's Springs.

The sun had passed the meridian and was heading into the west by the time they reached the old watering place. Sheriff Bob noted, as he had expected, that there was no seepage from the water hole. Then they were standing beside it, and he had slipped from his saddle.

"Age before beauty, old lady," Westover commented, as he dropped to his knees and prepared to drink. "I reckon I won't roil things up as much as you!"

Calamity Jane snorted and backed away. Sheriff Bob stared up, to find the bay mare looking with distended eyes and widening nostrils at something hidden in the stinging nettles close to the water hole. Getting quickly to his feet, he thrust the rank growth apart with his boot and stared down. A black-tailed jack rabbit was lying on its side, its back arched into a bow, its eyes bulging and glazed. The sheriff stooped and put his hand on the animal. It was still warm, but its muscles were hard as rock.

For a time he continued to stand, staring down at the dead rabbit. Then he walked back to the spring. Two seasons of unusual drought had lowered its surface till there was not more than half a barrel of water in it. Westover noticed that the mare had thrust her soft muzzle close to the water, and then had turned her head aside, her lips drawn back in a grimace of disapproval. He dropped to his knees and sniffed. It smelled right enough. He took a cautious mouthful of water, and instantly spat it out.

"Squirrel poison!" he muttered. "That coyote must have had an idea I'd foller him, and this was his scheme to stop me!"

His color suddenly heightened. He vaulted into the saddle and headed the bay mare out of the tangle of willows. All the boyishness and good humor was gone from Sheriff Bob's face now. He could easily enough have found it in his heart to forgive a man who shot at him

from ambush, but this blow had been aimed at Calamity Jane.

Greasewood and boulders, with the grotesque contour of Cuttlefish Mountain loomed clear-cut against the shimmering western sky. Bob Westover let his glance rest for a moment on this landmark, apparently a scant hour's ride across the desert, but in reality fifty miles away. Then he was again studying the hard-packed sand before him. In places tongues of porous lava ran out into it from the volcanic masses at his right, while again the bed of a dry stream meandered down from the upper reaches of an arroyo. The sheriff and his partner, the bay mare, were headed for the old Pastana ranch. Occasionally he had caught the impression of a sharp-shod hoof, and he knew that the man who had poisoned the water hole was still ahead.

"The ornery devil, he figured I wouldn't be passing there without I was following him!" the young sheriff communed, half aloud. "But who in sin is this hombre? I wish Calamity Jane could talk!"

He paused, his eye caught by a whitish discoloration on a boulder at his right. He rode over to it and stared down. The rock had been chipped by the edge of a steel-shod hoof, and a few rods farther in the same direction he saw the imprint of a shoe cork in the sand. He raised his head and followed the line of progress thus indicated.

"Turned off for Black Cañon!" he muttered. "I wonder——"

Without completing the sentence, even in his own mind, he headed the mare toward the distant, frowning portal of the box cañon. Twenty minutes later he dismounted, threw the reins over Calamity Jane's head, and went forward on foot.

The entrance to Black Cañon was formed by two turretlike masses of granite, towering one on each side. Between them ran a channel of firm, white sand, upon which the newcomer saw again the print of the steel-shod hoof. With a nod he turned and retraced his steps for some distance, then cut up the rocky slope that led toward the rim of the cañon.

"That hombre had lost his way to Black Cañon, and didn't want to ask for it direct," the sheriff muttered. "But what in sin does he want around here, anyhow? What am I going to say to him if I run onto him? I can't prove nothing, not even that he poisoned the water hole—although I know darned well he did!"

Evening had settled into the cañon by the time the sheriff made his way down into its upper end, following a deer trail he had discovered during a hunting trip years ago. Once he thought he had caught the flicker of a light, while he was still high among the clumps of gnarled greasewood and the granite outcrops of the hidden trail. He stopped to listen.

For a time he heard nothing except the flickering, querulous cry of an owl that perched in a cedar and snapped its bill disapprovingly at him. Then from somewhere in the tangle of scrub growth before him there came the sneeze of a horse, followed by the rasping of an impatient hoof. Sheriff Bob slid forward, using every projecting boulder as a temporary breastwork. Little by little he worked his way down the cañon, keeping a sharp lookout ahead. Presently he rounded an angle in the towering west wall, and in the same instant caught the glow of a camp fire. Crouching behind the water-worn outcrop which sheltered him, he peered stealthily ahead.

A man was sitting hunched near the fire, examining something which he held in his lap. So motionless and intent was he that the thought came to the observer behind the rock that this somber

stranger had come out here to commit suicide—that he was already dead. But the flicker of the fire seemed a sufficient answer to this idea: men don't as a rule bother to light the scene of their last bow to the world.

The stranger's pose changed; he raised his powerful arms above his head, like a diver; his fists were clenched, his whole attitude expressed triumph raised to its highest point. His head was still bowed; and as the sheriff looked, he dropped his hands and slid something under his coat. Then unexpectedly he stood up.

Sheriff Bob Westover continued to creep forward. He wanted to get closer.

From far down the cañon came the whinny of a horse. For a moment the sheriff thought the sound had come from the buckskin gelding ridden by the man he was shadowing, but in the next instant he remembered that he had heard the buckskin pawing somewhere close to the fire. Then his eyes caught the change that came over the stranger; he had whirled toward the entrance to the cañon, his hand swinging with mechanical precision toward his hip. He stood motionless for a long moment, his head turned toward the lower valley, his shoulders tense, his whole attitude that of a predatory animal, aroused by the presence of a natural enemy. Slowly and with noiseless steps he began to make his way toward the spot whence the sound had come.

Sheriff Bob fell in behind. He was taking a chance on discovery now, but the other man's attention was focused on the lower cañon. Forward they went, the sheriff managing to gain a little as they advanced. They passed the buckskin cayuse, tied short to an overhanging creosote bush. The horse whinnied at its master; and, as Westover crept past, thrust out its long ears inquiringly and made a snuffling sound.

They reached the portal; and in the cool, clear light of evening beyond, Bob Westover saw Calamity Jane, the slim lines of her legs and body foreshortened by the angle at which she was facing them.

Again her shrill whinny sounded. The sheriff was near enough to catch the snarl of surprise and anger which came to the other man's lips.

"Didn't expect to see her again, I'll bet!" Westover told himself, his blood simmering with wrath.

Next instant his own forty-five was out and he caught the sights, with his enemy's head balanced neatly just above them.

"Reach fer the stars, stranger—and drop that gun!" he cried, his voice harsh and imperative. "Going to shoot my hoss, was you? Say, fer two cents I would give——"

The figure before him pivoted with the ease and speed of a deeply-formed habit. From the gloom came a flash of light, and Sheriff Bob felt the stinging nip of a bullet that creased his cheek. He fired, dropping the muzzle of his gun for a body shot.

He saw the stranger crumple forward, as if he had been struck in the stomach with the end of a fence rail.

Sheriff Bob circled the prostrate figure, gun in hand. That old stunt of playing possum had been used till it was growing whiskers, and he didn't intend to be caught by it. If the position had been reversed—if he had been the bad man, instead of the sheriff—he could have settled the thing satisfactorily by pumping a few more slugs into the apparently limp body.

"And I orto, anyhow!" he mumbled. "First he tried to poison Calamity Jane, and now he tries to shoot her! By hemlock——"

Forgetting discretion, he advanced, quickly possessed himself of both the stranger's guns, and turned the fellow over. His eyes were half closed, and he was breathing shallowly; but his color

was too good for that of a man who has been mortally wounded.

With compressed lips and frowning brows, the sheriff stripped back the khaki shirt and grunted; a bundle wrapped in heavy brown paper, lying close to the bottom of the fellow's ribs, showed the round, black hole of a bullet puncture. Removing this package, Sheriff Bob saw that it had deflected the bullet, so that the latter, ripping a good-sized hole in the back of the package, had struck a rib glancingly and biased off around it.

"Knocked out and bleeding a little, but I reckon he'll live to stretch rope!" Westover told himself. "And this is what he was studying so careful, when I first come in sight of him. Le's see——"

He unfastened the brown paper parcel, which evidently had been undone and hastily retied. A silent whistle puckered his lips.

"Best bullet armor in the world, and guaranteed to turn a lot of other unpleasant things!" Sheriff Bob murmured. "Well, I guess I'll just slip a pair of bracelets on this hombre before he comes to. He sure has got a lot of explaining to do."

Half an hour later the prisoner was seated astride the buckskin cayuse, his wrists handcuffed behind his back, his slouch hat pulled tightly upon his head. Sheriff Bob, astride Calamity Jane, nodded to him.

"Off we go, pardner," he commented. "If they's anybody around here you want to kiss good-by afore you start, you better be doing it. Reckon you got everything you come for, didn't you?"

For the first time the stranger spoke. "You're making a mistake, young fellow. You've got nothing against me, and neither has any one else. Turn me loose, and save yourself trouble!"

Westover eyed him speculatively. "Guess I'll risk it," he commented. "Come on—let's go!"

In answer to a slap from the sheriff's hand, the buckskin started at a slow walk out through the portals of the cañon. Both horses were crusted with sweat, and showed the fatigue of the day. The gelding had probably been watered at Bethel's Springs, before the water hole was doped, and so had many hours the advantage of Calamity Jane; but the little bay shook her head and snorted, defying the hardships that were part of her job.

"Thing I got against you, stranger," Bob said presently, "is the way you tried to treat the old lady, here. Where did you get that squirrel poison, anyhow?"

They were riding almost parallel now, and the older man gave his companion an appraising look. Evidently perceiving that he had nothing to gain by subterfuge, he spoke boldly.

"I brought it with me—ain't the first time I've had snoops following on my trail. A little strychnine in a spring is a fine way to put 'em on foot. Now listen to me, young man——"

Sheriff Bob snorted. "Every word you say makes you more unpopular with me, stranger!" he observed. "But go ahead—I ain't nothing but the sheriff—you can talk as much as you like!"

"That's good of you. I've got a proposition to make. Turn me loose, and I'll divide my money, fifty-fifty, with you!"

"You ain't got no money that I knows about!" Westover grunted.

"Don't be a fool. This is your chance to clean up more jack than you'll make in the next twenty years, and no one can pin a thing to you!"

Sheriff Bob's color was rising. He looked steadily at the man riding at his side, his hands unconsciously knotting themselves into fists.

"Fer just two cents——" he began.

But Calamity Jane was tired of the

conversation. With a shrill squeal she laid back her ears, twisted her muscular neck, and seized firm hold of a section of the buckskin's rump. He had been hanging his head and dragging his feet; but at this cruel and unprovoked assault he took a sudden interest in life. Stretching his long neck, he broke into a gallop.

Sheriff Bob, riding behind and a little at the side, patted Calamity Jane's neck.

"You tell 'em, gal!" he murmured. "I ain't got the grammar!"

It was close to midnight when the sheriff approached the little box courthouse and stared up at his office window. A light showed behind the drawn oilcloth shade.

As Sheriff Bob entered the office, Laney turned briskly upon him. There was a look of triumph in the old gentleman's squinting eyes, and a sour smile pulled down the corners of his mouth.

"Waal, you see fit to come back to-night, arter all!" he commented. "I thought mebbe you had gone on one of your vacations. Jus' as well you showed up, I reckon—there sure has been the devil to pay since you left!"

For a moment Laney's face was almost eager and companionable. Then he blinked his rheumy old eyes.

"Long distance phone message come in afore you was hardly out of sight!" he resumed importantly. "Of course I had to tell 'em you was skylarking around the county, having a good time and leaving me to do all the work. And they said——"

"Who said?" interrupted the sheriff.

"Why, as I was saying if you'd only listen, it was the sheriff of Hallam County. And he said Jose Morello had been seen heading in this direction, and fer you to git out and apprehend him. It was Jose and his gang that held up the R and L, bouten five years ago, down at Dry Diggings. It was always a mystery whar they hid their loot, as nary a cent of the money was found on 'em. And now Jose has busted out of prison, after killing two of the guards, and some party that knowed him back in the old days seen him riding in this direction. So the sheriff of Hallam County, who's a real sheriff, by hokey, and knows his business, says most likely the gang come up here afore they was captured and hid the loot somewhere abouten here!"

Out of the corners of his little eyes he peered with malevolent triumph at his chief.

"And thar's a reward of five thousand dollars offered for the return of the money," he added. "Payable to any peace officer or other citizen that brings it in. But I reckon you're out of luck this time, Sheriff Bob. Young, spry, and handsome you may be, but smart you ain't! Jose has had time to git in and git out, and all you kin do now is to git out and make a show of earning your pay. Mebbe that scrub mare'll enjoy another canter!"

Sheriff Bob eyed the old man thoughtfully. Then he shook his head and reached under his coat for the bundle he had taken away from his prisoner.

"Reckon Calamity Jane wouldn't hanker for it none to-night, Doc!" he replied. "Nor me, neither. But it'll be all right—just you toddle down to the New England House and go to bed, same as usual. Fact is, the old gal and me met up with a party while we was riding around, having a good time, and we brung him in. I didn't have nothing definite agin' him, no warrant nor nothing—but Calamity Jane made a set at him, and I gambled on her hunch. So this Morello person is over at the jail now, and here's the money—shot up perty bad, but otherwise all right. By rights the reward ought to go to the little mare—plumb bandit wise, she is. But mebbe I'll consent to look after it for her!"

Peg Leg Shows 'Em the Door

By

F. R. Buckley

Author of "Peg Leg's Wild Animals," etc.

I SIT down to write this after a rather unpleasant interview with a young gentleman named Fisher—the same Willie Fisher who's just been foreclosed off that spare quarter-section of the O Bar T; and for whom I was kind of sorry, until he rolled into my store this morning and started a discourse on the subject of luck. As everybody knows, Willie's farming for the last four years has been confined to such time as he could spare from gambling and drinking; so naturally, to see him leaning over my counter, representing himself as a perfectly innocent citizen ruined by causes beyond his control, made me feel kind of tired.

After he'd been talking for about five minutes, I just naturally had to yawn.

"Whassamatter?" says Willie, in the tough tone which so often comes along with a belief in bad luck.

"Nothing," says I, not wishing to stove poker him so soon after his bereavement. "Only that in seventy-four years on this planet, I myself have never happened to run across this luck thing yet, and it seems kind of unjust that you should meet so much of it right away."

Watching his face while this was soaking in, I guessed that his next remark would be tactless, to say the least of it; and, as usual, I was right.

"Oh," says Willie at last, "you mean all this trouble I've had, has been my own fault, eh?" He stuck a cigarette in the corner of his mouth. "No such thing as luck, ain't there?" he demands, gathering steam rapidly. "You tell me that, do you? Yeah? You do, eh? Well, how about the time 'One-eye' Colwall got after you? Eh? How about that? I suppose that wasn't luck?"

"Well——" says I peaceably.

Willie gave a loud horse laugh.

"Well, if you ain't goin' to admit that," he says, wisely preparing to go before my temper slipped the leash, "if you're goin' to hum and haw about a case like that, I guess I won't talk to you any more. No such thing as luck—an' you only alive because of the biggest chunk of it that ever happened to anybody. You make me sick!"

"I'll make you sicker in a moment," says something within me; and I guess Willie must have heard it, because all of a sudden, he took one leap on to the veranda, and another over the railing onto his pony's back, and rode away at full speed, leaving almost one complete leg of his new trousers hanging on a projecting nail. Having rescued this relic, and laid it alongside of the stove

poker, ready for Willie when he calls back, I now hand out the facts concerning One-eye Colwall, which I would have given to Willie, had he waited.

On the fourteenth of July last, which is the same as to say on the night of my birthday, I awoke with the impression that somebody must have been cleaning a gun in the neighborhood; but discovered, after a moment of blinking, that the smell of Hoppe's number nine was coming, as a matter of fact, from a revolver muzzle held immediately under my nose. Looking back along the barrel of this weapon, in the glow of a night light which I always keep burning in my bedroom, I perceived that it was being held by a large, tall man whom I'd never seen before, but who had only one eye. And as soon as this gentleman spoke, I recognized him as Emory Colwall, the renowned horse lifter, cattle rustler, and general bad man from Hurst County, next door.

"I believe," says Mr. Colwall, with the politeness for which he is celebrated, "that I have the honor to be holding a weapon under the nostrils of W. Garfield, Esquire, sheriff of Three Pines County?"

"Yeah," says I, waking up thoroughly, and kind of hoisting myself up in bed, "and——"

Colwall pulled the revolver hammer back to full cock.

"That's a great load off my mind," he says earnestly, "because if half what I've heard of your hasty temper is true, sir, I shall probably be compelled to blow your head off; and it would worry me considerably to think I'd killed the wrong man. By the way, don't attempt to slide your hand backward under the pillow. I removed both your revolvers while you were still dreaming. I also took away the bowie knife you had stuck into the left-hand sideboard of the bed; and if you look, you'll see that your peg leg, the water pitcher, the ash tray, and the bedside oil lamp are also out of reach. You have laid four of my friends cold with these and similar implements, Mr. Garfield; but you are not going to do the same to me."

You know, at this point, I began to think that this here Colwall was a pretty dangerous sort of guy; not so much because he was holding a gun under my nose—many a poor weakling has done that—as because he seemed to have the ability to learn by the experience of others. These four friends of his that he spoke about, hadn't had that ability. "Lefty" Parsons I'd shot, while he had me covered, with a small derringer carried in my waistcoat pocket, quite separate from my regular armory; but that hadn't taught anything to "Egg" Stoner, whom I'd stunned with a volume of the encyclopædia after he'd searched me for weapons; or to Billy Jenkins, or "Blaa" Woolf, who saw I hadn't any derringers or encyclopædias within reach, but entirely forgot that canned goods can be thrown. This guy Colwall had imagination. Looking around, as I sat there in front of his gun, I perceived that he'd swept the room clean of everything that could possibly be used as a weapon.

"Yes," says he, observing my survey, "I think you'll find yourself pretty helpless, Mr. Garfield. I really do think I've made a pretty thorough job of it. It's about time somebody did. It's not good for ninety-nine-year-old sheriffs to have absolutely everything their own way. It gives them the swelled head. It makes them kind of bossy. For instance, it makes them tell the sheriff of the next county that they'll drop over some afternoon and clean up all his criminals for him!"

Yes—I remembered having said that identical thing to Ben Pokeson, only the week before, when Ben had been complaining that he didn't seem able to catch this Colwall, try as he would. Looking into the future, I perceived that Ben would be liable to laugh heartily at me,

when the story of this night became known.

"You're quite right," says Colwall, like a mind reader. "And that's what I'm here for. I think it would do you good to be laughed at a little, Mr. Garfield; and I know it would do me good to be handed the proceeds of the sale you had in your store to-day. I also hear that you were presented with a purse of gold for being such a clever sheriff. When the presenters hear of to-night, they'll probably want that purse back; so you'd better let me take care of it, too. And I understand that since the Acacia Bank failed, you've been keeping all your savings somewhere around the house. They'd be much safer with me. Now will you slowly and carefully get out of bed and hand these things over?"

"No," says I.

"Perhaps I should explain," says Mr. Colwall, looking at me with more expression in his one eye than many a man can crowd into two, "that, unless you compel me to do it, I am not going to shoot you. I'm not wanted for murder yet, and I don't want to be. But I'd sooner be wanted for murder, than be done out of this little revenge on you. Now—will you get up?"

We had the eye-to-eye for a few seconds, and then I nodded.

"Hand me my peg leg," I requested, with hope springing internally in the human chest.

It was when I saw his method of doing this, that my heart really sank to its lowest position. The man didn't trust me the least little bit in the world; didn't give me a chance. If he'd thrown me the peg leg, maybe I could have thrown it back and knocked the gun out of his hand while he was still a little off his balance. If he'd handed it to me in the way one gentleman usually does hand a thing to another gentleman, I might either have rammed it violently back into his solar plexus, or pulled him over on to the bed, where I could have strangled him. But, if you'll believe me, he got that wooden leg, and he went behind the headboard of my bed and passed the limb carefully over my left shoulder. Then he stood with his revolver muzzle screwed into the back of my neck while I buckled the straps. He even insisted that I should pull all the buckles up to the last hole, so that there shouldn't be any question of the implement's coming loose unexpectedly.

"Now then—up you get," he says, keeping carefully behind me. "And where are the stairs?"

"You ought to know," says I, somewhat peevishly. "You came up 'em, didn't you?"

He smiled and shook his head. "I took the liberty of shinning up and dropping in on you through the window," he said apologetically. "I thought perhaps you might have a burglar alarm or similar device on the stairs."

I tried to look horrified at the idea.

"No?" says One-eye Colwall, kind of mockingly. "Well, that's good. That makes it quite all right for you to go downstairs ahead of me, don't it—carrying the light, so that the target will be well illuminated in case of accidents. All right. Go ahead."

Now, you would have thought, wouldn't you, that he could have failed to notice my stepping clean over the third step from the bottom, which is connected by a wire with a shotgun which covers the stair tread? But he noticed it, all right; stepped from the fourth step to the second just as neatly as I did myself; and stood there in my international emporium and sheriff's office, grinning at me like a Cheshire cat.

"After that trip downstairs," he said gently, "I should really think you'd see there's no use in trying to fool me, Mr. Garfield."

"I guess you're right," says I insincerely. "Shall I light the store lamp?"

"What?" says One-eye Colwall; "and

bring any passing cow-puncher in to see what's the meaning of your being up so late? I'm surprised at you. Besides, if you once got up on the counter, who knows what might happen? You might fall on me, or anything. No—just carry the candle. That'll give plenty of light, and, besides, it'll keep one of your hands out of temptation. Now, where's the money?"

We had the eye-to-eye again.

"I've got you dead to rights," says Mr. Colwall, marring his hitherto perfect record of gentlemanliness by using a slang expression, and speaking between his teeth. "Now, do me the favor, will you? I can't wait here all night. Where is it?"

Still I couldn't believe that I was so thoroughly caught as this amounted to. I hope Willie Fisher, if he reads this, will notice that I wasn't trusting luck to any considerable extent, either for or against. I mean, I wasn't saying that One-eye's stacked deck was just luck, and laying down before it; nor I wasn't relaxing my efforts and trusting luck to pull me out of the mess.

"You needn't stare around the store that way," says Mr. Colwall. "Before you move from this spot, I'm going to know where you're going, and all hard objects will be put where you won't be able to reach 'em; and even then, my revolver muzzle's going to be within half an inch of your spinal column all the time. So you can stop thinking and give your brains a rest. Now, where's the money?"

"On the top shelf, behind the counter," says I, very reluctantly.

"Then suppose," says One-eye, after examining my face and assuring himself that he was getting the truth, "suppose you go over and sweep all the scales, weights, and similar objects off the counter with your own fair hands."

He was close up against my back, his gun muzzle touching my skull, while I performed this operation; but he had far too much brains to stay there afterward.

"Now, while you get up on the counter," he says, "I will withdraw to the other side of the room. You'll hold the candle in your right hand all the time, while with your left hand you'll throw the plunder over your shoulder on to the floor. You won't turn around, on penalty of getting shot at a range of four yards. Now, then, up with you."

I felt so humiliated that honestly, I was paralyzed. I couldn't believe it was me.

"Up!" says One-eye, from his post on the other side of the room. And up I went.

I threw down the money, and the purse of gold, just as he told me to. There wasn't any other course possible. He had the whole business sewn up so tight you couldn't see the seam; and, having got what he came for, he didn't permit his exultation to make him careless, by no means whatever. He didn't stoop down, for instance, as ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have done, and pick up the booty from where it was lying. I was all ready to turn, as soon as I heard his clothes creak, and take a chance on springing for his neck; but he didn't move from his position by the wall until I was down off the counter and standing in the middle of the floor with my hands up. Considering that I'd noticed my favorite weapon, the stove poker, lying on the shelf under the counter, ready to be grasped and thrown if he relaxed his vigilance for a quarter of a second, I guess the reader can imagine how I felt.

"That's fine," says Mr. Colwall gently. "And now—would you be so very obliging, Mr. Garfield, as to go over and seat yourself in that wicker chair, your hands still being held above your head? No, not the wooden chair! Keep away from it! And don't let your hands catch hold of the hanging lamp as you pass. That's right. And here's a rope all

handy. Hands still in the air, thank you. Now lift your legs a little so I can get this loop—that's right."

Well, to make a long story short, he hauled enough rope out of the cellar—it comes up through a hole in the floor—to make a good-sized cocoon out of me; and he made the cocoon, winding it so tightly that my chances of developing into a decent butterfly were practically nil; and even then, stooping to gather up my purse of gold, and my two hundred and forty-six dollars and thirty-one cents annual sale takings, and my savings which included two thousand dollars rewards for catching his four friends—gathering these things up, I say, he still kept both his eyes and his gun fixed unwaveringly upon me. I never saw such a distrustful man in all my life.

"There!" says he at last. "And now, much against my inclinations, Mr. Garfield, I find myself compelled to leave you. Such a bad case of swelled head as yours doubtless needs longer treatment than I have been able to give it; I could, in fact, spend many a pleasant hour pointing out to you how easily any old fool can be stood on his head by any man with normal brains; but——"

"Well, I won't trouble you," I told him. "I've seen enough of you for one long time. Now, you've got everything you came for. There's the door right behind you. Do me one favor and get out of it."

He didn't even trust the simplest statement. He flashed kind of a lightning glance over his shoulder to see that the door actually was there, before he even made a motion to go out of it. And his exit was so cautious as to be a perfect insult. There I sat, unable to move hand, foot, or head, twenty feet away at the least; and yet he kept his face toward me, and his gun trained on my tummy, and reached behind him, with his left hand to turn the doorknob. And, not content with acting out this distrust of my intentions toward him, he actually boasted about it.

"Now that I've licked you and laid you level with the dust, and taken all the scalps out of your wigwam, Mr. Garfield," says one-eye Colwall. "I don't mind telling you that of all the wild-eyed, yet cunning old devil lynxes I've ever seen or heard of, you are the most devilish. Now that I've proved myself the better man, I'll admit that robbing the mails, and dodging the entire department of justice of these United States strikes me as being a picnic alongside of dealing with you. When I came here, I didn't think that, in spite of all my plans, I could pull this job off; and now I have pulled it off, I've got a higher opinion of myself than I ever had before. I'll be able to undertake bigger things in the future, thanks to this night's work. If I can beat you, this way, there ain't a peace officer in the United States I can't steal the eye-teeth out of, without half exertin' myself. And, just to show you that I mean what I say, I'm goin' to retire from your presence as carefully as I would from that of any other man if he was armed to the teeth and at full liberty. I'm going to retire from your presence backward, flinging the door open, jumping outside, and slamming it in one movement, with my gun still trained carefully on you all the time. So—good evening!"

Well, he flung the door open, and he jumped backward through the doorway into the darkness; and then, as everybody knows, he had the misfortune to fall, stunning himself so badly that he was still lying unconscious when Jake Henson, my deputy, came over in response to an alarm given by my butting the telephone receiver off the hook with my head and shouting "Murder! Murder!" at the top of my voice.

And of course, at first blush, his fall does look like pure luck. Not wishing to tell all I know, I've permitted this

impression to pass current. And to some extent it's true; I mean, it was luck that One-eye chose to jump out through the door that way; and that, when he fell, he happened to hit his head the way he did.

But, since Willie Fisher has raised the question so prominently, I must step forward and claim some personal credit.

I mean—it wasn't just by chance that, when I told One-eye "There's the door!" I nodded my head, not to the doorway leading outside, but to the one that opens on the head of the cellar stairs.

FEDERAL AID FOR WESTERN ROADS

GREATER Federal aid for highway construction in the West was recently urged at Alburquerque, New Mexico, by James Hinkle and William Sweet, governors respectively of New Mexico and Colorado, in addresses before the joint national convention of the United States Good Roads Association and the Bankhead National Highway organization. More than three hundred delegates were in attendance when the convention was opened by J. A. Rountree of Alabama.

It is said that there are nearly five hundred million acres of government-owned land in the West, and that it works a particular hardship upon the States to build the roads without material Federal aid. There was a movement among the delegates on their arrival to ask the national conventions of Democrats and Republicans to incorporate a Federal-aid plank in their platforms.

"INDIAN JIM" TORRES

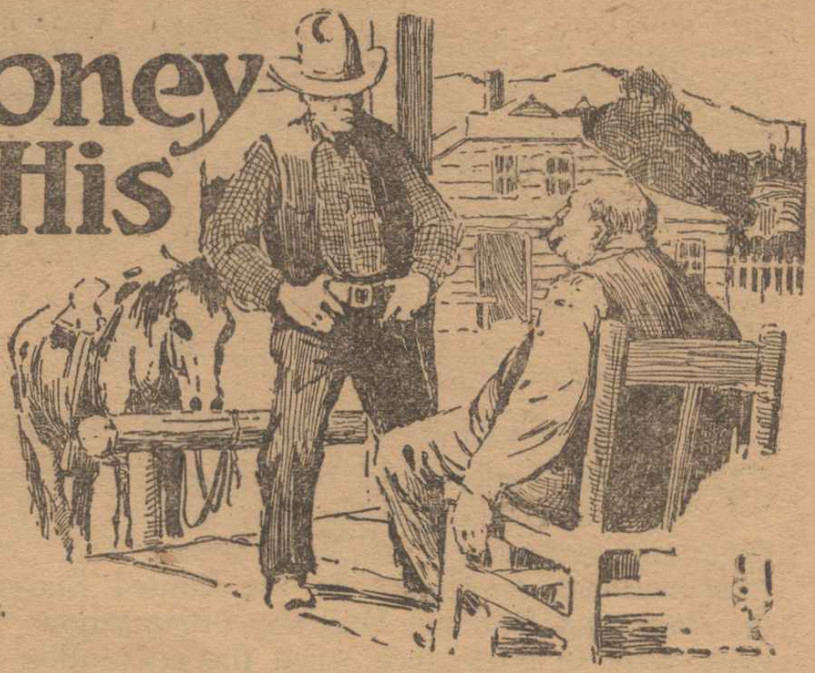
"INDIAN JIM" TORRES, scout and veteran of plains wars, friend and comrade of Kit Carson, and of many kindred heroes of the days of the early West, died recently at Cañon City, Colorado. In strange contrast to the manner in which death came to Carson, Torres died at the State Penitentiary. He had been a prisoner there for thirty-eight years, a convicted murderer. For more than a third of a century he had seen criminals come inside the gray walls, serve their allotted time, and go out again into the world. Many times he pleaded for clemency, but without avail.

Torres was not only the oldest prisoner in the penitentiary—he was eighty-seven years old—but he had served there longer than any other man. The old scout, a full-blooded Navajo Indian, was a striking figure, a strong face crowned with snowy white hair, and a sturdy body resting on wooden legs. These last were mute testimony of the adventuresome life he had led when he was reckoned a "good scout." He had been hit by five bullets in an encounter with horse thieves, and he was left in the snow for dead. Soldiers from Fort Lyon found him the next day, however, and bore him to the fort. To save his life the surgeons were forced to cut off both legs.

In 1879, Torres first had a tilt with the law, and he served three years for horse stealing. In October, 1893, a Pueblo rancher was found murdered. His body was discovered in a well. Torres, who had worked for him, had disappeared. Weeks later the old Indian was found, and in his possession was a horse belonging to the dead man.

Stoutly the old Navajo denied his guilt and produced a fair alibi. The jury, however, refused to be convinced and sentenced him to a life term.

When Money Went to His Head



By

Ernest Haycox

Author of "The Snowbird," etc.

MIDAFTERNOON in Burnt Creek. Six false-fronted frame buildings baking under the heat, cracked and weathered. A desiccated town slit in the jack-pine forest as an initial carved from the bark of a tree. A sultry, sand-ridden place, dying for want of water like all the rest of Central Oregon. Old man Budd lumped in a chair on the porch of his store, the sole witness of life.

Ralph Olmstead came out of the jack pines from the Bend Klamath Road and urged his horse to the hitching rack in front of the store. "You ain't moved out of that chair since last Friday," said Ralph.

"Too hot."

Ralph came up the steps. He was a compact young man, red of hair and scorched of features. Homesteading had left its mark on him. He had the bitter expression of one pushed to the limit of endurance. "Well, I need a sack of Durham and a can of coffee."

"Tobacco in the case. Coffee sum'eres on the top shelf. Find 'em yourself."

Ralph walked into the small store and rummaged through the cluttered shelves. All commodities were indiscriminately mixed and all alike filled or covered with sand. He found what he needed and, obeying the immemorial custom of the ranchers, scratched his name and the articles on a slip of paper, transfixing it to a spike. This was old man Budd's charge system.

"Mail in the box fer the Lewis'," grunted Budd.

Ralph came out finally with his packages and the letter, scowling more than usual. A tremor of amusement disturbed Budd's vast frame. "Seems like y' ain't so pleased with carryin' mail t' Grace Lewis like you once was. Gosh, don't look like a rattler bit you. She was your girl, wa'n't she?"

"She choses her own company. After this she can chose her own letter carriers."

Old man Budd made a shrewd guess. "Scrappin' ag'in. Cats an' dogs couldn't be worse. You two oughta have more sense. The trouble is, you're both on edge with the heat an' so forth. This ain't no country or time to git your back up."

Ralph scowled again. "The trouble is, a man comes into this country with the cards stacked against him. There ain't a chance to win. Not one chance in a million. Here I've hung on for three

years, scorched in summer an' near froze stiff in winter. My crops come up good —an' then the heat ruins 'em. An' if I did come lucky and harvested a little extra hay, what'd I do with it? Who'd buy it? Here I need a new horse, need barb wire for my fence, roof of my shanty has to be tar papered before fall sets in, and I owe you six months' groceries. That's homesteadin'!"

"Son, you ain't tellin' me anything I hain't heard before," said Budd. "Ev'ybody fer forty miles owes me a year's grocery bill. We're all busted. What's the difference? I ain't seen any hard money since McKinley was pres'd'nt. Wouldn't know what to do with it if I did git some."

"If congress would only pass that bill, we might get a little courage to fight it out!" exclaimed Ralph. "But there won't be an ounce of water in the country until they do pass it—and they wait and wait and wait!"

"Reclamation projects're always kinda slow," said Budd. "It'll come some day." He turned his head. "Speakin' of money, there's a chance fer you to make five hundred dollars. Read the sign over on the wall."

Ralph turned to a notice tacked on the rough boards and met this announcement:

FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD

For information leading to arrest of the three masked men who held up the Bend Klamath mail stage four miles north ot Burnt Creek, June 1, 1924.

"Day before yesterday," said Ralph. "Road agents, huh? An' we ain't had any trouble for a couple of years now." Then he read further:

Said three masked men bound and gagged driver of the stage, broke into an Endicott Express Co. chest, and took gold and paper coin amounting to thirty-five hundred dollars. Bandits were of medium height, weighed about one hundred and fifty pounds each, and wore corduroy pants, olive-drab army shirts, and Stetson hats. Leader of the trio heavier set than rest and had light-blue eyes. Any information should be given to the Endicott Express office, Bend, Oregon.

Old man Budd's voice lost a measure of its serenity. "When a rattlesnake sticks to its own rock there ain't no fuss to be made. But a varmint's to be shot when it starts runnin' wild. I didn't think they'd have nerve to do it."

"Who?" asked Ralph. Old man Budd's mind held many shrewd bits of knowledge, and it paid to listen. But the storekeeper had given one hint, and would offer no more.

"This country's hard, but it's sweet an' clean," he said. "Ain't no room for desperadoes. They ought to be shot down like coyotes."

"Got to find them first," replied Ralph.

"Just you 'member this," warned Budd. "There's danged few people c'n stand prosperity. A little money goes to the head mighty fast. Somebody'll spill the beans. There's three of 'em with more'n a thousan' dollars each. It'll burn their han's. Watch."

Another horseman appeared from the jack pines and came up. Ralph's mouth, habitually set, grew still thinner. Elvy Dakin was not his friend, nor his kind; the lowering, saturnine face marked the bully too plainly. The cold, blue eyes held their unsavory secrets.

"Need some chuck, old man," said Dakin, giving an unfriendly glance to Ralph. He fetched an empty gunny sack from the pommel and stalked into the store. Budd and Ralph stared out upon the sand until Dakin came back to the porch with the gunny sack half filled. He flipped a coin into Budd's lap. The storekeeper held it forward in his palm with a grunt of surprise. "Gold piece. Heard tell they still coined 'em, but didn't believe it. Thought the gov'ment had decided money wa'n't any use to us Westerners. How d'you expec' me to change this?"

"Reckon I owe you that much," re-

plied Dakin carelessly. "It don't make any difference." He tied the gunny sack to the saddle.

Ralph shook his head, and he could not avoid expressing some measure of resentment. He had worked hard and honestly, with nothing to show for it save the memory of bitter struggle. "Kind of reckless with your money, ain't you, Elvy? Seems strange to throw gold pieces around like that."

Dakin's blue eyes glittered as he met Ralph's sober face. Then the need for explanation evidently occurred to him. "Farmin' ain't the only way t' make money," he said. "People still have thirsts."

"Moonshinin'!" exclaimed Ralph in disgust.

"I don't like your tone an' I don't like your manner," flared Dakin. "Don't try to put on airs. *You* ain't got nerve enough or brains enough to beat the law."

Ralph's fist came up. "Once a crook, always a crook. Maybe I haven't got any brains—sometimes I doubt it fer stickin' to this country—but I can beat you to a pulp if you open that ugly mouth at me again. Now you get out of here before we have war!"

Elvy Dakin glowered and twitched his nose. Perhaps he would have accepted the challenge if old man Budd's conciliatory voice had not interrupted. "What ails you boys, anyway? It's too hot t' fight. Git on your horse, Elvy, an' pull out."

The man did so, very slowly. When he was ready to depart he flung a warning at Ralph. "Next time you spring that stuff on me, ol'-timer, we'll do battle. An' it won't be just fists, either." With that he turned toward the Bend Klamath Road, and although the day was stifling, he urged his horse to a lope.

There was a long silence. Ralph stared at the jack pines, still ridden by his discouragement. Presently old man Budd spoke again, apropos of nothing at all. "Yes, sir, a varmint's to be killed when it gets the rabies. No mercy t' be shown. Did you say you was interested in that five hundred dollars, Ralph?"

"I'm no man hunter. Against my grain to snoop after other people and their affairs."

"Just you 'member what I said about varmints. An' don't fergit about people not bein' able to stand prosperity. Just 'member those things, Ralph. Think 'em over. Five hundred dollars is a lot of money."

Ralph got his package of coffee and swung into the saddle. "If somethin' don't come my way pretty soon," said he, "I'll blow up an' bust. Everything I turn a hand to goes wrong."

Old man Budd's voice came after, but he did not hear it. The Bend Klamath Road, the intolerable heat, and the stifling sand engulfed him. His own temper was short enough to cause him many weary moments of self-discipline; now he was on the verge of a blow-up, as he had put it.

He plunged into the jack pines and gave the horse free rein to follow the narrow, rutted road. Old man Budd's cryptic sentences kept recurring, no matter how he turned his mind. Five hundred dollars. Why, five hundred dollars would be like a gift from the skies! It would give him heart to go on, heart to continue the weary, unequal fight for prosperity. It meant horses, fences, buildings, and seed. It meant self-respect. It meant he might even ask Grace Lewis——

"Oh, no, it don't," he said. "That little lady picks her own company, an' I ain't going to butt in any more. She shut the gate, and I'll be danged if I open it."

Of a sudden his eyes picked up a diverging trail of hoofprints ahead; hoofprints that swung from the main road to a narrow path into the deeper shade of the forest. Ralph's dissatisfaction was given more fuel. "There goes Elvy

Dakin to his shanty and his cronies and moonshine still!"

Then, simultaneously, his mind grasped three loose ends of information and made a strand of fact. The leader of the masked bandits was, according to the express-company notice, above medium height, heavy set, and had blue eyes. And old man Budd had repeated his mysterious comment twice: "Varmints out of their preserve—they won't stand prosperity very long. Somebody'll spill the beans—I didn't think they had nerve enough to do it." The storekeeper quite evidently had some particular gang in mind. And perhaps it was more than a coincidence that Elvy Dakin had blue eyes and was above the ordinary height. Moreover, Elvy had partners who made the unsavory shack in the jack pines their headquarters. Several shiftless, ratty men who made and peddled white mule. They were lacking in backbone, save when drunk, but they would follow Elvy, and he had always been a restless, unpleasant character.

"So that was what the old man drove at," murmured Ralph. "I was a bonehead not to see it."

If he could get some proof, he would be the possessor of five hundred dollars. Five hundred dollars! Then the small hint of pleasure died away from his face. "I'm no man hunter. It ain't exactly fair—unless I give him warning that I'm out-and-out against him."

Thus thinking, he rode through the forest while the afternoon sun sank lower and lower. Somewhere beyond six o'clock he emerged to a vast prairie, and in another half hour arrived at his shanty, perched on a quarter section of land. In the distance was the huddle of another frame house—the Lewis place. Ralph made a short supper, and in the twilight set across the country toward the far ranch with the letter he had brought from Burnt Creek.

He saw, presently, that there were people in front of the house; when he came closer he knew it to be Grace Lewis and Elvy Dakin, and his arm fell across the pommel of the saddle with an impatient slap. But he rode up through the graying dusk and joined them with a sober face. Dakin thrust out his arrogant chin and growled: "Nobody invited you over here."

"Them's certainly true words," agreed Ralph. "Truer than you know. But I don't always need invitation, being in that respect like some other people."

He slid off the horse and walked to the girl with the letter extended. "There was this for you, and I thought I might as well bring it—this time."

She was a small, sturdy lass, and even in the dusk a glow of pink stood on her cheeks, visible to Ralph. The barren land of the West is no respecter of persons, and its toll is usually calloused hands, roughened skin, and abraded beauty; but Grace Lewis seemed to have been excepted from that toll. Her eyes were dark to match her hair. A scent of rose perfume was on her clothes, the touch of a gentleness unforgotten in a homestead shack. She took the letter with a faint thanks, returning his sober gaze with a slight air of confusion and defiance.

"Here Rover, there Rover," said Dakin sneeringly. "You fetch an' carry well."

The girl turned on him as if to protest, and her eyes snapped. Then she dropped her head and was mute.

"You're getting funnier and funnier," observed Ralph somberly. The rankling sense of thwarted labor came again to him, and presently he was thinking of the five hundred dollars that meant security and self-respect. "By the way, Elvy, I'm looking for five hundred dollars. You ain't seen anything of it, have you?"

"Haw! That's a good one, ol'-timer. You ain't ever had five hundred dollars, and you won't ever have five hundred dollars."

"No, but I'm lookin' for it."

Some of the amusement died out of Elvy Dakin's face and left him puzzled. The girl, too, watched Ralph closely. "What're you talkin' about?" demanded Elvy.

"Why, the reward for information regardin' the holdup day before yesterday. I just said to myself, 'I need that money,' so I'm looking around. I thought I'd ask you—so you'd know what I was doing. Just so you'd know, Elvy."

Dakin stepped back a pace and his arm dropped toward a rear pocket. He was breathing fast, and a blaze of anger leaped in his hard, blue eyes. "What's that mean?" he demanded harshly.

"Nothing in particular and everything in general. Take your hand away from your hip pocket, Elvy. I can beat you to the draw. You ought to know better. Fan out of here now. And if you see anything of that five hundred, just let me know."

The two men stood face to face in the dusk, swaying slightly toward each other. Dakin's fingers twitched against his trousers leg and every predatory bit of his nature rose to the surface and was visible. A rasp of emotion came out of his throat, but no intelligible word. Ralph laughed.

"You'd like to fight it out now, Elvy, but you ain't got the crust. Go home and drink some of your moonshine, and you'll feel more like a lion."

The girl stepped between them. "Stop this quarreling. It's ridiculous that two grown men must fight just like children."

Dakin turned away and climbed into the saddle. "All right, ol'-timer," he said, looking straight at Ralph. "I get you, but you won't ever make any use of what you think. See?" Then he spoke to the girl. "Sorry our little evenin's entertainment was interrupted. Better luck next time. An' mebbe you'd better think over what I said." A moment later he was lost in the thickening dusk.

"What'd he mean, 'think it over?'" growled out Ralph.

"There's no reason why I should tell you my private affairs, Ralph Olmstead," she returned defiantly. "You're not my guardian."

Ralph curled his fist at the thought of the insolence Elvy Dakin might have given her, and the girl, seeing it, was suddenly angry. "There you go, doubling up your fist! Just like everything and everybody else in this darned old country! Force, force, force—that's all people can think of. I'm sick and tired of it!"

Old man Budd's shrewd guess was correct. Both of these young, upright people were gripped by the heat and the rawness of their surroundings. Both were on edge, needing the impact of some exciting event to jar them back to normal behavior. Ralph turned to his horse and without a word got into the saddle and gathered the reins.

The girl stood undecided, the anger dying away. "Well, aren't you going to say something? I'm expecting to hear that terrible temper break out."

"Them days," said Ralph sadly, "are gone forever. Guess we don't do anything but quarrel. That's getting kinda monotonous. There's a little business I got to look after to-night, so I'll just travel on. Won't bother you any more."

"Wait," she commanded, and came closer. "I—I heard you say something to him that sounded like a warning. What was it? Where are you going?"

"Well, now, I can't just tell you," he answered. "It's a matter of business." He rode away, leaving the girl by the gate. She called after him. "Ralph, don't you be foolish and go into the jack pines to-night. Do you hear me? There might be trouble."

He refused to answer, riding on. But he had gone only a few yards when he heard a sound that set every nerve on

edge. He dug his heels into the flanks of the horse and raced away. "Crying, she was!" he muttered. "Well, I won't ever give her reason to cry any more. But how did she know what I was going to do?"

Women, he decided, were possessed by an uncanny sense of events. Somehow she had learned of Dakin and his gang in the jack pines. Of course, it was no especial secret, and yet there was nothing tangible against these men. Then he thought of Dakin's insolent attitude toward the girl, and it turned him into a cold rage. "It's got to be settled right now!" he said to himself.

He came to his shanty and stopped only long enough to get additional shells for his revolver and to throw a lariat over the saddle pommel. This was by way of preparation for the unexpected. "If I'm going to do it right I've got to force the issue. That gang may be getting all their gold pieces from moonshinin', but somehow it don't seem likely. And Dakin took up my hint too quick. If there's any booty it'll be around the cabin somewhere. Here goes."

The dusk had turned to full-shadowed night. Above, in a clear, cold sky, a thin rind of moon let down a filter of light. Ralph urged his horse out of a walk and crossed the prairie. Turning in the saddle, he looked back and saw his shack setting in a desolate huddle. Farther away he observed some black, moving shadows against the sky line, but he paid no attention. Night riders were frequent enough in this country to attract scant notice. A few minutes later he plunged into the abysmal gloom of the pines and for a time was utterly blinded. Then his eyes became accustomed, and he saw the way ahead.

He was bound for the sinister cabin in the woods, something like a quarter mile farther along, and three or four hundred yards deeper in the brush. As he traveled, a rough plan formed in his head; he would leave the horse in the road and creep through to the shanty. It was yet early enough in the evening, and they would doubtless be playing cards, or busy with the moonshine still. In either case, they would be together, and he would have almost an even break in the fight that would probably come.

He turned a bend of the road, and the horse picked up his head and shied to one side. Ralph came alert, but neither gun shot nor voice broke the night, and he relaxed. "Don't be so skittish," he said. "Get along."

The next moment he was brought to a sharp halt. A shadowed figure stepped from the thicket; and the crackling of brush behind told of other men closing in. The sullen voice of Elvy Dakin challenged him. "That hoss has more sense than you got. I thought mebbe you'd put your head into the trap. Give a fool enough rope an' he'll always hang himself."

"Ain't it the truth," agreed Ralph, sparring for time. He could not reach for his gun without precipitating a shower of lead; he was too plain a target to afford that at this instant.

"Now," snarled out Dakin, "get down from that horse. I'm goin' to beat the sap outa you. When we're finished, you won't be able to talk about that five hundred dollars. Keep your hands up!"

Ralph slipped down. The horse's body shielded him from the men behind, and Dakin had not drawn his gun. He made a leap forward, but with all his planning was not quick enough. Dakin was upon him like a tiger, beating his face and body with savage fists. There was no time, it seemed, to ward off blows. The horse reared up, turned around, and bolted up the road. The attackers closed in, and Ralph was struck a glancing blow on the temple. He went down, half paralyzed, and in the confusion of feet he took hold of a pair of boots and pulled with all his might. A body crashed atop of him.

"Clear away," panted one of the gang. "Gimme a chance to shoot!"

Ralph gripped his man while the fog cleared from his head. They were all around him, standing slightly off, and waiting for a chance to put in a bullet. His unwilling captive grunted like a bear in a trap and rolled in the sand. It carried them toward the brush, and Ralph, conceiving a better plan, let go and shoved his opponent away with his feet. They rose almost together.

"It's the right-hand man!" cried a voice. "Let him have it!"

"No!" screamed Ralph's opponent, weaving as if drunk. It was then too late; the woods thundered and two orange blotches splayed out against the velvet darkness. There was a grunt, a cough, and as Elvy turned with his revolver, the man beside him fell heavily. Down the road echoed the patter of hoofs. "Outa here!" ordered Dakin. "We got to beat it! Come on, Bill."

They ran through the thicket toward the shanty. Ralph made a swift calculation. They still believed they had killed the right man. The scream of protest was too full of frenzy to sound like any particular person. It was such a cry as any one might make who felt the imminence of death. The pound of the hoofs sounded clearer.

"Come on, Bill!" bellowed Dakin, retreating farther into the brush. "We're goin' out the other trail."

Ralph took his cue and lunged into the thicket after them. He found a narrow pathway and redoubled his speed. The others were strung out in front, and one of the three had reached the shanty. The door slammed against the outer wall, and feet thumped across the flooring. Ralph arrived in front of the place five paces behind the last man; he approached the open doorway and waited. It was pitch dark in the shanty.

"There's somebody on the road," said Dakin. "I'm goin' to light just one match while you gents get your stuff. Then we got to clear away. It'll be four hours before they gather a posse, an' that'll put us clean out of the country. Bert, did you saddle the horses like I told you?"

"Sure. Hurry an' light that match."

"That cussed Olmstead made an awful noise. Gives me the willies. Hurry up!"

Ralph gripped the sill of the door. A match scratched across wood and flared to a dim light, revealing Dakin's face, lined with dirt and perspiration. "Bill, where are you?" he called, and turned the match toward Ralph. The latetr raised his revolver.

"Up—put 'em up—all of you. Hold that match, Elvy, and don't move."

The two lesser members of the gang stopped as if carved of granite. "It was Bill we shot, then!" breathed one softly. But Dakin was of more durable substance. The arm holding the match swept down and the light snapped out. Ralph jumped aside as the shanty trembled from floor to beams with Dakin's shot. The mushroom of flame gave him a point at which to aim; he took another step to the side, raised his weapon, and fired. One of the other men had taken advantage of the pitch blackness to come into play, and the roar of two explosions beat upon Ralph's ear drums with terrific force. He moved again and came to the corner of the room, waiting in absolute silence. The acrid odor of gunpowder brought tears to his eyes; a cough broke from some one in the opposite corner, was repeated, and followed by a ragged, weakening voice. "I'm done for!" It was Dakin's voice. A chair tipped and fell, a body sprawled to the floor with an irregular impact, and a gun clattered sharply on the boards.

With the chief down and the false courage of moonshine ebbing fast away, the two others were bereft of support, and the nasal voice of the ferret-faced one whined out a surrender, cor-

roborated quickly by his partner. Ralph clutched the wall of the shanty. "You boys ain't got a mite of spunk," he said in a drowsy voice. "Drop your guns. All right—now light the lamp. You sure must have had a lot of hooch in your system to rob a mail stage. Or else Elvy kicked you into the idea. Hurry up!"

Out on the road there was the stir of a horse and the swish of brush. The lamp wick spurted a flame; the ferret-faced one affixed the globe and backed against the wall with his partner. His face was chalk white. "We got Bill!" he reiterated.

"We?" cried his partner. "Where you get that stuff? I never fired. I didn't do it!"

"Shut up," commanded Ralph in the same drowsy voice. The pistol wavered in his arm, and he found it unexpectedly hard to maintain himself upright. Dakin was stretched awkwardly on the floor, one arm reaching outward for his revolver, and the other tangled in the fallen chair. The mattress of one bunk was dragged half from the frame, and Ralph saw the hint of a canvas bag in the boards. That, he decided, was the loot these men had taken from the mail stage.

He caught his breath; a sharp pain ran across his chest, and try as he did, the strength left his legs and the gun would not stay up to a level. The ferret-faced one took a step forward, his eyes glittering with a sudden hope. "Winged you, huh? Mebbe you'll sing another song, after all." His arms came down, and a malicious grin covered the ashen complexion. His partner made a tentative step toward the fallen weapons.

"Stay back!" commanded Ralph angrily. He tried to bring the gun up again, but his fingers were as pieces of ice and entirely bereft of strength. He made a last effort to stand, then the wall refused to support him longer, and he dropped like a sack of meal. The ferret-faced one gave a shout and dived for his gun.

"Stop it!"

The ferret-faced one rolled away from the weapon as if it had been a coiled snake. In the door stood Grace Lewis, pointing a rifle on the two outlaws. "Ralph, did they get you?"

"Good—girl!" he murmured. "I'm —all—right. But—no strength in my legs. Turn around, you two. Give me the gun. Take that piece of rope and tie 'em together. See what's happened to Elvy."

She did as commanded, trussing the arms of the two men. A hasty inspection of Dakin revealed a welt along the neck. "Knock-out more than anything else," observed Ralph. "He'll come around soon enough. Tie him, too. We'll leave him here."

The girl bent over Ralph and opened his shirt front. "Ralph, it just missed your lungs! Oh, I knew you'd come here. I saw it in your face. That's why I followed. I heard the shooting, and then saw the light in the window. What would have happened!" She shuddered. "Ralph—I—I won't lose my temper again!"

"Huh?" It seemed as if he reached a new reservoir of strength. He ripped off a piece of the shirt and made, with the girl's help, a rough dressing to stop the flow of blood. Then he managed to get to his feet and superintend operations. From beneath the fallen mattress he picked the canvas bag and found therein a packet of fresh five and ten-dollar bills. Beneath Dakin's mattress was a second bag, with gold pieces. Ralph explained the robbery to Grace, then drove the prisoners out of the shanty and to the road. The girl had found Ralph's horse and brought it back with her. Both mounted, and with the prisoners trudging before them, tethered by the rope, they started toward Burnt Creek.

"We'll call the sheriff on the phone

and have him down here in no time. He can come after Elvy and——"

"And the dead man," finished the girl, shuddering again. "I saw him in the road."

"Poor Bill didn't get a square break," observed Ralph. "But the rest of them will pay for it."

The two horses came together, and Ralph had strength enough to lean over and capture a kiss from the girl. "Say, honey, what's been ailin' us, anyway? There's too much work for us to do without fighting each other."

"We'll never do it again, Ralph."

"Well—not too much," he amended, with the semblance of a grin. Then, later, he had another pleasing thought. "Five hundred dollars' reward. Say, that'll put us on Easy Street. And when water comes into the country we'll be fixed for life. Ain't this a great land?"

CHALLENGES BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

MRS. STELLA ATWOOD of Riverside, California, recently challenged the administration of the Bureau of Indian Affairs before the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Mrs. Atwood brings these charges:

"That the Pima Indians have been deprived of water from the upper reaches of the Gila River; that there has been exploitation of the Oklahoma Indians; that the Chippewa Indians of Minnesota, despite a credit to their account of six million dollars in the Indian Bureau, received during a recent period of crop shortage only thirteen dollars each; that an attempt is being made to deprive the Mission Indians of California of land through an allotment process; that, despite an appeal for food for the destitute Indians of Alaska, Congress cut the appropriation for the Chemawa School in Oregon, with the result that four hundred Alaskan children would have been sent home if the activities of club women had not resulted in a year's extension by Congress."

Against these injustices Mrs. Atwood proposed a constructive program of legislation to protect Indians in their lands, and water rights, and to give them education through better schools, and training for citizenship. She said in part:

"Our first constructive legislation must be to correct the economic situation which is fundamental and basic. An economic survey should be made of each reservation, with a careful consideration of its individual needs. A careful estimate should be made of what is necessary in money and coöperation, with established governmental agencies to give the Indians adequate equipment and information so they may help themselves."

She bases her charges against the Bureau of Indian Affairs on personal investigations which she has been carrying on through visits to many Indian villages and reservations.

One of the most interesting investigations has been made among the nineteen pueblos in New Mexico. Under the communal system of government of the Pueblos, all lands are held by the tribe and are allotted for cultivation by the authorities. A man is allowed only what he can use, and the improvements he makes are never confiscated. The lineage of the children is through the mother, and she builds the home, as the family expands, kneading mud into dough and patting it into the walls.

The Monster of Roosevelt Lake

By

Reginald C. Barker

Author of "Bottom-side Up," etc.

(A GRIZZLY GALLAGHER STORY)

DAWN and "Grizzly" Gallagher arrived together at Lake - where - the - wind-never-blows, but already a thin curl of pine-scented smoke was arising from the stovepipe of Teddy Blaine's cabin, in front of which Teddy was splitting wood.

"Kinda nippy this morning, son," was Grizzly Gallagher's greeting. "You ought to grow some whiskers to keep the cold out this coming winter."

"I was thinking about it," acknowledged Teddy as he rubbed his tingling ears with mittened hands, "but Hattie says that if I let my whiskers grow she'll sure enough bob her hair."

"If I'd married a girl like Hattie," said Grizzly, "I'd have been nicknamed 'Bald Face' instead of 'Grizzly.' For I couldn't ever have abided a bobbed-haired wife."

"Did you hear the news as you came through McCall?" asked Teddy.

"Didn't hit McCall this trip," replied Grizzly Gallagher. "I wanted to look for fur sign, so I came over by way of Bear Valley and the Deadwood Divide."

Teddy whanged his ax into a stump where it stuck with quivering helve.

"Hattie and I saw a monster over at Roosevelt Lake," he announced. "Come in the house and I'll tell you about it while we're eating."

" 'Tis all pink and white you are, Hattie," said Grizzly Gallagher to Teddy's wife who was cooking breakfast, "and as purty as one of those little snow flowers that grows up nex' the clouds."

"It's kissing the blarney stone you've been, Grizzly Gallagher," returned Hattie; for sometimes the Irish in her came to the fore, "but just for the pretty words of you, I'll be givin' you the biggest trout in the pan."

" 'Tis your mother's daughter you are," said Grizzly Gallagher, "when it comes to frying trout. But tell me about the monster that Teddy mentioned as having seen while you and he were off on that fishing trip to Roosevelt Lake."

"Mother says it was a banshee," proclaimed Hattie with a shudder, "but old Indian Joe, the trapper, claims it to be the same evil spirit that caused the great landslide which dammed Monumental Creek and submerged the mining camp of Roosevelt."

"It was nearly sunset," said Teddy. "Hattie and I had had pretty good luck with the big lake trout, and thinking we had caught enough, we returned to our camp on the mountain. About dusk we

needed a bucket of water, so we went after it together."

"Scared of the dark," asked Grizzly Gallagher, "or just spooning?"

"Shut up, you old reprobate," commanded Teddy. "As I was saying, we were together, and we carried the bucket between us, each holding on to the bale."

"Seems to me," mused the old trapper, "there was a party named Jack and Jill who did the same thing."

"You tell him the rest, Hattie," said Teddy. "The old sinner will believe you."

"After we'd filled the bucket," continued Hattie, "we started back up the hill, and the bucket getting heavy we set it down."

"And went to spooning again," suggested Grizzly Gallagher wickedly.

"And we stood looking down at the lake going to sleep beneath its blanket of mist," said Hattie.

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher. "I most sartinly do."

"Suddenly Teddy took me by the arm," said Hattie, "and pointed across the lake to where the slide-wrecked buildings of the Golden Grab Mine lean over the water. And when I saw what he was pointing at I nearly screamed, for outlined against the mist was a huge creature taller than a man, and with an enormous head and one huge round eye right in the middle of its forehead. For a moment it stood there among the rotting timbers of the wrecked building; then the night mist hid it."

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher again. "I most sartinly do! What had you been drinking, some of that liquor out of those old saloons that lie beneath Roosevelt Lake? Or was it just an overdose of mountain air?"

"I told you he wouldn't believe it, Hattie," said Teddy.

"Did you find any tracks?" It was the natural question of a trapper who had spent forty-odd years in the Big Hills.

"We didn't get a chance to look for 'em," explained Teddy. "We had to get out of there in a hurry."

"You don't mean that you let the 'monster' run you out of the country," exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher, "after all I've larned you about the woods!"

"We didn't have any choice," explained Teddy, "for when we returned to our camp we found everything gone —grub, cooking pots, bedding, guns, and fishing tackle. All gone."

"Teddy was down on his knees looking for tracks," said Hattie, "but it was so nearly dark that he couldn't find any. Then suddenly from out of the mist that covered the lake there came an awful laugh. It didn't sound human. So I said to Teddy: 'Let's go.'"

"We walked all that night through the dark woods," said Teddy, "and we're not going back to Roosevelt Lake."

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher. "I most sartinly do!" And into his keen blue eyes came a look such as few had seen, a look such as had never been seen since the time, forty-odd years before, Grizzly Gallagher had shot his first bear. It was a look of anticipation, a look which meant that again Grizzly Gallagher had found in the Big Hills something to interest him —a mystery which might tax even his master woodcraft to solve.

"Teddy," he said, "you'll be packing up after breakfast. First we'll take Hattie into McCall and leave her with her mother. Then you and I are going to make a try at catching the monster you claim to have seen at Roosevelt Lake."

"It's the judgment of you that's poor, Grizzly Gallagher," said Hattie, "if you think I'm going to stay with my mother while you take Teddy gallivanting among the hills. You'll either take me along with you on your monster-hunting trip or it's Teddy that will be staying with me at Lake-where-the-wind-never-blows."

"I swan!" exclaimed the old trapper

in amazement. "I most sartinly do! I thought you said you were afraid to go back."

"Not when Grizzly Gallagher is along," answered the girl roguishly.

"Who's been kissing the blarney stone now?" asked Grizzly Gallagher as he rose from the table and filled his pipe.

"If so be we're going in by way of McCall," said Hattie, "I'd like to drop in and talk with mother for a while, for 'tis not often I get an opportunity to see her."

"There'll be an hour or so to spare," stated Grizzly Gallagher, "while Teddy and I are buying supplies and loading up the pack horses. One of us will call in and get you as soon as we are ready to start."

"Ain't you starting to trap kinda early this season, Grizzly?" inquired Sol York, the storekeeper, as he took down Grizzly Gallagher's order for enough supplies to run a month.

"Trapping?" repeated Grizzly Gallagher. "We ain't going trapping. We're going monster hunting."

"Huh?"

Grizzly Gallagher told about the monster which Teddy and his wife claimed to have seen at Roosevelt Lake.

"Haw, haw!" guffawed the storekeeper. He turned to a heavily built, slouchy-appearing character who had entered the store and was helping himself to a dill pickle from an open keg.

"What do you know about that, Scroeger?" he demanded. "Teddy Blaine and his kid wife claim they saw a one-eyed monster come out of Roosevelt Lake."

The man addressed as "Scroeger" wiped his stubbly lips with the back of a hairy hand.

"Sure," he said, "there are monsters in Roosevelt Lake. I seen one myself; had a body like a great ape, a face like a child, and long black hair that floated out on top of the water. It was sittin' on the side of Thunder Mountain eating a raw fish."

"Must have had mighty long hair," observed Grizzly Gallagher.

"It was long hair," asserted Scroeger solemnly. "It was the longest hair I ever seen."

"What had you been drinking?" asked Grizzly Gallagher.

Scroeger's hand slid to his hip pocket and came forth holding a bottle. "I can get you a quart of it for twelve dollars, Grizzly," he said.

"I ain't aiming to see your kind of monsters yet," returned Grizzly Gallagher. "You can keep your moonshine liquor."

"Moonshine!" repeated Scroeger. "Moonshine nothing. That's a quart of the good old redeye that made this country famous."

Grizzly Gallagher took the proffered bottle and examined the label. "I swan!" he exclaimed. "I most sartinly do! I ain't seen a bottle of that for many a year. Where did you get it?"

"I didn't say," was the cunning answer, "but there's lots more where this came from."

"I'm not interested in liquor," said Grizzly Gallagher, "either moonshine or any other kind. Let's hear some more about that monster."

"You stay away from Roosevelt Lake, Grizzly," advised Scroeger, "or you'll likely get all the monsters you are looking for. Do you mind what happened to Mike Moriarity?"

"Drowned in Roosevelt Lake," said Grizzly, "and buried on Thunder Mountain."

"What drowned him?" asked Scroeger. Then answering his own question: "He was pulled off his raft by something that came right up out of the lake."

"How do you know?" asked Grizzly.

"Every one in McCall knows," evaded Scroeger, "that there are monsters in Roosevelt Lake."

"Used to be a seaman, didn't you?" asked Grizzly Gallagher.

"Fourteen years at sea," replied Scroeger with pride, "and in them days, on the old windjammers, a seaman was a real sailor; there warn't no floating palaces them days."

"Seems to me I've heard tell that all sailors are superstitious," said Grizzly Gallagher thoughtfully. "Don't purty near all of them believe in sea sarpints and such?"

"I've seen queer things at sea," replied Scroeger evasively, "but I never saw anything half so queer as the monsters of Roosevelt Lake. You take my advice, partner, and stay away from there while you're able."

"Which," said Grizzly Gallagher, "is just what I don't aim to do."

Then he turned to the storekeeper. "Get those goods up as soon as you can," he said, "for we'll be starting for Roosevelt Lake this evening."

Halfway down the street Grizzly Gallagher met his old friend, Sheriff Mahoney.

"I hear you're going to tackle the monster of Roosevelt Lake," said the old sheriff. "Do you believe that there really is something living in the lake? Something that we don't know the nature of?"

"That's what I aim to find out," said Grizzly Gallagher. "Want to come along?"

"I'd like to," acknowledged the sheriff, "but I got my hands full just now rounding up bootleggers. Never saw so much red liquor in McCall since the country went dry."

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher. "I most sartinly do!"

"And I'll be darned if I know where it's coming from," continued the sheriff.

"Bill Scroeger been getting any freight lately?" asked Grizzly Gallagher irrelevantly.

"He had a couple of hundred traps come a few weeks ago," said the sheriff, "but what has that to do with what I was talking about?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Grizzly Gallagher. "So Bill is going to trap this coming winter, is he? What size traps did he get?"

"Durned if I know," replied the sheriff. "They came crated, and I didn't get to see 'em. I understand, though, that Bill Scroeger loaded 'em on his pack horses and took the traps to Roosevelt Lake."

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher. "I most sartinly do! No wonder Scroeger didn't want me to go to Roosevelt Lake. He aims to catch them monsters himself!"

"There might be monsters in the lake at that," opined the sheriff. "Didn't a bunch of scientific guys find a plesio-something-or-other down South Americay way? And ain't they forever finding queer things in out-of-the-way places? So why not a monster in Roosevelt Lake?"

"I ain't saying that there ain't a monster in the lake," said Grizzly Gallagher mildly. "I hope thar is; maybe I'll be able to stir up a little excitement again."

"Durn your silver-tipped whiskers!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Ain't you ever going to grow old?"

"Not so long as there remains a monster in Roosevelt Lake," was the reply. "And say, sheriff. Do you want to do me a little favor?"

"Shoot."

"For one thing," said Grizzly Gallagher, "I'd like to take a look at the bottles of moonshine you've confiscated. And for another thing—but maybe I'd better ask you that when we reach your office. There won't be so much chance of being overheard."

Deep in his beard Grizzly Gallagher was chuckling as he strode up the plank sidewalk to the restaurant of Hattie's mother—"Lady" Malone.

"Shure and 'tis a silver bullet you'll

be needing to overcome the monster of Rosyvelt Lake, Grizzly," warned Lady Malone, shuddering. "'Tis me grandfather himself that was pulled down by a monsther into the Black Slough of Connemara."

"A good tale for a cold winter's night," said Grizzly, "but outside the pack train is waiting, and I'd be obliged to you if you'd so tell Hattie."

"It's the monsther himself that'll be stealing her away from you two omadhauns," said Lady Malone with a sigh as she watched the little cavalcade depart. "And it's meself that'll be left all alone, alone."

That night Grizzly Gallagher, Teddy, and his wife made camp at the foot of the Jug Handle Peaks, a vast jumble of gray mountains, inhabited only by white mountain goats and the cougars that preyed upon them. Followed another day on the trail, with the horses headed toward the southeast. On the evening of the third day out, the little party came to a halt on a sort of plateau from which they could see, far below them, the deep waters of Roosevelt Lake.

"It was right here that we were camped," said Teddy, "when we saw the monster. We left our camp equipment here while we went down to the lake after water; when we returned it was gone."

"Then right here is where we'll make camp to-night," said Grizzly. "Give me a hand to unpack the horses; then we'll leave Hattie here to cook supper while we take a look around."

Hattie glanced nervously into the dusk. "I'd rather one of you would stay with me," she said. "Suppose, suppose that the monster really should come?"

"I'm not going to leave her here alone, Grizzly," asserted Teddy, "not after having our camp equipment stolen right from where we are now standing. If you want to go prowling around the lake this evening, go ahead. But as for me, I'm staying with Hattie."

Grizzly Gallagher took his rifle from where he had leaned it against a tree. "Maybe you're right, son," he acknowledged. "Not as I reck'n any harm would come to Hattie; but it ain't for an old bach like me to tell married folks whar to head in at. I'll be back about the time I smell the bacon frying."

At the foot of the hill Grizzly Gallagher looked back over his shoulder. Teddy was down on his knees kindling a fire beneath the pines. Hattie was standing by him with one hand on his shoulder, and the last rays of the setting sun made of them a picture that seemed almost unreal against the gray granite of Thunder Mountain.

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher. "I most sartinly do! If that thar ain't the purtiest pictur' I ever saw."

A hush fell on the mountains as the last rays of sunlight dropped behind the hill; creeping shadows of evening turned the water of the lake to purple; then the silence was broken by a harsh, grating laugh. A laugh that had in it no hint of joy!

For a moment Grizzly Gallagher stood listening intently, but strangely enough no fear showed in his massive features. Instead he threw back his head and his own laugh rang through the woods. And it was like enough to the laugh he had heard to have been its echo.

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Grizzly Gallagher. "Ha-ha-haaa, haaa-haa-haa!" Then, noiselessly as a panther, he stole down the mountain side.

As he reached the edge of the lake he squatted on his haunches and once again, as though in challenge, his great wild laugh rang across the water.

As it ceased, out of the mist-purpled water, a hundred yards away, there arose a reptilian-looking head speckled in black and white, and armed with a dagger-shaped bill nearly four inches in length.

Slowly Grizzly Gallagher's rifle came

to his shoulder, until at last the butt cuddled his bearded cheek. Slowly a gnarled finger crooked around the trigger as the sights became aligned with the savage head. Then sharply, decisively the rifle spoke.

Hurled back by the granite-buttressed mountains that encompassed Roosevelt Lake, the sound echoed and reëchoed, to die away at last like the roll of distant thunder. And where that reptilian head had been far out on the waters of the lake, there floated the body of a great dagger-billed loon, a loon without a head.

"The bird that can dodge a bullet," chuckled Grizzly Gallagher, "well, that's one bullet he didn't dodge. No wonder the durned thing scared the daylights out of Teddy and Hattie with its laugh, for that's the first loon I've seen in this country in more'n twenty years."

Arising to his feet, Grizzly Gallagher slowly walked around the lake. Now and then he would stoop and examine the shores for tracks. But not a sign showed that man or beast had passed that way.

"Can't do any more to-night," murmured Grizzly Gallagher, "so I guess I'll be getting back to camp."

As Grizzly Gallagher turned his back, a hundred feet from shore, a huge round head emerged from the water; a head from the top of which there gleamed a weirdly yellow light.

For a moment the great head remained motionless; then, as quietly as it had appeared, so quietly did it sink.

Perhaps it was the sixth sense which most woodsmen possess, that caused Grizzly Gallagher at that moment to turn his head.

"I swan!" he exclaimed. "I most sartinly do!" For on the quiet surface of Roosevelt Lake wide rings were spreading where the head of the monster had sunk.

Yellow moonbeams were playing tag with black shadows as Grizzly Gallagher retraced his way up the mountain. But it was in vain he sniffed hungrily for the aroma of coffee and the smell of frying bacon.

"Now I wonder," he mused, "if those two young hearts have gone to spooning and forgotten to cook supper!" And he raised his great voice in a woodsman's "Halloo!"

"Whoo," inquired a horned owl, "are yoo?" But no answer came from the camp.

Feeling strangely uneasy, and tense with a fear he could not name, Grizzly Gallagher at last reached the clearing, where on the plateau he had left Hattie and Teddy. Then, as he gazed around, an unaccustomed oath left the lips of the old woodsman, for Hattie was gone, and Teddy lay face downward on the ground with arms outspread.

At first Grizzly Gallagher thought the boy was dead, but he was only stunned, and the old trapper soon brought him to, by dashing cold water in his face.

"Where's Hattie?" were Teddy's first words.

Grizzly Gallagher explained that he had only just returned.

"I was kneeling by one of the packs," said Teddy, "and Hattie was stooping over the fire. Suddenly something crashed down on my head. The next thing I knew you were bending over me." He felt gingerly of a large lump just above his temple. "It's lucky for me that I've got a pretty hard skull."

"Somebody or something," said Grizzly Gallagher quietly, "has spirited Hattie away, and it's up to us to find her."

Still partly dazed by the blow he had received, Teddy stared uncomprehendingly at the old trapper.

"Hattie, my Hattie gone!" he exclaimed. Then he staggered to his feet and dropped his hand to his belt where he fumbled uncertainly for the gun he expected to find. But belt and gun had vanished.

"Let's go," said Teddy, "we've got to —got to find—her." Then he crumpled

to the ground at Grizzly Gallagher's feet.

Strong coffee revived him, and all that night he and Grizzly Gallagher sat eating their hearts out by a flickering camp fire. For as Grizzly Gallagher said, they could do nothing until daylight.

Tracks left by great shoes they found when daylight sifted through the pines; deep tracks, such as might have been left by a heavily burdened man—perhaps a man who had been carrying a girl in his arms. For a mile Grizzly Gallagher followed those tracks; then abruptly they ceased at the edge of a bald granite slide near the wrecked buildings of the Golden Grab mine.

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher. "I most sartinly do! Whoever it was that kidnaped Hattie, has hidden her away in the abandoned workings of the Golden Grab Mine."

Teddy looked into the pellucid depths of Roosevelt Lake where faintly he could discern the outline of some of the submerged buildings. Then he shook his head.

"No," he objected, "the workings of the Golden Grab have been flooded by the rising waters. I don't think there is any one in the mine."

"Son," and Grizzly Gallagher laid a hand on the boy's shoulder, "in the days when Thunder Mountain was booming, I worked for a spell in the Golden Grab. True it is that the damming of Monumental Creek flooded part of the mine, but only the lower levels. The upper levels will still be dry. Let's go."

From a pocket Grizzly Gallagher took a small brass miner's cap lamp. "It's the one I used when I was a miner," he said, and, unscrewing the tank cap, he filled the tank with water. Then as he snapped the automatic lighter, from the burner of the lamp, there burst a pencil of white flame.

Through tunnels, dank with the smell of rotting timbers, Teddy followed Grizzly Gallagher, and every once in a while they would have to clamber over a fall of rock which had dropped when the roof timbers had given way beneath the weight of the ground.

"I don't understand it," muttered the old trapper once. "I had most sartinly expected to find this tunnel cleared out, but if he ain't using this tunnel, how in Halifax does he get in and out?"

"What are you talking about?" asked Teddy in amazement. "It's Hattie we're looking for, isn't it?"

"It most sartinly is," agreed Grizzly Gallagher, "Hattie and the monster of Roosevelt Lake."

"You believe then that it was the monster that kidnaped Hattie?" asked Teddy. "But why? What makes you think that?"

"Because, son," said Grizzly Gallagher, "he's trying to scare people away from the lake."

Grizzly Gallagher swept the tunnel with the light of his lamp as he spoke. Then Teddy gave a cry, and stooping, picked from the muddy ground a tiny square of white.

"Hattie's handkerchief!" he cried. "She's been here."

Impulsively he took a step forward as though he expected to rush into the arms of his wife; but Grizzly Gallagher's huge hand closed on his collar and jerked him backward.

"Easy, son; go easy," warned the old trapper, "or you'll fall down."

And still holding on to Teddy, Grizzly Gallagher flashed his light at the top of a ladder which projected from a yawning hole a little to one side of the tunnel.

"It's a winze," explained Grizzly Gallagher, "an underground shaft leading to the lower levels of the mine."

Then handing Teddy his rifle, Grizzly Gallagher took hold of the top of the ladder and tested it. It was solid and immovable.

Down, down, down into the heart of the mountain Teddy followed Grizzly

Gallagher. Suddenly the old trapper gave a warning cry.

"Better hold your horses a moment, Teddy. Seems like we've reached the end of the ladder."

As he spoke, a few feet below them a light gleamed out of the dark, and they heard Hattie's voice.

The next instant Teddy followed Grizzly Gallagher as he dropped. And, bound hand and foot, they found Teddy's wife.

"I knew you'd find me," said Hattie as Teddy clasped her in his arms, "but I was wondering whether you'd be in time."

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher, as he flashed his light around the place where they stood. "I most sartinly do! This is one of the hoisting stations of the Golden Grab."

From floor to roof, piled against the walls of the hoisting station, were kegs, demijohns, and bottles of liquor of all kinds.

"But how in the devil do they get it out of here?" asked Teddy, "for they surely don't carry all that stuff up the ladder we just came down."

"This is just a storage place," explained Hattie. "Bill Scroeger is rifling the submerged saloons of Roosevelt Lake. Once a week Sol York, the storekeeper, sends in a pack train which meets him at the lake and takes a load of liquor into McCall."

"Who's running the pack train?" asked Grizzly Gallagher.

"Old Indian Joe, the trapper," explained Hattie. "Bill Scroeger was going to keep me here until all the liquor had been salvaged, and you and Teddy would have simply disappeared—killed by the monster of Roosevelt Lake."

"But the liquor?" asked Teddy. "If they don't take it out through the mine, how——"

Hattie led the way into a tunnel that sloped downward from the hoisting station. A hundred yards from the station she stopped and flashed her light ahead onto a sheet of black water that at a little distance completely filled the tunnel.

"That's the way they bring the liquor into their storage place," she said, "and that's the way they take it out to meet the pack train that comes each week to the lake."

"But it's full of water," objected Teddy.

"I swan!" exclaimed Grizzly Gallagher. "I most sartinly do!"

Suddenly far down the tunnel the water was strangely agitated and in little waves began to surge against their feet.

"He's coming now!" cried Hattie. "What shall we do?"

Teddy looked undecided, but Grizzly Gallagher dropped on one knee and raised his rifle. For out of the black water of the inundated mine, there gleamed a weirdly yellow light. It was followed by a huge round head in the face of which was a great glass disk, from which the water dripped.

It was a man in a diving suit, and in each hand he carried a net bag loaded with bottles of redeye liquor.

Up to his waist in water he stood, then slowly he stooped and laid the bottles carefully in the shallow water at his feet.

Unaware that behind his helmet the diver would be unable to hear, Grizzly Gallagher spoke. And the words he said were:

"Hands up, Bill Scroeger, I've got you kivered."

Perhaps in the semidarkness of the mine, the diver could not plainly discern the rifle in the hands of Grizzly Gallagher. At all events he turned as if to make his way back to the submerged saloons. And as he turned his back he exposed the air hose connected with his helmet.

Magnified by the confining walls of the mine, the sound of Grizzly Gallagher's rifle roared through the tunnel.

And the lighs went out—all but the small electric lamp fast to the diver's helmet.

And a few bubbles of air broke the surface of the water, as, severed by Grizzly Gallagher's shot, the air hose trailed away into the dark.

Knowing little of diving suits, it took Grizzly Gallagher and Teddy so long to remove the helmet, that Bill Scroeger was unconscious when at last they got it off. When he came to, he found himself propped against the wall of the station. And on his wrists were the handcuffs Grizzly Gallagher had obtained from Sheriff Mahoney.

"You made two big mistakes, Bill," said Grizzly Gallagher, "when you made a monster out of yourself. One was in showing me that bottle of redeye; for you see I knew that the only place that brand of liquor was handled was in Dutch Jake's saloon before the big slide dammed Monumental Creek; your other mistake was in telling me that once you'd been a sailor."

"You've got the goods on me," acknowledged Bill Scroeger with a scowl, "but Indian Joe will get you before you leave this mine."

"I think you're mistaken, son," observed Grizzly Gallagher quietly, as he raised his rifle. "Your pardner must have got scared when that thar air line busted, for he's coming down the ladder."

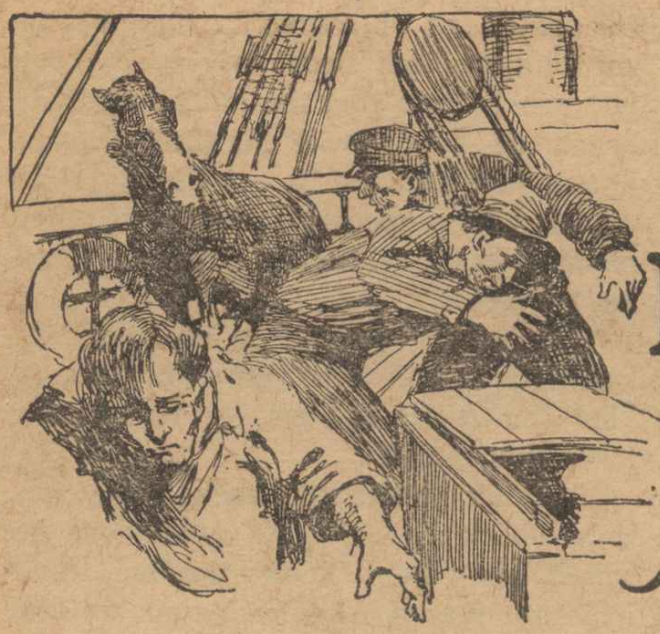
THE PALO VERDE

THE Palo Verde, that wonderful treat of Arizona, has been compared to a giant asparagus plant, some twenty feet or more in height. The trunk usually divides rather low into three large spreading branches, which in turn divide into several irregular, rather crooked limbs that bear masses of intricate branchlets and twigs. But the Palo Verde is not only a thing of beauty the whole year round, but it is a blessing to the hungry, when in fruit. For, like many of its desert companions, it is a legume.

Formerly the Indian women pounded the seeds to make flour for their bread, and the fruit is eagerly sought by certain four-footed creatures of the desert. The common, unpoetical name applied to this tree is "horse bean," a tribute to its nourishing qualities. Despite its profusion of fruit, the Palo Verde has a struggle to maintain itself. In the severe arid conditions of Arizona the mortality among the seedlings is very great.

If a tree gets far enough along, that is from ten to twenty years old, so that it can endure the loss of many twigs in the summer season, its life is fairly safe for many years to come. To cut down the water requirements of the tree, its twigs are often cut off. But the delicate-looking Palo Verde of the desert often attains great dignity of years. Doctor Shreve has established that at least fifty of these trees, now growing near the desert laboratory of Arizona, were there when the Mission of San Xavier del Bac was established in the valley below in 1700.

In the open desert the Palo Verdes seldom reach a height of thirty feet. But when they are given plenty of water they become fair-sized trees. On the campus of the University of Arizona there is an avenue of these trees, where their size demonstrates how quickly they grow when they have water.



In the Hills of Monterey

By

John Frederick

Author of "A Wolf Among Dogs," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

WHEN José Bernardo Pyndero arrived in Alta California as the new governor, Joaquin Tarabal was the richest man in the province. The hand of his beautiful daughter, Ortiza, is being sought by Francisco Valdez, who has just arrived from Spain. With him came a young body servant, "El Rojo," whom Valdez's father had purchased from the Turks. Before the ship docks, El Rojo escaped on the back of "Sanduval," the prize horse of Valdez.

Later El Rojo disarms and brands Lieutenant Juan Rindo, who was forcing his attentions on Julie Darnay, the daughter of Jean Darnay, a philosophical blacksmith who has sought refuge in America after the French Revolution. Colonel Louis Mortier has also just arrived in California to induce Darnay to sell him a piece of property, which has increased immensely in value since Darnay left France.

El Rojo, having made friends with a band of Navajo Indians who have come to California to avenge themselves on Pyndero, enters Tarabal's house to get supplies for himself and his Indian friends. Here he meets Ortiza and promises her that he will dance with her at the governor's ball.

In the midst of Monterey's present excitement, a young man who calls himself Lord Anthony Wyncham arrives in the town and calls on the governor. The governor in the meantime, has become a party to Mortier's scheme to get Darnay's property from him. Darnay is thrown in jail because of El Rojo's attack on the governor's man. Ortiza's coldness turns the edge of Valdez's ardor. He reports to Tarabal that he will not marry his daughter. Tarabal tells him he will either marry her, or he will be killed like a coyote.

El Rojo's Indian scout tells Ortiza not to fear Valdez, but she bids the Navajo to report to El Rojo that he must never try to see her again.

CHAPTER XIX.

WINDOW CONFIDENCES.

NOW Julie Darnay was convinced that the man was mad. He ran through the most ridiculous motions and postures. Of course she could not see all the absurd things he was doing; but he leaped here and there, like one of wits as light as his feet, and they were as light as thistledown. He flickered back and forth across the floor of his room, like a shadow thrown by a fire and quivering on a wall.

Certainly he was mad. It could not be a dance. Sometimes, as he stooped forward, he bent over until his body made an acute angle with the floor. And again he leaped back, half the length of the room. She stared with great eyes. Most wonderful of all, it seemed to Julie, was the silence in which he performed these maneuvers. Even supposing that he had taken off his shoes, she was close enough, to be sure, to have heard the pounding of his bare feet.

And then all was made clear. For she saw the frail gleaming of a ray of light which issued from the right hand of the man. It was a sword, and what she had seen was a dummy-foil drill. He had been going through his exercises

in the privacy of his room. All that she had seen was instantly given point. Those grotesque leaps and sudden glidings to and fro now became sinister things, and they were beautiful because they were sinister. Where she had thought him a frantic clown, she now felt that he was the very paragon of a graceful gentleman, and, whereas she had been between pity and smiling, she now found that her heart was beating more quickly.

Presently he came to his window in order to breathe and rest, and Julie Darnay found herself looking upon the shining black hair and the bold features of Lord Wyncham! She swung the shutters of her window wide open. Oh, that he would look up to her! And in an instant her wish was granted. He saw her at once, and, leaning from his window, he kissed his hand to her. Julie, as a matter of course, blew a kiss back to him, but she had not reckoned on the effect which it might have.

For he was instantly out his window, hanging by his hands. He was in his shirt and knee breeches, but his feet and legs below the knee were bare. And now he worked his way along the wall of the house, clinging with the tips of his fingers to such rough projections as he found, though Julie could see nothing that seemed capable of affording a handhold from the distance at which she looked. He was presently just above the top of a dobe wall. Down to this he dropped, staggered, in imminent risk of falling to the ground, then whirled, raced along the wall, went up the wall of her house, with the ease of a flying bird, and behold him, in ten seconds, sitting in the window of Julie's room, laughing at her, with the wind lifting and blowing his long black hair. She had never seen him so close—only a glance now and then when he had chanced to pass her in the street—but now she saw enough to enchant her. He was as brown as a berry, and the brown, wherever the sun struck his skin, turned it bronze, with the rich red of the blood shining through it.

Julie was frightened, but only enough to brighten her eyes and put a tingle of color in her cheeks.

"Your lordship," she cried, "seems as much at home in the air as a bird!"

"I have seen enough to make me fly, señorita."

"But," said Julie, "what if people see you here?"

"They will say that we are eminently respectable. We converse at a window in the open sun."

"But you, my lord, have come to see a girl you have never known."

"I have seen you two times in the street, Julie Darnay, and I made a solemn vow that the third time I saw you I should certainly speak to you, even if you were surrounded by a whole bevy of swordsmen and jealous lovers and brothers and what not!"

The smile flashed on her lips and in her eyes.

"I am sure, señor, that you have no fear of swords."

"So?"

"I have been watching you fence at shadows in your room."

He turned his head, observed the position of his window, and then looked back at her, with a sharper glance. She felt that he was rather alarmed than embarrassed when he found out that he had been spied upon.

"One must have exercise," he said.

"After walking three thousand miles?"

"That is nothing. But now we may consider that we know one another?"

"It is very improper, your lordship?"

"Not at all."

"But where could you have found out my name?"

"The governor speaks of nothing else."

"The governor!" cried Julie.

"Why not? He is a man of taste."

"The governor!" echoed Julie. Suddenly she was remembering that Pyndero was a bachelor; that he was the king of this country; that she herself might, by lucky chance, mount to the pinnacle of success; that she might become his lady and be the greatest lady in Alta California; then she would wear wonderful gowns and receive famous visitors in the name of her husband.

All of this swam before her eyes, but so quickly did she make the illusion vanish that the shadow lay on her face only an instant and then was gone. She was able to smile as brightly as ever into the eyes of Lord Wyncham. For a Spanish governor was a Spanish governor, but an English lord was quite a different thing. Moreover they were romantic fellows, these English, and one could not tell in what fashion they might be taken off their feet. Julie felt that she would be a fool unless she played all of her cards as well as she could and as quickly. She had read a great deal of the Bible, but sundry romances she had come upon had sunk into her mind far more deeply than Holy Writ.

"He is in distress," said Lord Wyncham, "because your father is unfortunately confined to the jail for a few days, and perhaps you will not be taken to his ball."

"Oh," breathed Julie, "the governor's ball?"

"But I," said Lord Wyncham, "have vowed that I should risk a rebuff for the sake of his friendship and attempt to meet and know you, señorita."

She smiled at him, and then they chuckled together over his not too ingenious story.

"Even if you came barefoot?" she asked.

"I have been at sea a great deal," he explained, "and I'm more at home in bare feet than in any shoes."

"So am I," said Julie, and then she blushed at the confession.

"But the ball?" he asked.

"What of it?"

"Consider the disappointment of the governor, if he learns that you are not coming?"

"How can I go when my poor father is in prison?"

"But, of course, it is nothing serious. He will be out at once!"

"Of course," she nodded. "But is it not strange that they should keep him so long when he had done nothing at all?"

The black brows of Lord Wyncham lowered a little, and his blue eyes stared searchingly into her face.

"Very, very strange indeed," he said.

"Ah," cried Julie, "when you look like that, I think that I have seen you before."

"Really?"

"Just a trick of imagination, of course. But about my father—yes, I am worried."

"Let me suggest something. Perhaps that rogue of a governor is only keeping him confined until you ask to have him set free."

"Ah, do you think that?"

She had clapped her hands happily together.

"Very like."

"I shall certainly ask him then."

"At the ball?"

"Where else?"

"I am glad you are going, señorita."

"Thank you."

"And you are going with me, I shall hope?"

"Why," laughed Julie Darnay, "of course. I thought that it was all settled."

CHAPTER XX.

A BOUT WITH THE FOILS.

THE governor found himself drawn so closely to the young Lord Wyncham that sometimes he discovered that he was on the verge of disclosing secrets which should have been left safely obscured. For instance, on this morning

Wyncham was speaking of Julie Darnay.

"She is full of mischief," said he, "and, when I mentioned the name of the governor, she grew rosy. Oh, her heart was stirred, I warrant! For that matter, where is there a girl of her age who wouldn't be touched at the thought of dancing with a governor?"

"Wyncham," cried the startled governor, "you didn't tell her that I was wishing for her at the ball?"

"Why not?"

"I can't receive a nobody there."

"She's too pretty to be a nobody."

"And you let her think that I'm very interested?"

"Of course. I have saved you at least a week's time and broken the ice completely for your acquaintance. I have so prepared her that, with only one or two lies of moderate strength, you will find her smiling up into your face."

The governor tapped with his fingers against his upper lip. It was his favorite way of covering a smile. He was delighted with Lord Wyncham. It was the very frankness of his rascality which intrigued the governor. His own misdoings were kept religiously behind the veil. Now he hardly knew which to admire the most—the careless manner with which Lord Wyncham lied, or the equally careless manner with which he told the truth.

"Wyncham," he said at length, "you are original—inimitable."

"Not at all," said Wyncham. "I have copied every man I have ever met. I am at this moment intently studying some of your mannerisms."

"Nonsense!"

"It is true, nevertheless. I was raised in poverty."

"Really?"

"A truth. In the meantime I have observed many types of people. I have talked to lords and ditch diggers."

"How could that have been?"

"My father was a second son. He could do nothing worth while all his life but pray for the death of his elder brother, without heirs. And, by dint of making that one prayer and no other, he at length was able to succeed. His brother died. He stepped into the estate with a sigh of relief. And so here I am in Alta California."

The governor nodded again.

"You couldn't stand the quiet life."

"I could not. I was not ready to marry and settle down, and, since I had the estate in prospect—port has ruined my father's chances of a long life—the lovely ladies became so attentive that I knew it was only a matter of time before I should be caught."

"Wyncham! What, fled from the beauties?"

"Which shows my wisdom. I fear nothing in the world but a smiling girl."

"Tush! They are nothing, when a man's mind is set."

"I'll tell you this, governor—Julie Darnay is determined to beg her father's freedom from you, and I'll wager that she wins it."

"You'll lose then," said the governor.

He spoke so deliberately that in a moment he regretted what he had said.

"Of course," he added, "I am simply waiting for justice to take its course."

Lord Wyncham smiled with perfect openness.

"I see," he said.

And Pyndero knew that it was best to drop the subject there. But his conscience was tingling a little, and he could not help pressing on. A little imp of the perverse was leading him on.

"You see what?" asked José Pyndero.

"I didn't guess before that you wanted something out of the old Frenchman."

"Sir?" cried the governor.

"Excuse me," said Wyncham and laughed.

But Pyndero, having been pricked, as though with a keen sword's point, could not help keeping to the subject.

"What the devil put this into your head? What could I get from an old blacksmith?"

"Nothing, of course. And, besides," added Wyncham smoothly, when he saw that the governor was disturbed, "I'll wager that the girl wins. What, Pyndero? I know you! A bright smile and then a sad one; a sad look and then a gay one—and you'll capitulate!"

The governor shrugged his shoulders. "I'll make a wager on that."

"Whatever you please, except money."

"A bout with the foils then. Two touches out of three, my lord."

"I'll take no odds, your excellency."

Pyndero smiled. He had conquered so many times in practice with the foils, or in earnest with the unbated points, that it had become impossible for him to conceive of defeat.

"Perhaps you know best, Wyncham. We'll walk into the patio. Two touches, my lord. The first to make two touches wins. Is that it?"

"If I lose?" asked Wyncham.

The governor considered.

"Your penalty then must be to come to play with me every day. I am out of work and practice."

"And if you lose?"

"Why, then I must listen to Julie."

"And set Darnay free?"

The governor hesitated. Then, as one who recalls that, after all, there is no real danger, he nodded.

"I set free the old blacksmith. But," he added, "what makes you so earnest to get Darnay out of trouble?"

"I have seen Julie. That's answer enough."

"You think you'll get her favor by setting her father free?"

"Why not?"

"Because, unless her father's in jail, Julie is. He's a grim old warrior, you know, an old revolutionist. Danton is his god. He gives Julie very little liberty."

He jerked out these short sentences, for he was busy, as he spoke, taking down foils from the rack in which they hung. He selected half a dozen—for he had weapons of every sort—and he offered Lord Wyncham the hilts. The latter tried one, lunged with it, nodded with pleasure, tried another which he liked still better, and signified his willingness to trust to his luck with that foil.

"A very good choice, too," said the governor, looking upon his guest with greater respect. "You have my own eye for the weight and the balance of a foil."

They had reached the patio when a name was brought to the governor. He bade the servant bring his guest to the patio at once.

"Here's a man you'll be glad to have watch your play," said the governor. "An old French soldier. Colonel Mortier has fought his way from one end of Europe to the other with Napoleon. Besides, he's a good judge of fence. He took a foil against me the other day and gave me some excellent exercise. A little too free in his style, however. He seems to try to rush in and bear everything down. And that will never do against an artist—never, never!"

Mortier appeared while the governor was still speaking, and just as the latter and Wyncham had removed their coats and prepared for the engagement. He was introduced to Lord Wyncham, bowed his acknowledgments, and then took a chair near by to act as judge.

Lord Wyncham came on guard with such careless ease that one would have thought him facing a child. And Mortier, who had tasted defeat at the hands of the governor on several occasions, smiled with sour expectation. They engaged at once, and the governor pressed straight in, with the confidence of a man who knows himself and his sword, having proved both on a thousand occasions. In an instant he had cornered his antagonist, and Mortier,

rubbing his hands together and delighted to the bottom of his heart to see a representative of "perfidious Albion" humiliated, leaned forward to watch the touch.

Something, however, went wrong at the critical moment. Lord Wyncham was working no harder than ever, but there seemed to be something wrong with the timing of the Spanish swordsman. At any rate, between two motions of his sword Wyncham glided to the side and was free. José Bernardo Pyndero blinked with astonishment and pressed in again. Again he drove his antagonist the length of the patio. Still, struggle though he might, he could not slip his point past the point of the Englishman. There was little danger of a counter attack. Wyncham fought purely on the defensive, and even on the defensive he seemed perfectly indifferent to the outcome of the match. Luck, it seemed, was fortifying him.

At the farther end of the patio the governor feinted in low carte and then thrust full at the head, a venomous attempt which might have torn out one of the eyes of Wyncham, had the button gone home. The Englishman, however, avoided the point with a movement of his head, and, stepping in at the same time, he offered with his foil at the defenseless breast of Pyndero. It was a manifest opening, but Wyncham did not take advantage of it.

Instead, he leaped back, saluted, and set to work without his smile, as though for the first time he had been induced to take the match seriously. In three seconds the governor was giving back. Neither was it tactical maneuvering to draw out the enemy. For José Pyndero found himself struggling, as he had never struggled since boyhood against any swordsman. For ten years he had felt that he was the leading blade of all Spain. But Spanish swordsmen were not in the front rank. The stilted and involved teachings of Carranza still weighed down the aspiring fencers of the nation. But war brought new ideas to Pyndero. For five years he had labored to perfect himself in the French system. And now it was five years since he had met a man who could even distantly approach him in the perfection of his sword play.

To feel that he was matched here by an obscure and youthful noble at the end of the civilized world, so to speak, maddened the worthy governor. He fought now with a scowl of concentration. Perspiration dripped from his forehead. In truth, he was nearly exhausted, whereas Lord Wyncham was almost as fresh as ever. He was breathing heavily, but that did not disturb him. His gliding footwork was as smooth and as deft as when he began. He lunged as far, he recovered as swiftly as when he had opened the encounter. He had changed his style. Rather, he had taken upon himself all styles. Sometimes he used a rather straight arm, with a long and awkward Italian guard. Sometimes he pressed in and attacked with all the flexible neatness of the French school. And, again, he was a combination of all schools. His quick, short parries clipped away the blade of Pyndero, and his point hovered like a phantom before the face and the breast of the unlucky governor. With his back to the wall, Pyndero tried a counter attack. He had hardly begun when a time thrust nailed him fairly in the center of the breast.

He had been beaten fairly and squarely. Had they been fighting with true rapiers, he would have been a dead man, with a foot of cold steel through his heart. For his own part, he was too stunned to speak, but he heard an exclamation from Mortier, and both he and Wyncham turned toward the Frenchman. The colonel was in the exact position from which he had watched the decisive thrust. That is to say, he was half risen from the chair, bent over, his arms somewhat extended, his eyes bulging. Amazement had been

carried to the verge of horror in his face. It brought home to Pyndero the full greatness of his fall.

"There are two touches needed to win!" he cried. "On guard, señor!"

"On guard," said Lord Wyncham.

He brought his sword up as carelessly as ever, and this time he paid a penalty for it. The nervous blade of the governor slipped inside his guard and touched the Englishman on the shoulder.

"Now!" cried Wyncham. "Now, in all seriousness, your excellency!"

They went at it in a fury. But the governor, having tasted success, seemed to be invincible. He pressed back Lord Wyncham. In thirty seconds he had scored again, and Lord Wyncham threw down his foil with a laugh.

"By the Lord, Pyndero," he cried, "a touch only serves to wake you up and turn you into a fighting devil."

"Ah, my lord," returned the governor, who had dropped into a chair and now was gasping back his wind and mopping his purple face with a handkerchief, "I thought I had gone to sleep. I was completely wrong in everything; but when I waked up, you admit——"

"Masterly work," said Wyncham.

"Yes," said the governor, "I say freely, my lord, that you are the finest blade I have ever encountered. And with a little more experience—in fact, I was a little worried to begin with—though, after I had solved your style—after that first touch——"

"After that, of course, there was nothing to be done," said Wyncham. "Exhausting exercise though, eh?"

Yet he was already breathing easily, and, while the governor lay stretched in his chair, gasping and panting, Lord Wyncham was calmly donning his coat. In a trice he was as cool and comfortable as ever. His appearance also changed as soon as the coat was donned. Without it he had seemed to be of twice his real bulk. For his shoulders were extraordinarily wide, and his arms very long. In action, with those long arms shooting in and out, one extended behind him to give balance, and the other darting in and out, he had seemed fully twice the size of the governor. But, now that he had donned his coat, he was perfectly normal. The governor, if anything, was the more imposing man.

"Wine," called the governor, when he could breathe more easily.

Wine was brought, wine chilly from the deep and moist cellars of the governor's house. It was an old claret. It filled the narrow glasses with a heart of red fire and with purple shadows.

"To the sword," cried the governor, giving his toast, "and to a worthy swordsman"—nodding to Mortier—"and to a brilliant one," thereby saluting Lord Wyncham.

"To the sword," responded Wyncham readily, "and may none of us ever meet with unbated points."

"Amen!" cried Mortier heartily.

They drank, and Wyncham at once took his leave, pursued by the governor's reminder that he had promised to come to fence every day in case he were beaten. So he departed, and the governor lay back in his chair and smiled contentedly upon the ceiling.

"But do you realize," said Mortier, who quite understood the vanity of his new friend, "if those had been real rapiers, you would at this moment be a dead man, my dear friend?"

"Bah!" scoffed the governor. "I was only testing him. If the sword had been real, he would never have scratched me with the point!"

Yet his brow was clouded.

CHAPTER XXI.

PYNDERO DECIDES.

AFTER the first touch," went on Mortier, "a strange thought came to me. I could have sworn——"

"What?" asked the governor, angered by this dwelling upon his misfortune.

For, after all, to one who has been a duelist, the first touch, if it be over a vital spot, has a significance which a hundred touches afterward cannot possess.

"But when you touched him twice in succession, I knew that it could not be."

"What could not be?" asked the governor, more and more irritated.

"Excellency," said Mortier, who recollected that he could speak as freely as he chose, because the governor was only his partner in their business venture, "of all the people I have ever met in the world, and I have met a good many, you are the finest swordsman——"

"A thousand thanks, my dear Mortier."

"Except," continued the Frenchman, "one man!"

"Ah!" said the governor, his joy departing.

"And that one man," went on Mortier, "I thought for a moment, in spite of myself, that I was watching at work, as Wyncham drove you before him."

"H'm!" said the governor, scowling.

"But when you touched him twice in succession, it removed all my doubts."

"This acquaintance of yours," said the governor dryly, "being so great a fencer that it would have been impossible for me to get a sword's point near him?"

"Exactly," said Mortier.

"Your pardon," sneered the governor. "Such a man does not live."

"Your pardon," answered Mortier sternly. "I have myself fenced with him! Recollect, your excellency, that I have crossed foils with you a number of times. You are a brilliant swordsman. But the other was a genius. He had the arms and the shoulders of Wyncham, very long and snaky quick. He had the same footwork, moving about like a floating shadow over the ground. I have fenced with you and found that you far surpass me. Yet it was not impossible for me to touch you one, while you were touching me three times. And, in actual fighting, that one touch of mine might come first. If the worst came to the worst, I should not consider a duel with you as a death sentence."

"Certainly not," said the governor, but his face was stern.

"This other artist, however," went on Mortier, "was as sure as death. In his hands I was helpless. He drove me before him. He turned away my thrusts and lunges, as the roof turns away the hailstones. He could have stabbed me to the heart at any instant. I was filled with wonder. In fact, your excellency, when I first watched Lord Wyncham I could have sworn that he was the man!"

"And who was this great genius?"

"A slave."

"What?"

"That same El Rojo who stole your Indians from you, Pyndero, who rides Sanduval, and who has branded and made a fool of your lieutenant, Rindo. That is the man—the slave of Señor Valdez."

"A slave and a fencer? In the name of Heaven, Monsieur Colonel!"

"Very strange, eh? But this El Rojo is a strange man. So strange, as a matter of fact, that, when I saw his style of fencing, I was half convinced that he was El Rojo!"

"But that slave has red hair. Is that not so?"

"It is true—very true, my friend. But there is black dye for red hair, and there is black dye for red eyebrows. You understand? Also, there are wigs!"

"But his voice, Mortier!" cried the governor.

"When he was on the ship I never heard him speak except a very soft-voiced monosyllable or two. He kept in his place and was never obtrusive. That's why I can't place him at once by his voice."

The governor was shaking his head.

"Pure nonsense. I trust that I can

recognize the manners of a gentleman, and Wyncham certainly has the correct air."

"He could have picked that up."

"By watching his masters? A Spaniard and an English gentleman are as unlike as the two poles."

"Very true. But El Rojo went to a strange school, where he could learn all manner of things. He was on a pirate ship, you know."

"I've heard something about that."

"And he had all manner of men for companions when he was rowing in the galleys. He had Englishmen, Frenchmen, Italians, Spaniards—men from half the world sat beside him. What he learned in that way must have gone deep. And if he could pick up fencing and become such a consummate artist, you must admit that he could pick up other things, too. When I consider with what perfection he played the part of the humble, submissive, contented slave for days and months and years, no doubt waiting for the opportunity to escape, which at last he seized so daringly—I say, when I saw all of these things, I was ready to attribute anything to El Rojo. He is really a Yankee in blood, you know. His father was an American merchantman whose ship was captured by the Moors. He and his wife were killed by bullets during the battle. The crew and the youngster were taken prisoner and enslaved."

"The devil! A perfect romance! What is his true name?"

"He always told Valdez that he had forgotten—he was only five or six at the time he was made a slave. But I have no doubt that he remembers well enough. To conclude, I say that this El Rojo is such a remarkable fellow that, for some minutes, during that fencing bout, I believed that he must have turned himself into young Lord Wyncham. However, I saw him twice touched at the end, and that showed me that I had been mistaken."

The governor had grown very thoughtful.

"At least," he said, "there is something unusual about Wyncham. He lies too well, for one thing."

"You think he didn't really come across the continent?"

"I don't know. I can't make up my mind to one thing or the other. So I am having him watched. We are going to find out a bit about that gentleman, you may depend upon it!"

He added briskly: "And, in the meantime, I sent for you to hear the full details about Darnay. You know there was no chance to talk over everything yesterday."

"I told you the substance. He couldn't be stirred. I lost my temper and blurted out the whole truth. I told him that what had been worth little or nothing when he was in France, was now worth a quarter of a million francs."

"The devil!" exclaimed the governor.

"It *is* the devil. What can we do if he fails to sign?"

"Let him rot in the prison."

"And if he *does* sign?"

"He will rot there just the same. I cannot have old fools like Darnay running about through Alta California, telling tales, whether people believe them or not."

The careless manner in which he spoke made Mortier look down to the floor to keep the fear out of his eyes. He had sadly underestimated the strength of the governor, he saw. And yet, even as he listened, a new thought came to him, which perfectly solved the problem and cut the Gordian knot for him. Having arrested Darnay and having exposed his designs to the old man, the governor dared not set him free, or the Frenchman would pull a towering scandal down around the ears of Pyndero. Therefore Darnay was even now as good as dead. It only remained for Mortier to win the heart of Julie Dar-

nay and to marry her. Then, the instant that Darnay died, his wife became the heir to the estate, and he, through his wife, laid his hands upon it.

All of this was so simple that tears of joy rose to the eyes of the soldier. He said good-by to the governor shortly after this and rose to leave.

"As for Darnay," he said, "why should we both worry about him? Monterey has forgotten about him already. Because, in fact, the town never started to talk about him. There is only one danger. This girl, Julie, may begin to start tongues wagging. And, as I remember her, it would only take a word or two from her to start a young man making a fool of himself."

"All very true," said the governor.

"But suppose that I monopolize some of her time. It is known that you receive me. Suppose I tell her that I am working for the liberation of her father?"

"A good idea, Mortier."

"I am off to find her this moment."

"Good luck, my friend, and *bon voyage!*"

Mortier laughed and departed. But, when he was in the street, he made one serious mistake. He looked back at the house of José Pyndero and smiled, then shrugged his shoulders and walked on. The mistake was so serious because the governor was watching him from a window, and Pyndero saw clearly both the smile and the shrug.

It was not a great deal, but it was enough to start his thoughts. He spent some time walking to and fro and turning the question over and over in his mind. And, having been a soldier himself, it did not take him long to begin to understand the probable tactics of the Frenchman. Julie was the point of attack. She was the point which must be secured.

Only one way occurred to him, and that was to pay her some attention himself. Unless he greatly misunderstood her, as long as she had the slightest hope of such a dignitary as the governor of the province, she would not take the addresses of the colonel seriously. And, on the spot, Pyndero decided that he must excite those hopes in her mind. It could be easily done. One flattering conversation might be enough to sink the ship of Mortier.

Having come to this resolution, he let his thoughts run on to other things. Truly his stay in Alta California was anything but dull. Yonder in the hills —how near he could not guess—were the Indians who would lurk about until they had either accomplished their quest by sticking a knife between his ribs, or until they had been run down and butchered. Yonder, too, was the miscreant El Rojo; and, last of all, the mystery of Wyncham.

On that point, also, he decided that he would take the field and do his own detective work. That very night he would start on the trail which had brought Felipe a knife thrust between ... shoulders.

CHAPTER XXII.

"STOP THE CARRIAGE!"

IT was known that the governor did not have a carriage. For that very reason Señor Don Francisco Tarabal had decided that he, the richest man in California, must have one. Since he must have a coach, he must have it of the finest type. Therefore it was ordered in France. No one knew at what immense expense it was built, painted, gilded, and furnished in velvets. No one could guess the huge cost of boxing the great vehicle, part by part, each part wrapped tenderly, so that no harm might come during the voyage. And, again, there was the expense of the long trip around the Horn and up the western coasts of the Americas.

At any rate, the coach at last reached Monterey, was assembled on the beach, and, having been rubbed and polished

until it shone, had been rolled into town at the heels of six horses. Since that day nine years had elapsed, and the great coach had been used three times! Nevertheless Don Francisco did not regret the expense. It pleased him that he had under a shed such a thing as this to exhibit to visitors to the ranch. And when a stranger arrived, he never failed to lead him to the door through which he could see the magnificent carriage. Indeed, every day of its existence that carriage was polished, and the leathers oiled and rubbed, and the metal work burnished, so that, when a ray of sunshine fell upon it, it was sure to give back a blinding light.

In the nine years it had been used three times. It was on the third occasion that Lord Wyncham and his excellency, Governor Pyndero, saw the coach. It was the afternoon of the same day on which they had fenced in the patio of the governor's house. And, having gained a mutual respect for one another, when they met on the street in the afternoon, they started on a stroll together which ended in a long tramp. As for the governor, he was deeply interested in learning all that he could concerning the young English nobleman. To verify that title, he would have given his year's salary to have at hand some one who could say whether or no there was such a patent of nobility, and who at the present held it. To be sure, when he was with Wyncham, his doubts almost ceased. But when he was away from him, a thousand apprehensions crowded into his mind.

He could not help remembering the manner in which Mortier had connected the young lord with the escaped slave, El Rojo. And, again, he could not help dwelling on the singular story of how Anthony, Lord Wyncham, had crossed the continent. However, he was forced to admit that such an extraordinary fellow was as apt to be telling the truth as lying. He could not be sure which was the case here. But he knew that a man who fenced as Lord Wyncham did, necessarily possessed both imagination and cool nerves. In the meantime, by a closer association with him, it might be possible that he would let fall a few valuable hints.

The governor, however, was wrong. The conversation of my lord was entirely about America. He did not even dip into his experiences crossing the continent, but confined himself to topics of the day in Monterey. He chatted of Mortier. He had seen pretty Julie Darnay and had something to say of her. On the whole he seemed marvelously pleased with California and the life there. When he would move on again he did not know. One thing tempted him to stay. His boast had been that he could live for a year on his wits. And it was so easy to win money at dice from the good citizens of California, that my lord felt it would be going against manifest Providence if he turned his back too soon on such a store of gold. And here the governor could not forbear laughing. It tickled him to the core of the heart, the unprincipled recklessness of this man. He recognized the same strain in himself. He felt that they were brothers in all but blood, and for some time, as he walked down the road, he was smiling to himself and vowing in the silence that, if ever he had at hand a dangerous and difficult task in which reward and peril were equally balanced, he would call upon young Lord Wyncham as his partner in the work. For, though he believed the man capable of almost anything, yet he felt that his pledged word would hold Wyncham, as steel chains might hold another man. With his lordship as an avowed partner, all would be well between them. And with such a coworker, what could they not do together?

He sketched a dozen bold schemes. He would supply the thews and the sinews of war. There was the possi-

bility of getting together a gang of miscreants, setting them aboard a trim little sloop, mounting a few long guns, and ranging her up and down the coast as a pirate to seize the shipping. What an ideal commander would the young lord be, thought the governor! And if the spoils were split into three equal parts, one for the crew, one for the man who led them, and one for the governor who kept them from being captured, they would both become rich.

This dream, however, could not be realized until he had learned more, much more about his companion. And, if he continued his inquiries, it was not at all improbable that he might be able to learn so much that he would have Wyncham at his mercy. For it was very strange indeed that such a man should have left England at his own pleasure. Far more likely that that skillful sword of his had penetrated the breast of some well-known man, and that he had saved his neck from the rope by fleeing across the seas. It was very likely, also, that he was only a younger son, and that he had falsely assumed the title of Wyncham in this obscure corner of the globe, hoping that no one would be capable of confronting him with the truth about his position. All of these possibilities concerning the young man must be probed, and particularly the governor was eager to learn how it happened that Felipe, on the trail of Wyncham, should have been knifed in the back, while he was far away in the hills, and Wyncham at the time sound asleep in his room in Monterey!

That silence of the governor's had endured a moment or two, and he was about to speak again when a distant rumbling, which had been growing softly upon them during the last few minutes, turned the corner of a hill, and the thunder dissolved into the bumping of wheels and the grinding of tires and the patter of many hoofs. A few seconds more, and they found themselves looking down upon a strange spectacle. It was like a small section of a triumphal procession transplanted to the California wilderness of bare, brown hills.

First of all there appeared a solitary rider on a black horse—a black horse whose bridle, saddle, reins, and trappings were whitened with silver mountings. If the horse was magnificent, the rider was still more so. He was a half-breed chosen for the grace of his horsemanship and the splendid dignity of his bearing. He was equipped now with the long cloak which furled back over his shoulder and rippled in the wind. And along the side of his great black hat a white feather curled.

He was enough in himself to have made a city stare. But he was merely the herald of the splendor which followed him. This consisted of eight black horses, only less glorious than the stallion which was mounted by the first of the party. Like him, they were harnessed with silver-worked harness, and a postillion rode on one of each span. These postillions, to furnish a slight change in the color scheme of white and black, were clad in long crimson coats, with trousers of blue velvet; their hats were white, and their plumes black. Behind the stream of the eight dancing horses the driver appeared aloft on a seat blazing with gold, with a splendid functionary seated with folded arms beside him. But the driver was a strange contrast to all the joyous lavishness of the rest of the picture. He was a squat humpback, with huge, long arms and great hands.

There was no need of the postillions, even to manage the eight horses, had it been chosen to handle the team with reins. As it was, the little man did nothing but give orders which quickened or slackened the pace of the team. He had resolutely refused to dress in a fine uniform. Instead, he wore a dirty gray shirt and coarse cowhide boots and a ragged hat slouched down about his ears.

One could imagine the fury of the rich rancher, as he strove to curse his driver into finer clothes. One could also imagine the surly scowl of the clod, as he shrugged his shoulders. But, at length, he had conquered. He was necessary to that equipage. He could pick up any horse of the eight with his voice and make it lunge into the collar, or, with a word, he could soothe the most restive.

Certainly he was the only jarring note in the entire group. The two horsemen, who trotted on either side of the coach, were hardly, if at all, inferior to that gorgeous horseman who led the troop. And behind the carriage, at just a sufficient distance to escape the clouds of dust which the wheels raised, rode eight horsemen, two and two. Considering the space occupied by the horses and the intervals between each span, and the great length of the brilliant carriage itself, the procession stretched along a considerable bit of road; and, when the leader had come around the shoulder of the hill, it was still some moments before the rear of the cavalcade swung into view. Last of all came half a dozen enormous brindle-colored dogs, each span held on the leash by an Indian runner, more than half naked and gray with the dust. They were spectacular brutes and seemed from their color and bulk to be a cross between the English bandog and a greyhound.

"What prince is this!" exclaimed Lord Wyncham, when he saw this procession start up the slope toward the place where he and the governor were walking.

"The devil knows, not I," answered the governor. "But I see plainly that I am to be outshone by one of my subjects in my very seat of government."

And he smiled at Wyncham, partly in good humor and partly in vexation.

"What use is a carriage like that in the California hills?" asked Wyncham.

"None under heaven. And yet I think I have heard of it. It is one of the seven wonders of Alta California. It is the carriage of Señor Don Joaquin Tarabal."

"And who," asked Wyncham, "is he?"

"You have been this time in Monterey and have not heard his name? Come, come! A man could more easily live six years on the earth without seeing the sun."

"You forget, my dear friend, that I have spent my time since my arrival talking about myself and relating my inventions about my trip across the continent rather than asking questions about other people. But this looks like a cavalry charge, not a pleasure drive!"

"It is the great Joaquin Tarabal in person," said the governor. "I recognize his horrible frog face even at this distance. I have never seen him, but he has been described to me. He is the richest man in the province. He has more pesos than he himself dreams of. He is only troubled by one thing, and that is the lack of things on which to spend his fortune. He is one of these lucky devils—he married a charming girl—killed her in a year or so—but she left him a ravishing daughter. He could not find a husband for such a queen among women in California, of course; so what does he do but send to Spain, and there he buys a husband from the ancient and famous family of Valdez! He has imported that husband, and no doubt that young man is now riding in the carriage."

"And the beautiful daughter?" asked Wyncham.

"Of course."

"Then we shall ride the rest of the way back to Monterey in the carriage with them."

"Impossible! In the first place, all of the seats are filled, and in the second place, neither of us has any claims on Señor Tarabal."

"I say," said Wyncham, "that I shall ride to Monterey in that coach."

"My lord? You may now see for yourself that every seat is filled. In spite of its bulk, there are only places for four, and every place is taken."

"Your excellency," said Wyncham, "is impossible!"

"Sir!"

"You have no imagination. I shall sit in the coach and talk to the lovely Miss Tarabal."

"The señorita, sir?"

"Of course. I say that I shall stay in the coach and talk with her until we reach Monterey."

"Valdez will have your throat cut, even if you could manage it. But it can never be done. Do you expect to hold them up? They have enough men to riddle you full of holes, even if you were the finest swordsman in the world."

"True," chuckled the Englishman. "But there is one thing which is stronger than swords or bullets. Look—what a wonderful bit of a show it is! See those white plumes shaking between the ears of the horses! Pyndero, I wouldn't give up this picture, not for a hundred pounds, and I swear that I shall be in the heart of it."

"A hundred pounds, ten, that you never get there."

"A hundred pounds, excellency. Do you mean it?"

"Upon my honor. A hundred pounds to you if you actually ride into town in that carriage."

"It is too simple. However, if you insist upon giving away money——"

The leading horseman was now not more than fifty feet away from them, and he had raised a bright red staff, which he held across the pommel of the saddle to warn the pedestrians out of the way. Lord Wyncham stepped hastily to the side of the road, but in so doing he stepped upon, or seemed to step upon, a stone which rolled under his weight and cast him with a cry to the earth. There he lay for an instant stunned, then struggled to his feet, but slumped over to his side with another exclamation.

"The ankle, Pyndero!" he cried to the governor. "I have twisted it. I shall not be able to walk for a week at the nearest."

"Then," said the governor coolly, "you have lost your chance to dance at my ball. I am sorry, Wyncham."

The latter, in the meantime, had tugged off his boot with a groan and was wrapping a handkerchief around his ankle. The carriage would by this time have rolled on, with Tarabal buried securely in his own comfort and caring not a whit for the ease of any other person in the world. But Oritza had risen suddenly from her place, and, standing straight up, she had cried: "Stop the carriage! That man is badly hurt!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"A THOUSAND TIMES KIND."

TO Francisco Valdez it had seemed a strange thing that any one should dare to halt this impressive equipage. He had been used to splendor enough during his life, but such extravagance, here at the end of the world, seemed to him more than imposing; he was overawed. And such a clear, strong voice of command from Ortiza was the very last thing he expected. To be sure all through the journey toward the town his respect for her had been increasing, but it had been her passive strength which he admired. She had watched him from her seat with an indifferent eye which had gradually quelled him more and more. And every foot of the way which was sounded off by the rapid hoofbeats convinced him more and more clearly that he could never be happy as the husband of this woman. He could not take her into his life and assign her a small, obscure niche to fill, as many husbands he knew did with their wives.

He could by no means do that. She had a quiet strength which would make itself felt. No, he could never find happiness with her. Instead, what would betide him?

When he thought of marriage with Ortiza, he thought of the knife which he had found buried in the pillow beside his head; and the instant he thought of leaving the country without marrying the girl, he thought of the wrath of Joaquin Tarabal. Which force was the more to be dreaded he could not make up his mind.

But now came this clear cry from Ortiza, and the driver from his high seat sent the command on to the eight horses and brought them to a halt. The brakes made a shrill squeal, and the big vehicle stopped with a suddenness which jarred the four people in it and threw into disorder the gallant horsemen who followed in the rear.

From farther back the six great bandogs, seeing the fallen man by the roadside, began to press forward, slaver of eagerness dripping from their jaws and plainly showing that they had been raised for the man hunt and trained to it. The three attendants hurled their whole force back on the leashes, but they were dragged along in spite of their efforts. It was only a sudden roar from Tarabal, who saw the direction the dogs had taken, that stopped them. He leaned from his seat, bellowed a stream of curses which checked the great dogs and made them touch their tails between their legs, and then rolled back into his seat.

"Drive on!" he commanded. "What do you mean by stopping here, Juan?"

"The señorita commanded," grumbled the driver.

"He is badly hurt, father!" exclaimed the girl.

"Since when," demanded Tarabal, "have you begun looking out for the troubles of strange men? You are fifty years too young for that. Drive on, I say!"

The driver spoke, the eight horses, at the word, leaned together into the collar, and, just as the heavy coach began to roll ahead, the fallen man was heard to say loudly to his companion, who was kneeling beside him.

"No, no, excellency! I shall manage to get back to the town. Do not ask them for a place in their carriage!"

The word "excellency" had a wonderful effect upon the rancher. He sat up, blinking.

"Stop," he called to the driver.

The team halted. Tarabal leaped from the carriage, like a youth and an athlete. He approached the place where the two were.

"What's wrong here?" he asked cordially.

"Nothing," said the governor hastily. "That is, nothing of the least importance. My friend has turned his ankle a little. It is something which often happens to him. And then, in five minutes, he is as well as ever."

So saying, he smiled and nodded to the rancher. The latter searched his face, and he saw enough to convince him. He had heard the newly arrived governor described. That description fitted the man he now saw before him in the road perfectly. And something like the warm sun of courtesy instantly poured into the heart of Tarabal. Yet what could he do? He was dismissed with a polite gesture. He turned to retreat toward the coach, grinding his teeth because he had lost this chance of rendering a service.

"You are wrong this time, excellency," said Lord Wyncham. "The ankle is badly wrenched. If I can put my weight on it in ten days, I shall be only too happy!"

Tarabal turned with a sigh of relief and pleasure.

"Then," he said, "you must certainly

take a place in my coach. I shall be only too happy to bring you comfortably into Monterey."

"You are a thousand times kind," said Wyncham. "I have not the honor of your name. This, however, is his excellency, the governor, Señor Don José Pyndero."

"And I," said Tarabal, bowing as low as his obesity would permit him, "am a thousand times happy to find his excellency. I am Joaquin Tarabal of San Triste."

The governor bowed, but he did not seem overpleased.

"And this," he muttered, having been forced to the point, 'is my friend Lord Wyncham."

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

PLANE CARRIES MINER TO HOSPITAL

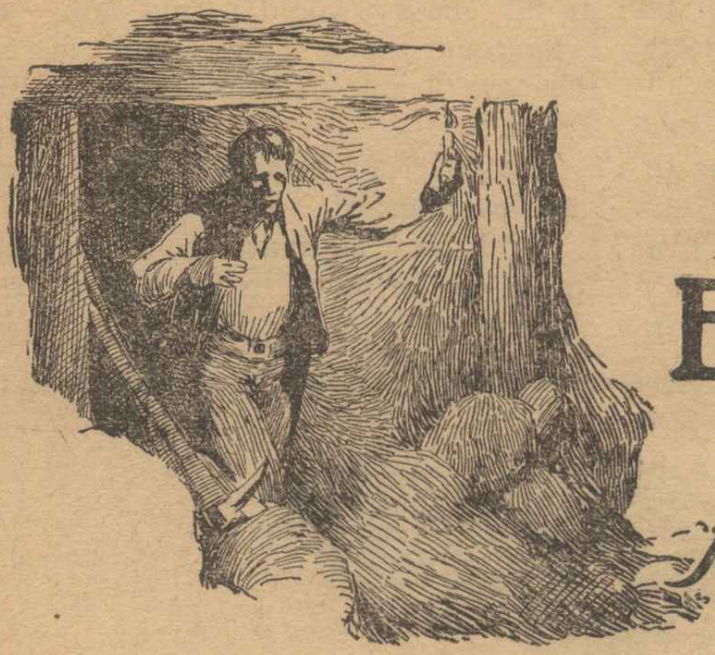
SOME time ago William Himmell, an old-time sour dough of the Kuskokwim district, lay seriously ill near McGrath, Alaska, a place where there has never been a resident doctor. A ten-day trip by dog sled over the trail to Nenana, faced him. It was almost certain he would die unless medical attention was given him. When Pilot Ben Eielson of the air mail service landed at McGrath, it was suggested to him that he should take the sick man in his plane to Fairbanks, two hundred miles away.

In a few hours the suffering miner was on a hospital cot under the skilled care of physicians and nurses. Regardless of head winds, snow, or frigid weather, Pilot Eielson has made regular trips on schedule, carrying mails and keeping the outposts of progress in touch with civilization. His unusual succor of the sick miner has stirred the entire Northland, and Alaskans see no end of services the airplane can do for them.

GOLDEN WEST'S SONS' CONCLAVE

THE forty-seventh annual convention of the Native Sons of the Golden West opened during the month of May in Sacramento, California. About five hundred delegates, representing two hundred and fifty subordinate "parlors" and a membership of more than twenty-eight thousand were present and took part in a five-day program. The order has done a splendid work in perpetuating landmarks of early California.

Redwood reforestation, restriction of Oriental immigration, and the founding of fellowships in Pacific-coast history for special research studies were the chief topic that engaged the order. This organization has contributed more than fifty thousand dollars for the promotion of State history studies through fellowships. Most of the money for fellowships has gone to the University of California. A school history of California, to be prepared under the auspices of the history department of the university, was planned.



His Fatal Barrier

By James Howard Hull

"WHAT ails you, anyhow?" Jukes grunted, as he pulled on his boots in the corner of the cabin where he had spent the night. "You look like you'd saw a ghost or somethin'."

In the doorway which led to the other room of the cabin, Canfield stood with a white sickliness trembling on his delicate features. "I have," he announced. "Come in here and take a look for yourself."

Jukes lumbered across the floor, pushed the other aside, and entered the little sleeping apartment which neither of them had invaded since they arrived on the previous evening. There was one small window and a single cot. Jukes took an involuntary step backward. Reposing on that little cot, there was, and apparently had been for some time, the shape of a man; dead. "Well, I'll be gumfounded!" Jukes declared. "We've slept in here all night and never knowed it!"

However, he was much less impressed than his companion. Both had arrived late on the previous evening, staked their horses, and spread their blankets in a corner of the main room. The cabin stood close to a well-traveled trail and served as a halfway house for whoever came. Years before a mine had been located here and two hundred yards of tunnel excavated. The claim had been abandoned for ten years, and the cabin now seemed to have become a public possession.

It was early in June, and Jukes knew that he was the first to ride over the trail since the snow melted. A stranger by the name of Canfield, who arrived an hour later, had been the second.

Emboldened by the other's presence, Canfield approached the cot, and studied the face of the man who had reposed on it for the last time. "Looks to me like old Withers, the man that robbed the bank down in Afton last fall. Don't it to you?"

"That's who 'tis," Jukes agreed. "Knew he'd be safe enough here till the snow melted. Got sick with something and died of it."

Canfield was gazing about the place. In the middle of a tiny, dust-covered table near the cot he found a letter, and stood reading the address.

Jukes snatched it out of his fingers and read what was written on it. "Sheriff K. R. Quarles, Afton, Wyoming." And on the other side, written cornerwise, was a note in the same hand.

W

"Whoever comes here first and finds this letter, will you please mail it for me? Yours truly, Nathan Withers."

Without hesitation, Jukes broke the seal and drew out the single sheet.

"You're not going to read it, are you?" Canfield protested.

"Oh, no! Never catch me in no such low-down trick as readin' another man's letter!" Then he handed it to Canfield. "Here, read it yourself first, if you're curious."

With considerable hesitation Canfield took the sheet and studied the lines eagerly. Then he handed it back.

Jukes read it slowly.

DEAR QUARLES: I'm done. I've said right along if you ever got me, you'd have to get me dead, and that's how I'll be when you or anybody else comes here and finds this letter. The eighty thousand dollars I got from the bank last fall will be found in four sacks, packed together in a little box, up in the tunnel. After you enter the tunnel, step off one hundred and fifty paces, and you'll come to the box. You'll need a candle to see by, and you'll find some on the shelf over the stove. Take plenty of matches. I advise you to come alone, and show this letter to nobody. I want that money returned to the bank. NATHAN WITHERS.

Jukes finished the last sentence of it, then read it over again. The meaning was clear enough, but he wanted time to think. His first impulse was one of bitterest regret that he had shown the letter to Canfield, before reading it himself. Information of this sort was best when it was possessed by one, and only one person. However, now that the harm had been done it was necessary to plan.

Canfield was the first to speak. "Conscience money. Too bad we opened the letter. It's going to get me in bad with the sheriff. I know him, too. He's a sort of second cousin of mine."

Jukes was thinking fast. This man was going to be hard to handle. "Second cousin, eh? Well, what do you aim to do about it?"

"Ride down to Afton and take the letter to him, I guess. It's the only way out of it; explain to him what we found and how we happened to do what we did."

Inwardly Jukes was raging. The simpleton! But this was no time for rage. He spoke with cynical calmness. "There's other ways out of it, son. S'pos'n' we fix this letter so it won't be a letter no more; maybe touch a match to it. Then the secret narrows down to just us two, and what the rest of the world don't know won't hurt nobody."

"You mean go halves on it?" Canfield inquired innocently.

"Sure, we'll split even on it. Eighty thousand dollars. We'll go forty-forty."

Jukes had no intention of making an even division, but the arrangement would do for the time being. There were two reasons why the promise could not be kept. One was that the entire amount should by rights become his own. The other was that the knowledge that there ever had been a letter must reside within his own mind and nowhere else. On the whole, it would not be difficult to manage. To arrange with Canfield to divide the money evenly and take him along up into the tunnel to get it, would be a simple matter. By the light of a single candle, in the semidarkness of the mine, a little quick drawing would narrow the secret down to satisfactory dimensions.

There would be only a few details to look after. The remains of the once-formidable Nathan Withers must be removed to a place where they would never be discovered. Probably the tunnel would be the best place. Canfield, too, could be left in the tunnel. No person would enter it for the next twenty years. There were other small details to be handled. The letter must of course be burned. Then, too, there was the matter of Canfield's horse and saddle and entire outfit. The horse must not be allowed to stray at large and return

to the place where Canfield's acquaintances would find it. The horse proposition would be the hardest of all. Of course, it might be led into the tunnel and disposed of. Still, on second thought, the tunnel would not be absolutely safe. Some aimless prospector *might* happen along to examine the worthless ledge, and cause questions to be asked.

He tucked the letter quickly into his pocket and turned to Canfield, changing the subject briskly. "How about breakfast? If you'll get a bucket of water, I'll build a fire in the stove and see if I can throw together some bannocks."

He was glad to be left alone, even for a few minutes. He wanted to think out every detail. Rummaging in a closet for something that would serve as kindling wood, he discovered two boxes. One contained a quantity of old fuse and a box of caps. In the bottom of the other were a dozen sticks of giant powder. That suggested the final step in his plan. With fuse, caps, and powder, it would be possible to cave in the tunnel at the entrance in such a manner that whatever was within would be safe for all time. The plan was now perfect. Within a few hours the money would be his, and the tunnel would be closed. And within it would be a dead horse, a saddle, the remains of Nathan Withers, the outlaw, and of a certain simpleton named Canfield.

Canfield returned, and before long they found boxes and seated themselves at the tiny table.

Canfield was too talkative. "There's one thing about this that looks queer. I don't quite understand yet, why old Withers wrote that note to Quarles, instead of sending it—by us or whoever came here—right down to the bank direct."

"Well, in the first place, he was about to die," Jukes argued.

"Sure, sure; the money was no use to him any more, and he wanted to undo his devilment. I can see that part of it all right. But he hated Quarles; hated him like poison. To my knowledge he tried three times to kill him. Tried to lead him into traps, and took all kinds of risks just to get a shot at him. Quarles was the only man that was at all likely to get him; that made some difference. But even outside of that, he hated Quarles. He'd have been willing to take chances two to one against himself, to get a shot at him. I know. Quarles is a sort of second cousin of mine, and I heard all about it. And why he wanted to write this letter to——"

"Second cousin o' yourn, eh?" Jukes broke in suddenly. "I suppose that's why you think you ought to ride down to Afton and give him the letter."

"But I don't see why he wrote the letter to Quarles—the one man he hated so—instead of——"

"Well, you ain't going to," Jukes snapped out irrelevantly.

"Why?"

"Because I've got the letter," Jukes stated with finality. "And I've got other plans for it." He drew it from his pocket, held it high over the table, struck a match deftly, and lit the corner of it. Rapidly it burned to black crispness, and with a single puff he blew the remnants to the floor. Then he rose suddenly. "That settles the letter part of it. Now the next thing is for you to come along with me up to the tunnel, and see if we can locate——"

"Oh, but I'm going to ride down to Afton anyhow," Canfield declared. "I know what was in that letter, anyhow. And my word's as good with Quarles as a written document. The next thing for me to do is to get my horse and hit the hike. And remember one thing, mister; if that money's gone when we get back to-morrow night, we'll know who took it." He found his hat, pulled it down across his forehead, and stepped toward the door. Then he hesitated. "Come

to think about it, old-timer, perhaps you'd best put on your saddle and go along, too. We can make it in to-night, and the three of us can come back to-morrow."

Jukes refused to argue further. This man was hopeless. A few details of the plan must be changed. "Oh, go on and get your horse, then!" he grunted.

After Canfield had gone, Jukes stepped over to his mackinaw which hung against the wall, and found his .32-.20. Then he pulled the door shut, except for a mere crack, and watched. Canfield was busy on the farther side of the horse. Jukes' eyes narrowed to mere slits in his face, and his big lips grew thin. For a second only, his fingers trembled. Then Canfield put his left toe into the stirrup and came into view. Jukes fired.

Cold perspiration drenched his brow. He wanted to think. The horse had leaped away down the trail, with reins dragging. That could be attended to later. The man must not be permitted to remain there a minute. He must be dragged a hundred yards up through the sagebrush and into the tunnel before any chance traveler might happen along and see it all.

Then Jukes steeled himself to the task. With a railing curse at his own weakness, he rushed out and gripped the dead man's collar. How he hated it! Now that he was dead, he feared Canfield as he had never feared him when the man was alive. This thing that once had been a man—he feared the sight of it and dreaded to touch it. He wanted to be as far away from it as he could get; miles and miles away. He wanted to go where he could delete utterly the vaguest memory of it.

But this would not do. He must brace himself. There was really no danger of discovery whatever. There was not a living person within ten miles of the place, and if by any chance a rider should happen along, it would not be early in the morning that he came. Whenever men arrived at this cabin, they arrived along toward evening, planning to stop here overnight.

With pounding temples he made his way with the uncanny burden up to the mouth of the tunnel, and inside it as far as he could go without a candle. Then he turned back. He must go back to the cabin and get a candle.

As he passed out, he stopped to examine the timbering near the entrance. It was admirably adapted to his purposes. For a considerable distance the timbers were old and rotten, and here and there loose rocks had broken through. One stick of powder would close the entrance so completely that a man with a shovel and pick could hardly hope to clear the passage in less than a week. One stick would be enough, but to make it sure he would use eight.

With a chuckle of relief he hurried back to the cabin to find a candle. Slowly he managed to summon his thoughts. Thus far the plan was working out well. First he must find his candle, go back to the tunnel, step off one hundred and fifty paces, and get the money. The next thing was to cache the remains of old Withers safely inside the excavation. And the last step would be to catch Canfield's horse, lead it far inside, and there shoot it. After that, the dynamite, a cap, and a short length of fuse, would destroy every trace of what had been done.

There was a candle on the shelf above the stove, as the letter had indicated. Jukes grabbed it and ran back to the opening. He was losing his control again. His fingers trembled horribly as he broke the superfluous tallow end from the candle and left an inch of wick bare. He touched a match to it and prowled into the darkness. To make the entrance he must step over that one object he feared and dreaded to see or to be near.

He counted his paces, but forgot the

number and went back to the entrance to begin all over again. Then he stepped along with big strides. At the end of fifty he stumbled against something in his path, and shouted a quick phrase; half oath, half scream of horror. Then he went on to a hundred; a hundred and fifty.

Four feet away, directly ahead of him, was a small box. Eagerly he leaped toward it, and fell. The candle went out. Relighting it, he tried to discover the nature of the invisible obstruction. It was a tiny strand of wire, strung about a foot from the ground. At his left it was carefully strung along the edge of the rocks back toward the entrance. It was nothing; perhaps some sort of electrical firing device that had been here for years.

Candle in hand, he fell upon the box, pulled open the cover, and feasted his eyes upon what he saw there. There were four sacks. He laid his candle against a convenient rock, found his knife, and opened one of them. Money! Eighty thousand dollars, and it was all his own! This was what Quarles was to have taken back to the bank; Quarles whom Nathan Withers hated more than any man on earth. Jukes picked up his candle and the box. Now if he could only find his way out without stumbling over that dreaded object! His fear of it was something worse than panic; it was mania. The very consciousness that it was near would destroy his mind in an hour. It must be a thousand miles away, and the memory of it must be deleted forever!

Far down the tunnel toward the entrance there seemed to be another light, sometimes bright, sometimes dim. A shower of sparks seemed always dropping from it. Was it a fuse? Who could have set it off? It was just at that point where the timbers were rotten and loose rocks were visible above them. Jukes halted and refused to go nearer to it until he had decided what it could be. Then he remembered something. Nathan Withers had hated Quarles worse than any man on earth. Was it possible that that little invisible wire was indeed part of some improvised device for setting off a fuse at a distance? Was it?

The answer came with a roar that seemed to shake the whole earth to its center. With the impact of it, the candle went out at once. Jukes dropped the box and clapped his hands against his ears. His head buzzed with a quaint dizziness. Then there was silence, as absolute as the darkness itself.

With numb fingers he touched another match to the candle and rushed down toward what had once been the entrance. Ahead was a mass of rocks, tons and tons of them. A man with a pick and shovel and a team of horses could never have found his way through that barrier in a month.

For an hour, Jukes wandered up and down the place, back and forth like a caged tiger searching for a way of escape. The candle burned low, and he possessed no more of them. The hot grease of the tiny remaining portion burned his fingers. He strayed back toward the pile of huge boulders, blocking the passage completely, excluding even the faintest ray of light. The task of removing them defied human strength. Nathan Withers, a few days before his death, must have made use of at least fifty sticks, in his fiendish endeavor to obtain revenge even after he himself was dead.

Jukes came a step closer to the fatal barrier. His foot stumbled against something which lay still across the tunnel. He emitted a cry; half oath, half scream of horror. The candle went out.

Ol' "Shep"

By James Edward Hungerford

Ol' "Shep" is sure a friend o' mine,
A "pal" through thick an' thin;
We've seen some life "along the line;"
Some good—some tough as sin!
He's always stuck right by my side,
Wherever we have strayed,
An' proven trusty, true an' tried,
Whatever game we played!

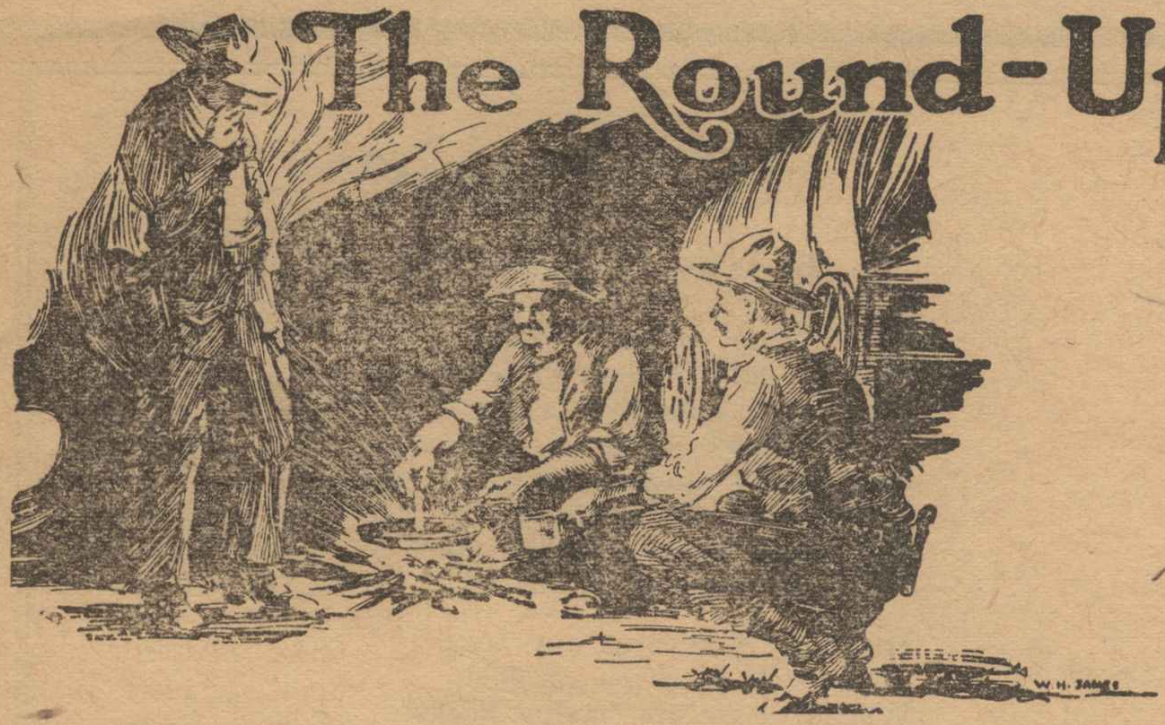
His nose is keen as any fox;
His eyes as sharp as steel.
Whenever we are tendin' flocks,
He makes the critters feel
As safe from harm an' full o' peace
An' perfect self-content,
As if ol' Shep, to guard their fleece,
Was straight from Heaven sent!

He's kinda lank an' floppy-eared;
His beauty is some marred.
In heaps o' scraps he's nigh been "queered;"
His hide is battle-scarred;
But he is still chock-full o' fight,
An' ready fer the fray,
With wolves er wild cats in the night,
Er any time o' day!

An' yet, while he would fight fer me,
With heart an' tooth an' limb.
He's gentle—wouldn't harm a flea—
If they'd "lay off" o' him.
He frisks an' frolics with the sheep,
An' sometimes causes strife;
But when they lay 'em down to sleep,
He guards 'em with his life!

Ol' Shep has been a pard o' mine!
Fer years, through thick an' thin;
He talks to me, with bark an whine,
An' eyes—with love light in;
He's stuck beside me night an' day,
A comrade an' a friend;
A pard in trouble, work, an' play,
On whom I can depend!

The Round-Up



CROSS-BAR BOB, now of Peru, Indiana, comes ridin' up with some mighty interesting information.

We got to talkin'—Cross Bar and us—not long ago, and Cross Bar he suggested that he might be ridin' this way some evenin' soon. So, we just told him to come right along, and most welcome he would be, and to make it on some Round-up night.

Well, here be Cross Bar.

"CAPTAIN OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: For several years I have rounded up and corralled the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE as each copy appeared on my range. I read the well-written, clean stories in it with intense interest. Why? Because they bring back to me vivid recollections of happy, carefree days spent in the open in God's country of the great Southwest, in the early eighties when I was a cowboy out there and where I lived for nearly forty consecutive years. May the fertile brains of the authors of the stories never dry up but continue to yield an abundant harvest of such enjoyable tales as always appear in the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

"I am also much interested in your own department—El Rodeo. The subjects of discussion are very familiar, from actual experience, guns, Spanish, or spade bits, lass-ropes, hair ropes, et cetera. But I do not recall any comment or opinion on the manner in which a lass-rope can be most safely handled to prevent cutting off a finger or two by having them caught while roping cattle and wrapping the end of a 'loose' rope round the saddle horn. I have seen it happen and the only way to avoid it is to rope with a 'fast' rope—I don't mean 'swift.'

"To explain: Make a cowboy's loop on the near end of your rope; slip the loop over the saddle horn; keep it there and in roping it will be found almost equal to a third hand—but without fingers to lose—thus leaving your own two hands free to rein your mount and handle the lass-rope. Some may say it is too dangerous to use a fast rope; your horse may be pulled over when roping heavy, wild cattle—and they all were wild in those days—but don't you believe it, a well-trained rope horse is as much afraid of and will guard against being jerked off his feet, as his rider is, and by giving a little slack to the rope

the loop can be easily and quickly slipped off the saddle horn.

"I used a thirty-three-feet, seven-sixteenths-inch rope for large cattle and a three-eighths-inch for calves and yearlings, hard twisted, with a small cowboy's loop at the farther end instead of a metal hondo or eye; I never liked the latter, or rawhide ropes, because if one of the strands broke, your rawhide was done for.

"I have seen California vaqueros use sixty footers and loose at that, not 'fast,' but excuse me, the thirty-three footer was the surest shot, especially in brush. When through usage or getting wet our ropes became too limber, we easily cured that by rubbing them with 'tar' off the hubs of the chuck-wagon wheels, afterward trailing them in the dust, and this process made the ropes of proper stiffness and partly waterproof. Simple, isn't it?

"Guns: My choice always was a .44 Frontier Colt, long barrel—'hog-leg' we called them. That, and a .44 Winchester carbine, same cartridge, both loaded, and a belt with thirty-five shells, total about fifty rounds, were my constant companions when riding the range daily, but not at round-up where carrying arms was prohibited by law and the cattle association's rules. In those days wolves, coyotes and wild cats were plentiful and at times saucy, not to mention cattle thieves. I still have my old pistol belt bought in 1880 and I keep it as a cherished memento of my frontier days.

"Spanish, or spade bits: Never used them; entirely too brutal. To get the best out of a cow pony, you must make his mouth feel as comfortable as possible and should use a bit which will always control but not hurt him; there are other means of punishment and a quirt or spurs are the best.

"Hair Ropes: Never saw one used as a lass-rope; they are too limber to throw against wind; have seen them used to tie up a bed roll or fence in a bed at night in camp, to keep off rattlesnakes which were and are supposed to hunt the warmth of a bed, but didn't and don't travel about at night.

"Finally—and I can hear you say, thank Heaven he has wound up his little ball of yarn—I have given you your proper title of Captain of the Round-up, according to the code of cattleland in the days of the open and free range, and my way of thinking."

Walter F. Sage, of Noroton Heights, Connecticut, wanted to be with us this evening, but could not make it, so he sent us the following letter, which, if you will give us your attention, we will take great pleasure in reading. Here goes:

"DEAR BOSS AND FOLKS: I cannot let this day pass without voicing my appreciation of the story 'The Race,' in the issue of August 9th, 1924. I am always glad to learn of one who like myself really loves and understands any king of his kind as Mr. Baxter evidently does Crusader and such a he-man as Harry Camden.

"I am eighty-three years old and have grown up with horses from the age of five years, and Mr. Baxter credits Camden with just the same system of treatment with Crusader as this writer has followed from the beginning—lumps of sugar in place of whips and spurs, or better still, gentle whispers in the ear and soft strokes of the hand.

"One instance will illustrate. My uncle bought a five-year-old Morgan stallion for two hundred and fifty dollars. The stallion had just killed his master who had always abused him and outraged his pride. In less than six months, I, a small, sickly boy, could go into this stallion's close box stall at any time, day or night, climb on him if lying down, or handle him in any way, and he

loved me better than most human brothers.

"The horses used by me through four and a half years' service during the Civil War carrying dispatches through swamp country were treated by me as my equals and in some respects my superiors, and they never failed me. I could not do justice to the good qualities of these thoroughbreds among horses, and now in my infirmities and pains of old age the thoughts of these many kingly animals I've known and been known by is a source of great comfort and I like to think of heaven as a place where I will meet old friends, not the least of whom will be my many animal lovers. I read your magazines as fast as they come out and shall look eagerly for more from Mr. Baxter's pen."

Herman Drews thinks that WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE fell into a slump, and then—— But here is what he says:

"DEAR EDITOR OF THE ROUND-UP: A few days ago I wrote you saying that WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE is not putting in such good stories as they used to. For a month or two they really were 'punk,' but I notice that the real good writers—I want you to understand that I am not trying to knock any writers at all, but I mean my favorite authors—did not appear in the contents, so I think that was the real cause for the slump in the stories.

"I think 'Four Ridin' Pals,' by George Gilbert, is the best one out of about ten or more serials that have been printed since 'Hired Guns,' by Max Brand, and that Gilbert really ought to get patted on the back for this.

"The following short stories got a hand from me: 'A Generous Captor,' 'Shorty McKay, Whistlin' Fool,' 'Grizzly Gallagher's Grisly Guest.'

"In the first paragraph I mention that my favorite authors did not appear in the contents. These authors are: Robert J. Horton, Walter J. Coburn, Max Brand, and a few others. A few more stories like 'The Coyote' series, 'The Cactus Kid' series, 'The Branding of a Tenderfoot,' and 'Rodeo Ranch,' will put WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE back in the running and the lead.

"Why not get Horton to stage a comeback of Rovin' Reddin, The Coyote, and The Cactus Kid?"

Guns have this in common with everything else, humans included: Some likes one kind and some likes another. G. C. Everight, Blytheville, Arkansas, feels this way about his likes:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: They was talking about the automatic pistol in the Round-up. Well, I have had several years as a sheep-herder in Wyoming and believe me, I had my part of experience with different kinds of guns. The automatic is all right if you do not need a gun, but if you ever get in a tight place and need a gun and need it bad, that is when your automatic hangs up on you.

"I have bought two automatics in my life and you can find one of them in Cheyenne River and I deposited the other one in a rattlesnake gulch in Colorado. One of them was a .38 and the other was a .380. I tried different calibers and lengths of barrels of Colt's six-shooters, but the one I finally decided on was a 44.40 frontier model with a five-inch barrel. Of course the gun that you shoot the most is the gun that you can shoot the best, for it just takes practice to learn to shoot any kind of a gun.

"The most of my gun practice was at coyotes, prairie dogs, rattlesnakes, wolves, sage hens and such like. Of course the rifle question is a matter of choice. I own an 8 millimeter Mannlicker carbine. It is a regular pet of mine. It weighs five and one half pounds.

"I am coming back to the pistol question. There are guns that are adapted for different services. I am now on a

job that I have to carry a gun while I am working and the gun that I selected was a .38 Smith & Wesson top break with four inch barrel. I picked it because it was effective and was light to carry, and it is effective at close range.

"Well, I will get back and let some of the other 'boes have a whack at it."

"Slide over, please, folks," says C. P. Halloway, from San Francisco. "No, thanks, I don't like to crowd and can talk better while standing. I can get away more quickly.

"Now! Pig swim? Sure they can swim like a duck, but they will cut their throats if they are real fat and if they have long hoofs where the outer half crosses over the inner half. How's 'at?

"A chicken can swim too. In Illinois I saw an old Barred Rock hen swim about twenty feet without using her wings or getting her back wet, but I won't tell the story, for I'd hate like the deuce to have my veracity doubted on my first time up.

"Now about hand guns, why call on Buckley instead of me? Perhaps you did not know I can write on that subject, but I can because I have my preferences and prejudices just the same as Buckley, J. Wilfer, Flapjack Meehan, and all the others who use hand guns.

"I do not like a revolver for the simple reason that I cannot hit the side of a barn with one smaller than a .45 and as I weigh only one hundred and sixty, I object to using both hands to avoid being kicked in the face.

"However, with the automatic it is an entirely different story. I think I have tried them all and I feel that the .45 is pretty hard to beat for all-around service. At present I have a .380 Ortgie for a house gun, for which I molded and machined bronze handles to replace the wooden ones to give more weight and it has proved quite satisfactory as it shoots hard and true and it is safe.

"Buckley's idea of the spring clip holster might be all right for the hip. I *know* it is all right for the arm."

Gosh all hemlock! Can a hog swim? Why, boys *and* girls, a hog's a life saver, but it cost the—— However, this is not our story, but that of Warren Branch, Atlasburg, Pennsylvania.

"DEAR BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP: I wish to put in a few lines on the subject of rabbits and hogs swimming. I have several times seen rabbits swimming and will say that at one time a rabbit led a pack of hounds in a race across the Genesee River which is near my home in New York State. At another time I saw a rabbit jump from a bridge to the water to escape the dogs at one end of the bridge and my chum and me at the other. The jump from bridge to water was about fourteen or fifteen feet. I could tell of many times when I have seen rabbits forced to take to water and they never have hesitated a second.

"Now in regard to a hog swimming. They can swim very well, but when forced to swim hard or for a long distance they almost always injure themselves. If a hog is slim and not fat it is not so hard on the hog, but a fat hog that has to swim very hard or very far will cut its throat nine times out of ten.

"I live on the river where we have a flood two or three times a year and I could tell of any number of instances when hogs have been forced to take to the water on account of floods, and the figures would show very few fat hogs coming out without injury. The slim or skinny ones have the best chance.

"If any one has any doubt if the hog will cut its own throat let them get the account of the truck load of hogs that went through the bridge at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The driver of the truck was drowned, but his helper got hold of a hog's tail and the hog swam out with him, but the hog cut itself up so badly about the throat that it died next

day. Several other hogs swam out of the river with no load to pull and were just cut up a little about the throat. Only the one that towed the truck helper to shore died from its wounds.

"Any one can get an account of this accident by writing to the following addresses, and sending a self-addressed and stamped envelope: The Pittsburgh *Press,* Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, or to Press Information Bureau, Washington, D. C.

"Some folks tell what they have heard, but all of the foregoing can be proved by eyewitnesses or newspaper records."

Talk about short and talk about sweet! My, my, but Lee Mahoney, of Corsicana, Texas—may his tribe increase—sure do admire us all, for he allows:

"DEAR EDITOR: I am seventeen years old and have been reading the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for two years, and the only fault I have with it is that it is not published daily instead of weekly.

Guess we had better stop right on that one. It's the kind we had ought to grow on!

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 very top letter on the bunch this morning is from a cheery sailor Gangster, Morris I. Cox, telling us how quickly his membership button made him a friend. "As soon as I got it I put it right on my blues and went ashore," he says. "There I met a brother and we had a wonderful time together. The Hollow Tree Club has a twofold meaning. First, if one is lonely one may exchange letters with other folks in the same boat. Second, if two of The Gang meet by chance they become fast friends. And what is better than a few friends? I feel fully repaid for signing up for a hitch in the Old Tree."

A sister from far-off Australia wants American pen friends.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am an Englishwoman, but have been an Aussie for twenty-three years. I have a great admiration for America generally, and the West particularly. I adore open spaces and feel cramped in cities. Australia is a land of open spaces, and very dear to me. "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove," or an eagle I should enjoy showing any one from your part of the world over our island home. It is a place of much beauty and wonderful sunsets.

I have been in several parts of Australia, such as New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia. The Gippsland country in Victoria is especially beautiful. There are large dairy farms, and the milkings average from a hundred and fifty to two hundred cows at a milking. I once went for a holiday to a farm, or, as you would call it, "ranch," where they were milking two hundred cows in the morning and one hundred and twenty in the evening. I learned to shear sheep and even to brand cattle, and had many a mad gallop after the dairy herds over mountainous country. I really think that Gippsland must be most like your Western country.

I have also been up to the far North among the blacks, or aboriginals. But before I close I really must tell you a little about Adelaide, queen city of the southern hemisphere. Before me as I write is a long, low range of hills, blue-purple in the distance, with here and there a white dazzling homestead peeping through, and as a background Mount Lofty with its gleaming monument. At the bottom of the hills is the city bounded by its four terraces. The beautiful River Torrens divides Adelaide from its suburban neighbor. Rising against the blue of the sky are the spires of St. Peter's Cathedral. There are numerous beautiful parks and gardens in the city with trees and shrubs and subtropical flowers. With every success to the good old Hollow.

MRS. JEAN BLIGHT.
71 Archer Street, North Adelaide, South Australia.

"I am a homeless boy of fifteen," writes Billie West, No. 21 South Gaylord Street, Butte, Montana. "I lost my parents in a fire in Minnesota several months ago and came to Montana a sick, heartbroken lad. Will the Hollow tell elderly Gangsters with no children of their own of me?"

Arkansas Traveler, care of The Tree, is anxious to hear from some brothers and will tell any one interested about the Wonder State. He says he's a traveling salesman and has nothing to do on Sundays but read the paper.

"Please won't some woman in the country of my age, twenty-five, write? Since I lost my husband and son not long ago, I have worked as a nurse from eight to twelve hours a day, yet I get very lonely at times." Address answers to Mrs. G. Grace, P. O. Box 360, Santa Rosa, California, Gangsters.

Mrs. Claude L. Johnson, Jamul, California, will enjoy hearing from people in foreign countries as well as the United States. Her husband is an ex-service man and they live on a government claim in the mountains near Mexico.

"I am a quarter-breed Blackfoot Indian who'd like to hear from some of The Gang. I live alone in the hills, just go to Columbia once a week for grub and mail and to Sonora every month for my WESTERN STORY MAGAZINES. The storekeeper keeps them for me, so I never miss a copy." This message comes from Gangster Cliff Lehman, P. O. Box 175, Columbia, California, brothers.

Edna Luna, Strathmore, California, lives on an alfalfa and peach farm. She gets very lonely and would welcome some friendly letters.

Can any one help these Gangsters to find the place they want?

DEAR GANG: My husband and I want to take up a piece of land, a homestead, just as soon as possible. Do any of you know of a good piece of government land, grazing land with tillable soil and water for stock and house use? We have a few milk cows, so would want a place not very far from a town and cream depot. Information about a cheap relinquishment with alfalfa growing would certainly be apreciated. We're interested in fishing and hunting and would like to hear from others who are.

MR. AND MRS. WM. M. FISCHER.
Harlan Court, Emeryville, Oakland, Calif.

FOUND ON JACK'S MEMORANDUM PAD:

MONDAY—Be sure to order Hollow Tree badge to-day.

Send twenty-five cents in stamps or coin to the Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, and state whether you want the button style to be worn on the coat lapel, or the pin.

Let's see how many cheery letters we can send this sick-a-bed brother!

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I was caught in a machine over a year ago in the factory where I worked and am not able to walk. I would like to exchange letters and postal cards with young men in other parts of the world. If there are any Gangsters in Pittsburgh will they drop in and see me? Hoping to hear from some, including cowboys and Indians, who want to cheer up a lonely cripple. JOHN A. ATKINSON.
300 McClure Avenue, St. John's Hospital, N. S., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Step right up into our circle, rambler.

DEAR GANG: My pony won't let me stay in one place long. He has, like me, a roving disposition and a mind on adventure bent. When he gets to acting sorta queer it means it's time to tie my bed on my saddle and hit the long lonesome. Where I go makes no difference to me, and I leave the matter to my pony. Sometimes he goes north for his health and sometimes he has a burning desire to worship at the shrines of the ancient Aztecs and hold lengthy discourse with Zuetzelcoatl on the rich range far below the Rio Grande.

I'm a puncher by profession, and proud of it. Five years ago, when I was seventeen, I learned the art of punching, and there is nothing I'd rather work at. I have nothing to hold me in one place, and, being young and full of pep, or darn foolishness, I can't sabe which, I've decided to see the West from the Canadian border to the Panama Canal. So far I'm doing fine, thanks to my pony. I wouldn't sell him for the best ranch in Texas. We've been together night and day for four years, have weathered snowstorms in Montana, sand storms in Arizona, and rainstorms in lower Mexico.

People, you-all especially in the East, do you know what real life is? You go off and camp near some stream for a couple of weeks, and when you return you tell everybody of the glorious time you had "roughing it in the wilds." Friends, as an old man once said, "You ain't been nowhere an' ain't done nuthin'." When you are out on the desert, sixty miles from nowhere, out of chuck and water, and have only one shell for your Winchester, when you are out in a sand storm or traveling over a hard, lonesome trail with a hot blazing sun trying to melt the marrow in your bones, you are roughing it in dead earnest, and you're seeing real life.

Do you know what friendship is? Have you one friend? I don't mean one who goes around with you and calls you a good sport and borrows money from you; he is only an acquaintance. Of course, you say: "I have a pal, a brother, a sweetheart; I have many friends." How many have you when you need them in a great emergency? Dog-gone few, if any.

I have no pal because I have yet to meet the man who sees life as I see it. I have no brother and I never had a sweetheart, and wouldn't know what to do with one if I had, but I have one real friend, my pony. He has saved my life several times, and came near losing his own doing it. That's friendship. No matter where I camp day or night all I have to do is whistle, and he is there, ready, waiting.

People, if you want real life, come out to the range; if you want a real friend buy a horse.

I'll swap experiences with anybody, and would like some one to send me the whole song of "Zebra Dun." If any of your Eastern boys want to try cow-punching let me know, and I'll tell you what kind of an outfit you need. All I have to do at night is sit around and wish it was time for breakfast, so I'll have plenty of time to answer letters.

When I'm on the trail I don't mind getting a letter every three or four months, but when I'm punching I hate like thunder to have the foreman tell me, "nuthin' stirrin'" when he brings the mail.

Here's hoping I get a herd of letters that will make the rest of the boys green with envy.

C. H. BOATE.

Sterling City, Texas.

DOMINION LAND OFFICE CLOSED

AFTER twenty-five years the Dominion government has recently closed its government land office in Omaha, Nebraska. A few years ago western Canada was a drawing card to American farmers and ranchers, but American immigration into Canada is now so negligible that the Canadian government has closed a number of its land offices which it maintained in western States. In its twenty-eight years of life the Omaha office sent nearly fifty thousand American settlers across the line. It is said these settlers took with them more than fifty million dollars in cash, household goods, and live stock.

GIANT SEQUOIAS MENACED

ACCORDING to a Washington dispatch, the famous giant sequoia trees of California were threatened by forest fires in June. Forest service officials received advices of fires in five of California's national forests, including one covering about five square miles in the Sequoia National Forest, in which, together with the General Grant Forest, ten miles away, many of the finest specimens of the redwood trees are located.

The deficiency of rainfall in California this year is the greatest ever known, and forest officials were much worried over the fire situation.

MISSING

This department 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.

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.

JOHNSON, W. D.—He was last heard of in Oakdale, Louisiana, in 1922. Any one who has any knowledge of his present address will confer a favor by sending it to Avant J. Lafosse, Post Office Box 151, Kinder, Louisiana.

ALLEN, JERRY and **RACHEL.**—I am very eager to get in touch with my father and mother, who placed me in the American Home Finding Association when I was two months old. I am now eighteen years of age, and my name was changed from Irma May to Ruth Lucille. Please write to R. L. Allen, 1024 South Eighth Street, Springfield, Illinois.

ATTENTION.—Any one living in the State of Kansas who has a son by the name of John C. in the United States navy please communicate with W. K. Brunk, Western, Nebraska.

McCOY, CORA ALICE.—She left Denver, Colorado, twenty-two years ago, and has not been heard of since. Please get in touch with your sister, Mrs. H. D. Ryan, Hotel Carlton, Denver, Colorado.

C. V. S., JIM.—Your wife and baby, Martha May, are in great need of money. Please help them at once. E. W., care of this magazine.

CLYDE, GERVIN.—Please write me at the same address or return home. I still love you, and everything will be all right. Pearl.

McGREGOR, FRANCIS HERRICK, of Victoria, British Columbia. Please write me at once through this magazine. Peg.

SULLIVAN, J.—He formerly lived at 1812 Broadway, Superior, Wisconsin. Any one who has any knowledge of his present address will please send it to Bute, care of this magazine.

JAMIESON, HARRY.—He worked as a bartender in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but later went to Chicago, Illinois. His daughter was told that he was living in Oklahoma in 1913, but she was unable to get his address or that of his relatives. Any one who has any information about his present whereabouts will please write to Mrs. Eleanor Gwendolyn Larson, 339 Palm Avenue, Coronado, California.

ATTENTION.—Boys who served with me in Company K, Twenty-seventh Infantry, in Siberia, Manila, and Honolulu, please write to your old buddy, Roy Roark, 6837 East Twelfth Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

LINVILLE, ERNEST.—He was last heard of in California, where he was working for the Warn Construction Co. He is twenty-six years of age, weighs one hundred and forty-five pounds, and is very neat in appearance. Any one who has any news about him will please notify his father, D. L. Linville, 1727 Forest Avenue, Knoxville, Tennessee.

MOSSING, ISAAC.—He was living in Montana for some time, but has not been heard of since. His sister is eager to get in touch with him, and will gratefully receive any information about him. Lena Mickelson, Box 70, Viceroy, Saskatchewan, Canada.

ATTENTION.—My name is Clarinda Livingston, and I was admitted to the Protestant Orphan Asylum in Detroit, Michigan, from the Women's Hospital and Children's Home on August 6, 1886. Later I was adopted by a family by the name of Clark. I am eager to get in touch with my relatives, and will welcome any information about them. Write to Mrs. S. A. McCarthy, 225 North Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

RAYMOND, JACK.—He is five feet eight inches in height, has brown hair, gray eyes, a muddy complexion, and the letters L. W. tattooed on his right arm. His wife and child are in great need of him, and will greatly appreciate any information about him. Mrs. G. M. Raymond, 770 North Madison Street, Pasadena, California.

BATESON, HAROLD.—He was a lieutenant in the Royal Flying Corps in 1918. Any one who has any knowledge of his present address will please notify Mrs. A. Laird, 583 Delaware Avenue, Toronto, Canada.

DOLLAR, E. L.—Please communicate with your father at once, as he is worried about you. William Dollar, 1212 West Seventeenth Street, North Little Rock, Arkansas.

KRISTEN, JACK.—I have followed carefully the instructions on the card, but have not heard from you since March, 1923. Please write as soon as you see this. Chrystal Tyrell, General Delivery, Phoenix, Arizona.

CRAWFORD, HARRY CHARLES.—He was last heard of in San Diego, California, while serving on the U. S. S. "Farragut." Any one who has any information about him will please notify Chrystal Tyrell, General Delivery, Phoenix, Arizona.

RILEY, FRANK.—He was last seen in Montana. His son is very eager to hear from him, as he is worried and has news for him. Frank Riley, Jr., care of this magazine.

HANSEN, WALTER.—Please write to your old pal, as I am very anxious to hear from you. Clifford Campbell, Box No. 273, Tulia, Texas.

CURRIER, GEORGE M.—He was last heard of in March, 1922, when he was operating a tourist party boat from Miami, Florida, to Cuba. He is thirty-eight years of age, with dark-brown eyes and hair, and weighs two hundred and eighty pounds. His wife's name is Alla Mae. I would appreciate hearing from either of them. Mrs. C. I. Rummel, 808 Third Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

LORETTE, JOAN.—I am very eager to get in touch with my aunt, who was working in Middletown, Connecticut, as a trained nurse for Mrs. Palmer and Mrs. Curran. She is about fifty-three years of age. Please send all information concerning her to Miss Margaret Lorette, 527 Canal Street, Holyoke, Massachusetts.

LONG, SALLY and **JANE.**—I would like to find my aunts, who married two brothers by the name of McKinney. Any one who has news about them will please notify me. M. D. Long, Box 64, Sudan, Texas.

MURRY, EDWARD and **MABEL.**—They were last heard of on August 3, 1923, in Winchester, Indiana. Mabel has red hair, bobbed, blue eyes, and is twenty years of age. Mrs. G. Britton, Box No. 441, Miamisburg, Ohio.

ADAMS, DORIS.—She lived near Martinsville, Indiana, with her father, who was a country minister. In 1910 they moved to California, and have not been heard of since. Blackfoot, care of L. P. Altman, Blackfoot, Idaho.

TIMMONS, LORIN.—He left Arkansas City, Arkansas, to join the army in Fort Riley, Kansas. He is six feet in height, with dark hair and eyes, and weighs one hundred and eighty pounds. Please write to Bertha Brown, Anthony, Kansas.

GILES, JESSIE.—She was last heard of in Montana, where she was teaching school with her sister. Any information about her will be greatly appreciated. C. H. Underwood, Service Co., Fifth Infantry, Camp Devens, Massachusetts.

FLICKER, HENRY.—He left England some time ago, and is now supposed to be living in Ohio. He is sixty-five years of age, five feet eight inches in height. Any one who has any news about him will please notify William Weeks, Glace Bay, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada.

WALLING, MERLE.—Please get in touch with me as soon as you see this. I have left the navy and am anxious to see you. Charles F. Pierce, 26 Oliver Street, Fall River, Massachusetts.

BURNS, FRANK.—He was last heard of in 1917. I have been living with Genevieve's family since April, but will return home to J. about August 20, 1924. Andrew and Gertrude are dead. Please write me as soon as you can, for I need you. Sarah Mount, 1138 Ainslie Street, Chicago, Illinois.

DURHAM, EVERETT.—Please return home to your wife and children, as there is nothing for you to fear. We all love you and will make you happy. Mrs. Everett Durham, Trilia, Illinois.

STEVENS.—He formerly came from London, England, but was last heard of in New York, in November, 1920. Please send all information about him to W. M. S., care of this magazine.

BROCKETT, G. A.—Please return home to your family or write at once. The children are longing to see you. Celia and Rosalie, 207 Crosby Street, Akron, Ohio.

CAMERON, JOHN C.—He formerly lived in Dallas, Texas, but was last heard of in Arizona and New Mexico. He is about fifty years of age, with brown hair and gray eyes, and is of medium height and weight. It is believed that he is operating a horse or cattle ranch in the West. Please write to Mrs. E. Beers, General Delivery, Fort Worth, Texas.

HALE, BUELAH MAY.—She was last seen in Chattanooga, Tennessee. I am eager to find her, and will appreciate any news about her. R. P. Fericks, U. S. S. "Henderson," care of Postmaster, New York City.

O'NEILL, JIM.—He has been missing from home for about twelve years. He is about fifty years of age and very tall. Please notify his daughter, Ethel O'Neill, 1412 Second Street, Seattle, Washington.

EDWARDS, Mrs. B. E.—She was last heard of in Roanoke, Virginia, on December 12, 1922. If you see this let it remind you that I did what I promised to do, but if you care to treat me fairly, I am ready to return to you. B. E. E., care of this magazine.

BISHOP, BESSIE.—I have sent letters to Clifton Forge, Virginia, trying to locate you, but have failed. I am very anxious to hear from you, as I still remember what you said in Roanoke. B. E. E., care of this magazine.

MYERS, JOHN.—He was last seen in Baggs, Wyoming, but was supposed to be leaving for Utah or Oklahoma. He has four sons, Roy, Ben, Dean, and John. His only surviving brother is very eager to get in touch with him, and will appreciate any information about him. Karl Dewey Myers, Box 212, Hendricks, West Virginia.

NEAL, GEORGE P.—Please report to Captain Burnette at Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming, at your earliest possible convenience. Wire him that you are returning to resume your duties. Do this without fail, and I will be there to see you through. Your father, C. P. Neal, Brooten, Minnesota.

REES, MARY ELLEN DODDS.—She was last heard of in Hamilton, Montana, in 1919. Any information about her will be gratefully received by R. Lafitte, Box No. 391, Route 1, Houston, Texas.

YAMHILL, JOHN.—He has been missing from his home in Maryland since 1922. He is forty-seven years of age. His son is very eager to find him, and will welcome any news. Claude C. Yamhill, 635 West Redwood Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

COIN, HENRY.—He enlisted in the army in March, 1920, in Fort Crook, Nebraska, and later was sent to Camp Travis, Texas. Please communicate with Frances, General Delivery, Michigan City, Indiana.

McINTYRE, CHARLES.—He is a sailor on the U. S. S. "New Jersey." His friends from Connecticut would like to get in touch with him, and will gratefully receive any news about him. W. Mills, R. F. D. 42, Cranbury, Norwalk, Connecticut.

GREER, IDA or **MARTHA.**—She lived in Missouri in 1884, but has not been heard of since. Any one who has any news about her will please notify S. L. G., care of this magazine.

COURTMAN, JACK.—He was last seen in the Gladstone Hotel, Detroit, Michigan. Please send all information to Bill, care of this magazine.

HALBROOK, JAMES WILLIAM.—He was living in Springfield, Illinois, about ten years ago, but has not been heard of since. His niece is very eager to find him, and will appreciate any news regarding him. Rosie Halbrook, Route 3, Carbon Hill, Alabama.

BALES.—Please communicate with your brother, Walter S. Bales, Room 130, Stubbins Hotel, Indianapolis, Indiana.

McLANE, T.—Write me at once, or wire, as I have very important news for you. J. B. Malin, 120 East Market Street, Akron, Ohio.

BESTES, DEWEY T.—He was last heard of in Omaha, Nebraska, and Sioux City, Iowa. His mother is very anxious to hear from him or any one who has his present address, as she has important news for him. Write to Mrs. C. H. Jordan, 317 Macdonald Avenue, Richmond, California.

BASCONE.—Please write to me at once, as I am very much worried about you. Gussie.

WALKER, ERNEST.—He has gray-blue eyes and weighs about one hundred and forty pounds. He was living in Seattle, Washington, for some time, but he was last heard of in Timber Lake, South Dakota, where he was working for Dick Kaufman and his wife. I am eager to hear from him, and will appreciate any information regarding him. Irma Kail, 1513½ Tacoma Avenue, care of the Kenneth Apartments, Tacoma, Washington.

GUNION, LAWRENCE.—He was living in Seattle, Washington, in June, 1919. Any one who has any news about him will please notify Arthur Gunion, care of Ben Glover, Railroad Route, No. 3, Sherwood, Oregon.

CREAMER, OLIVE GERTRUDE, and **RALPH GOODWIN.**—They disappeared from their home on May 13, 1906, at the age of five and three years respectively. Olive had dark-blue eyes and black hair, and Ralph had brown eyes, dark hair, and a deep scar under his chin. It is believed that they have been kidnaped, as no possible traces can be found of them. Please write to Mrs. John Crocher, Wood Point, New Brunswick, Canada.

TARPLEY, WILLIAM, of Tuskegee, Alabama. He worked for the Groh Brothers' fishing fleet at Fairport Harbor, Ohio, in the fall of 1920, and was last heard of in Oregon. Write to your old friend, C. N. Clarke, P. O. Box 378, Barre, Vermont.

FREEDMAN, J.—Please write home to your parents, as they are worried about you. I. F.

COLLINS, GEORGE, and **HEMPHILL, W. D.**—Please write to your old pal, as I have important news for you. J. C. B., care of this magazine.

ROSS, JACK.—He left Denver, Colorado, in August, 1923, for an Indian reservation in Montana, with a boy named "Slim," but he was last heard of in Wyoming. He is a cow-puncher, of about twenty-eight years of age, with light curly hair, and has a red rose and the name "Sue" tattooed on his left arm. I am very eager to hear from him, and will welcome any information. Sue Bush, Laguna Beach, California.

GREGORY, CECIL THEODORE.—He has been missing from his home for some time. Any one who has any news about him will please notify his sister, Mrs. C. M. Stewart, 3870 West Warren Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

BENTLEY, LUTHER FLOYD.—He is twenty-two years of age, with light hair, blue eyes, and weighs one hundred and forty-five pounds. He left Kansas City, Kansas, to go to Oklahoma, but he was last heard of in California. Please write home to your sister-in-law, as she has good news for you. Edna Bentley, Route 2, Smithfield, Texas.

BOOTH, S. M.—He was last seen in Billings, Montana. Any one who has any information about him will please notify Joseph J. Meyer, Basehor, Kansas.

DUNAHAM, RALPH C.—He is four feet ten inches in height, twenty-three years of age, and a printer by trade. He was living in Massachusetts for some time, but has not been heard of since. His pal is eager to hear from him, and would appreciate any news. P. B. Emery, 23 Bradford Avenue, Bradford, Massachusetts.

PASSANO, LISS.—She is about seventy years of age, and was living in Portland, Oregon, some time ago. Her niece would like to hear from her. Mrs. Iola Hildebrand, Route 4, Arkansas City, Kansas.

GALLAGHER, NORMAN E.—He was discharged from the Eighth Cavalry, Fort Bliss, Texas, in the early part of 1923. He is five feet six inches in height, with curly black hair and numerous marks tattooed on his arms. Any one knowing his present address will confer a favor by notifying his old friend, Mr. A. R. Thompson, 2520 Linden Street, Oakland, California.

SCOTT, JOHN.—He left home four years ago, and we haven't heard from him since. He is twenty-nine years of age, with dark-brown hair and eyes. He is five feet ten inches in height, and he has a man tattooed on his arm. He served on the U. S. S. "Mona Ventura" when it was torpedoed, on September 16, 1918. Your father is dangerously ill and we want you to come home. Any information about this man will be of utmost value to his mother. J. S., care of this magazine.

WESTON, LELA.—She is about fifty-one years of age, and is believed to be living in Des Moines, Iowa. Her cousin would like to hear from her, and will appreciate any information. Sarah Hildebrand, 1325 South Third Street, Arkansas City, Kansas.

O'CONNELL, MARGARET WRIGHT.—She was in Denver, Colorado, in August, 1923. Please write to your sister, Blanche G., Bayard, Nebraska.

CHESTER, CHARLEY.—Please write your sons: Cassius, at Santa Ana, California, and Orval, at Dundee, Florida, and your daughter, Mrs. Inez McCall, Gainer, Florida.

BOOHR or **BOOR, ELLEN.**—She moved from the vicinity of Russellville, Arkansas, about nine years ago to the southern part of Kansas. She has a daughter, Elva, and several children by a former marriage, by the name of Higgins. Her brother's daughter is very anxious to hear from her. B. G. K., care of this magazine.

WATSON, C. W.—She was last heard of in 1902 in San Francisco, California, where she was working in a laundry. Any information about her will be gratefully received by H. A. L., care of this magazine.

MARAK, ANDREW J.—He is five feet seven inches in height, has blue eyes, light chestnut hair, a scar on his chin, and weighs one hundred and forty pounds. He left Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1921. Please write home, as your sister is dead and your brother is ill. Carl A. Marak, care of Moose Clut, Detroit, Michigan.

KEELER, IRA.—She is sixteen years of age, five feet ten inches in height, has light hair, blue eyes, and half of the middle finger on the right hand missing. She was last seen in May, 1924, in Larned, Kansas. Any information about her will be appreciated by her parents. C. Keeler, 626 South Park, Sapulpa, Oklahoma.

H., DONALD K.—Please come home, as mother and your father are married. Onita C., 1607 Polk Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

COX, LELA and **MAURICE.**—Florence and Henri are very anxious to hear from you, as they want to give you news of their marriage. Write to Mrs. R. A. Johnson, care of Joe Ballenger, San Benito, Texas.

KIEHL, CHARLES CONRAD.—He left Indianapolis, Indiana, in August, 1916, to go to the mountains and hike for his health. He is five feet five inches in height, thirty-eight years of age, has brown hair and eyes, and a ruddy complexion. Please send all information to his friend, M. B. Wike, Route 1, Springfield, Ohio.

PAGANI, EDNA.—She was last heard of in New York City about six years ago. She is about forty-five years of age, with dark complexion. I have very important news for her, and would appreciate any information that will help me find her. Mrs. Annie E. Belton, care of Mrs. M. D. Coleman, R. F. D. 1, Box 99, Bradford, Pennsylvania.

OSSIE.—Please get in touch with me, as I am ill and need you. I know everything and will forgive you. We will go West and start all over again. Marshall B., General Delivery, Richmond, Virginia.

MORSE, A. R.—He was in Alliance, Nebraska, in August, 1919, but was planning to go to Oklahoma. He has brown hair and eyes, is five feet ten inches in height, and about thirty years of age. Your buddy is eager to hear from you. H. A. S., care of this magazine.

BONE, MARIE E. M.—She and her husband were living in Edina, Missouri, for some time, but they were last heard of in Altus, Oklahoma. Please write to an old friend, Mrs. R. L. Whiteley, 1609 East San Antonio Street, El Paso, Texas.

LaCOUR, P. A.—She formerly lived at 631 St. Mary's Street, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, but has not been heard of since. Write to Mrs. R. L. Whiteley, 1609 East San Antonio Street, El Paso, Texas.

COLEMAN, MARY.—She left Johnston City, Illinois, on May 24, 1924, to go to Kentucky. She is five feet two inches in height, has dark hair and eyes, a fair complexion, one gold tooth, and weighs one hundred and fifty-five pounds. Please send all information to her husband, Henry Coleman, 402 South Water Street, Johnston City, Illinois.

LONG, WILL, formerly of Johnston City, Illinois.—He is six feet two inches in height, with dark complexion and hair, and is a miner by trade. Please write to an old friend, who is very anxious to see you. Henry Coleman, 402 South Water Street, Johnston City, Illinois.

BRUNSON, CHARLIE A.—He formerly lived in Goose-lake, Iowa, but was last heard of in Nebraska. He is five feet eight inches in height, has hazel eyes, dark-brown hair, and a scar on the left hand and right arm. Please write to his daughter, who has been searching for him for fifteen years. Nona V. B., care of this magazine.

CHAUNCEY, JAMES HOWARD.—He left Mamaroneck, New York, on July 11, 1917. Please get in touch with me at once, as I have good news for you. A. B., care of this magazine.

JACQUES, JOHANA.—She was last heard of at 4056 West Twenty-second Street, Chicago, Illinois, where she was an employee of the Lawndale Telephone Exchange. She is about nineteen years of age, and has been recently divorced from her husband. H. C. W., care of this magazine.

SYMA, LUCILLE, formerly of San Antonio, Texas.—Any one who knows her present address will please notify E. E. Clark, Route J, Box 409, Indianapolis, Indiana.

FAHEY, MIKE.—He had a job as a lumberjack in the Highland Boy Copper Mine in Bingham Canyon, Utah. Please get in touch with your old parner, Francis Baird, 242 B Street, San Mateo, California.

WORTH, JACK and **W., DAVE.**—Please write me at the same address in Boston. Frank.

BAVERS, PETE.—Your old pal "Kaintuck" would like to hear from you. Write me at once, as I have news for you. Clarence Marshall.

LEDDY, JAMES HENRY.—His home is in Norton, Massachusetts, but he was last heard of in Sebastopol, California, where he was making plans to go to Oregon. He is thirty-six years of age. Please notify Mrs. N. C. Hope, Main Street, Chartley, Masachusetts.

P., BILLIE—I'm sorry for what I did, and I still love you. Please return home. E. L. H., care of this magazine.

KINNER, Mrs. MARY.—She is sixty-six years of age. She has been missing from her home in Milvane, Kansas, for about twelve years, and was last heard of in Dunlap, Kansas. Her daughter is eager to hear from her, and would appreciate any information that will help her find her. Mrs. Lula Green, Route 1, Box 21, Milvane, Kansas.

NICHOLS, ARTHUR G. L.—He was sixty-nine years of age. He was living in Hillsdale, Michigan, in 1884. Any one who has any information about him will please notify his sister, Alice Nichols Swift, American Hotel, Spokane, Washington.

MIRTLE, LORING DeWITT.—He was discharged from the navy in September, 1920. An old friend wishes to hear from him or from any one who knows his present address. L. M. B., care of this magazine.

DICKERSON, RICHARD.—He was last heard of in 1917. Any one who has any news about him will please notify M. Donchue, R. F. D. 3, Box No. 116, Blairsville, Pennsylvania.

ARMSTRONG, HARRY C.—He is thirty-three years of age, five feet in height, with brown eyes, dark hair, and weighs one hundred and eighty pounds. He was stopping in Tillamook, Oregon, in 1919, but later he was seen in Montana, where he was working with the Northern Pacific Railroad. His mother is very anxious to find him, and will welcome any news concerning him. Mrs. W. B. Armstrong, 211 Hays Street, Hoquiam, Washington.

MOORE, CALVIN.—He was living in Texas in 1923. He is now twenty-one years of age. His father would like to get in touch with him, as he is very old and needs his help. Lewis A. Moore, Castle Dale, Utah.

O'LAUGHLIN, FRED.—He is six feet in height, has blue eyes, dark hair, and weighs two hundred and fifty pounds. It is believed that he is working either in Colorado Springs or in Denver, Colorado. His son is worried about him, and will be grateful for any news leading to his present address. James O'Laughlin, Paducah, Texas.

W. W. P.—Please write at once either to your mother or your wife, as they are worried. M. B., care of this magazine.

OLSON, WAGNER.—He was last seen in Hettinger, North Dakota. He is nineteen years of age, five feet ten inches in height, and has red hair. Please notify Ehner Olson, Route 1, Box 38, Moose Lake, Minnesota.

WALKER, G. H.—He is sixty years of age, and a photographer by trade. He left his home about twenty-five years ago, having deserted his wife and child. His family is very eager to hear from him, and will welcome any news concerning him. Mrs. Ruby Corrol, Box 88, Bynum, Texas.

SEARS, JACK.—He is twenty-nine years of age, and was last heard of in Los Angeles, California. Any information about him will be greatly appreciated. G. M., care of this magazine.

McGOVERN, JOHN.—He left Troy, New York, on April 10, 1876. Later he went to Texas, and has not been heard of since. I will be grateful for his present address. H. M., care of this magazine.

MESSENGER, WALTER J.—He was living in Denver, Colorado, some time ago. Please write home to your wife, as she has money for you. B. M., care of this magazine.

SPENCE, WILLIAM.—I have written you at Bellville, Texas, but have received no answer. Please write to your old friend, Carl H. Alexander, R. F. D. 7, Bellevue, Pennsylvania.

WARD, FRED B.—He was last heard of at Wakeeney, Kansas, in August, 1920. A friend is anxious to get in touch with him, and would appreciate any information concerning him. Mrs. Nellie Craft, 330 North Park Street, Casper, Wyoming.

LITTLEFIELD, C. S.—His mind was supposed to have been affected after returning from the war. His wife is worried about him, and would like to get in touch with him as soon as possible. Mrs. C. S. Littlefield, Paso Robles, California.

WALL, LORTON.—He is seventeen years of age, has brown curly hair, large brown eyes, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. He has been missing from home for quite some time, and his mother is anxious to know where he is at present. Mrs. Callie Wall, R. F. D. 2, Warren, Arkansas.

BEATY, J. R., and **WILL BARTHOLOMEW.**—Your brother George is very eager to hear from you. Please write to him as soon as you see this, as he has some news for you. George W. Beaty, 334 East D Street, Petaluma, California.

CLORE, HOWARD W.—He was last seen near Crawfordsville, Indiana, in February, 1915. His family is eager for his return, and will appreciate any information that will help them find him. Earl and Leslie Clore, 916 Woodlawn Avenue, Huntington, Indiana.

H. H., BILL.—Please let us know where you are. Everything is all right at home. Lou, care af this magazine.

COWLES, CLEMENT MORSE.—Your mother is anxious for your welfare, and is willing to help you. Write to her, as she has good news for you. B. S. Cowles, 336 West Broadway, Paterson, New Jersey.

JOHNSON, ANDREW.—He is about eleven years of age. He was in the Vine Street Orphans' Home at Chattanooga, Tennessee, but was adopted recently. His mother is eager to find him, and will appreciate his present address. Esther Johnson, 342½ East Main Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

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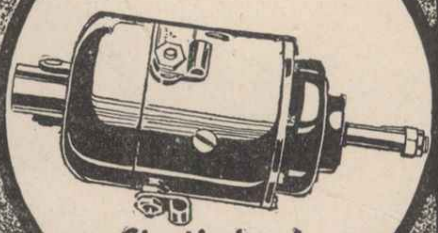

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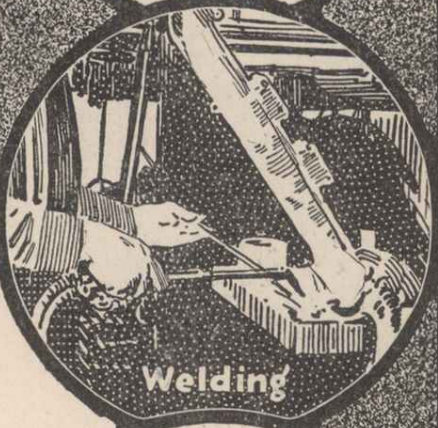

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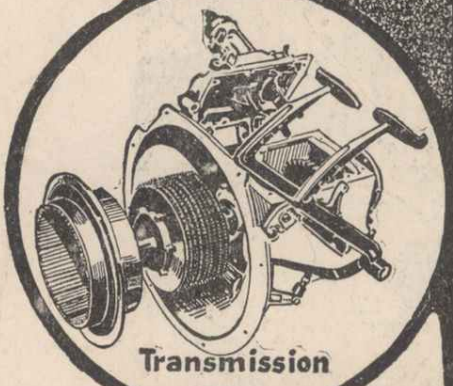
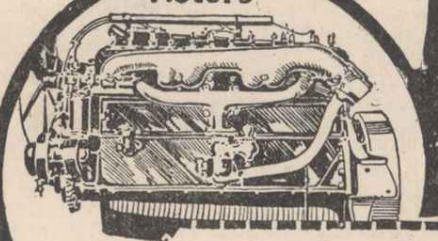


Transmission

Motors



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