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Every Week — May 12, 1928

Western Story Magazine

THE HOODED BUCKAROO
By Seth Ranger

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ONE NOVEL

TWO SERIALS

FIVE SHORT STORIES

TWO ARTICLES

MISCELLANEOUS

DEPARTMENTS

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The Hooded Buckaroo

By Seth Ranger

Author of "Beaten Gold," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOODED BUCKAROO.

SEEMINGLY out of the sinister shadows of the draw rode a lone horseman. Dawn was just breaking, the eastern sky and a few vagrant clouds directly overhead were golden. The rider sent his horse up the narrow trail leading to the top of Black Butte, then waited for day to break. With two exceptions, all he could see in any direction was desolation—sand dunes, salt marshes, soda lakes, as flat as a board and as dry; strange desert rock formations, beautifully colored, areas of sand dotted with miserable clumps of sage and mesquite; other areas of rich soil that would grow almost anything if given water.

Of the two exceptions, one was on the desert level, a green splash on brown desolation—Sinclair's horse ranch. The other lay five hundred feet below the desert floor, was sheltered on three sides by sheer walls, and was known as Dry Coulee. The entire coulee was covered with orchards, except for a small part set aside for the town—Dry Coulee. Here was, indeed, a living, green memorial to the American pioneering spirit. Some one had discovered that the soil in the coulee was very rich. A group of hardy souls had set about changing a dry coulee into a wet coulee. Wells

were driven and water pumped. Years passed, the district prospered, and then, without warning or reason, the wells had gone practically dry. Just sufficient water remained for domestic use—none for irrigation.

The lone rider's gaze lingered long on Dry Coulee as if much were on his mind. Even at this distance one could see that the orchards were turning brown, the fruit was dropping. The ranchers down there were slowly going under—an empire of fruit was slipping from their grasp. They had created this wealth, were on the point of reaping, and a cruel fate was denying them.

For two hours the rider hardly moved, sometimes sitting on his horse, watching; again sprawling out on the ground, watching—always watching the country from the Sinclair Ranch, fifteen miles as the crow flies, to Dry Coulee. Almost below ran a one-way desert road. It cut through some chalk cliffs, skirted a deep arroyo, then meandered on—the road that connected Dry Coulee with the outer world.

Far down the road a tiny dust cloud formed and moved slowly toward him. Within half an hour it would pass along beneath him and on to Dry Coulee. He stood up and stretched himself—a large man standing well over six feet and weighing around one hundred and eighty pounds. He opened a saddle bag and drew from it a black hood of strong cloth, which he pulled down over his head. Neck, face, hair, nose, and mouth were concealed. There was a small hole below the nostrils; two small holes before the eyes, and a round slit over each ear.

He leaped into the saddle and began the descent, making little effort to spare his horse—a stocky roan, with a Trailing S brand which some one had made a poor attempt to disguise.

Reaching the road, the rider selected a spot almost concealed by a shoulder of rock. The road was extremely narrow at this point and a car, rounding the shoulder, would proceed with the utmost caution. To go off the road meant a drop of ten feet, straight down, then an embankment of some forty-five degrees that extended some three hundred yards before it reached the bottom and level ground. The slope was dotted with clumps of mesquite, great slabs of black rock, and shale.

Hardly had the rider taken his position before the hum of a motor could be heard. In the front seat the driver was muttering over the condition of the road. He was a powerful man, with iron-gray hair, keen, steady eyes, and a mustache that was almost white. The other half of the seat was filled with a suit case and a small black bag, which he frequently glanced at. He wore a belt and holster from which protruded the butt of a .44 Colt six-gun.

The other occupant of the car was a girl of twenty. She was blue-eyed and blonde, with the alertness of manner that comes from life in the saddle. Her cheeks were tanned, her hands brown and small, the flesh hard, as if she often rode without gloves. Of the range she might be, yet her sport dress came from an exclusive shop. It was original and made for her.

"The road is better after we round the next point, Mr. Wright," she said pleasantly to the driver, "and really there is no hurry. The committee is to meet at ten o'clock, with father as chairman. He can be depended on to keep them together until we arrive." She glanced at the clock on the instrument board. "We are two hours ahead of time right now, so take it easy."

"I like to get a bad job over with, and driving these roads is a bad job. What with punctures or broken springs and what not——"

"But nothing has happened yet. Easy around here. That's a bad one!"

As the car swung around the curve a hooded figure leaned from his saddle and gave the wheel a sharp twist. Before the driver could swing the car back onto the road again, the outer front wheel had dropped over the edge. The other followed ten feet farther on. Busy with the wheel, the driver had no opportunity to use his weapon. The hooded rider caught up the black bag, then, seemingly for the first time, observed the girl. His gloved hand shot out and dragged her clear, just as the car went over the edge. It turned in mid-air, struck on the top with crushing force, then rolled a hundred yards down the slope before it stopped against a pile of rock.

The girl did not scream, but her face was filled with horror, then fury. "You fiend!" she cried. "Why didn't you give him a chance?"

The man did not answer. Suddenly the girl remembered some of the many stories she had heard about the "Hooded Buckaroo." Some, perhaps, were founded on fact, but most of them were based on surmise, and had been repeated until many believed them. It was said that he covered his face to conceal scars that would have instantly identified him; that he never spoke because a bullet in the throat had destroyed his voice.

"Aren't you going to do something?" she cried furiously. "Even now you might save him. Come, give me a hand!" Then, seeing he would make no effort, she flung herself at him, as if with her own strength to tear him from his horse and force him to do her bidding.

Without sound, without emotion, he pulled away. Sobbing with fury, she followed for several yards, then turned back. He rode away at a brisk pace and did not look back. But no detail of his appearance had escaped her. The piercing blue eyes, fringed by the black fabric of his hood, the denim shirt and brush pants of the working cowboy, the well-worn boots, and the battered Stetson hat. She would, no doubt, recognize that horse again if she saw it. The job of concealing that Trailing S brand had been indeed a poor one.

The girl worked her way down the slope to the wreck. A brief glance was sufficient. Wright was done for—murdered! There was no other name for it. She managed to pull his gun from the car and, though the hooded rider was almost beyond pistol shot, she emptied the weapon at him. He looked back, briefly, then disappeared around the next turn. The girl climbed to the nearest ridge and looked about. "Not a soul in sight," she groaned, "not even the Hooded Buckaroo. If he's ever caught after this, there'll be a lynching! Even Sheriff Bill Reed couldn't stop it!" She sighed. "Well, somebody will come along—sometime!" And with this terse comment she seated herself and tried to banish from her eyes the horrible scene below.

At Dry Coulee schoolhouse ranchers were arriving in ones and twos. Kirkman, president of the Kirkman State Bank, was chairman. He glanced over the group, and those assembled looked into his face and took hope. Every man present owed him money. Every man owed money to the big man at Kirkman's side, "Bull" Bridger. Among the last to arrive, Bridger naturally took a seat where he could see and be seen as well as heard. This meeting was as important to him as any one.

"Mike Wright's about due," Kirkman now announced. "I sent Greta over to meet him—couldn't afford to have him get lost on the desert at a time like this. And, boys, he's bringing the money with him. It'll save us from mortgaging ourselves, body and

soul, to the Singleton crowd. Mike's taking my word that we can pull through. Our friendship goes back nearly thirty years to Alaska, when I split my grub with him on the trail. He's been wanting to get revenge ever since, so I gave him his chance. And, while we're waiting, this is a good time to give Rod Bridger a vote of thanks. Make it a rising one, boys!"

They needed no second invitation. "Rod" he was to some, Bull to others because of his strength. They cheered from the depths of their hearts, though they could see their withering orchards as they cheered.

Bridger stood up. He was a big man, something over six feet, and he moved with the grace of the born rider. His voice was deep and strong; his face handsome, though inclined to sternness. Bridger smiled as he glanced about.

"I'm touched, boys," he said, "I really don't deserve this. I came among you a stranger. Because I was to live among you, I've tried to be neighborly. In the matter of loans, Kirkman will agree that I've gone the limit——"

"And then some!" Kirkman interrupted.

"I'm not saying this in self-praise, but so you will understand that I can't carry you farther. My banker won't permit it. I hope Mike Wright has the funds, not to see you through, but to see us through. Better days are ahead. Thank you, boys!"

Bridger seated himself amid cheers.

Men talked among themselves, mostly of securing a permanent water supply; time passed, and Kirkman frequently glanced at the clock.

"Singleton will give us that, but we'll be paying 'em tribute the rest of our lives!" some one said.

"Mike's had a breakdown, I guess," Kirkman said, when he had held them for more than an hour.

The clatter of hoofs broke in on the hum of many voices. Greta Kirkman was galloping down the street on a half-wild range horse. She struck the ground so hard that she almost bounced, then ran into the schoolhouse.

"The Hooded Buckaroo sent the car over the grade!" she cried. "Mike Wright's dead! The money's gone!"

Something like a groan of anguish swept through the crowd as the girl related what had happened. In one quarter, rage flamed up for a moment.

"What've we done that the world's against us? Danged queer it would happen at this time! I'm for finding out who'll profit by our misery." Such were the cries from the disappointed ranchers.

"Easy now," Kirkman warned, "this is the first time the Hooded Buckaroo has struck at us. He's hit other sections on rare occasions——"

"And always knew when there was an extra lot of money in the bank or on the way!" the hot-head flared. "Come on, sheriff, let's go! Nothing can live in this country without water —man, plants, trees, or animals. Throw a ring around the water holes, bring in very suspicious character, and let Greta look 'em over. You'll know him, won't you?"

"Yes, by his dress. He did not speak and he wore the hood. But I'll know him—sure!" The girl was positive about this.

"What kind of a horse did he ride, Greta?" It was Sheriff Reed speaking.

"Roan."

"Branded?"

"Yes, Trailing S. An effort had been made to disguise the brand, but I could tell what it was."

"The Trailing S is Bill Sinclair's brand," the sheriff exclaimed. "But of course Bill——"

"Everybody is under suspicion at a time like this," the hot-head cried. "I

want to ask Bill how the Hooded Buckaroo comes to be riding a horse with his brand. Everybody's under suspicion. You, Kirkman, me, and the rest of us."

"Come, come, now," Bridger laughed, "I guess those of us in this room are cleared. We each know where the other has been all the morning. Sheriff, my car and horses are at your disposal."

"Pick up a couple of men, some blocks and tackle, and lift the car off old Mike Wright," the sheriff directed. "The rest of you get ready. We're going to search the whole country. I'll send three men out at once." He detailed three with unusually fine horses. "Swing over to the Sinclair Ranch and see what Bill knows or has seen. After that, light out for the Mesquite Hole. Anybody coming there for water, bring 'em in. That's all."

"And, boys, find that black bag if you can. If we can't get that, we'll have to take what the Singleton's will offer."

CHAPTER II.

BILL SINCLAIR.

A COMMITTEE of three prominent citizens of Dry Coulee rode up to the Sinclair Ranch. The first was Reed, the sheriff; the second, Kirkman, the banker, and the third, Bull Bridger. Two weeks had passed since the Hooded Buckaroo's raid. Search had been fruitless; the black-hooded rider had vanished, and with him a black bag filled with currency.

Sinclair was listening to the radio. Like most of the men in the district, he bulked large. His hair, which was of that indefinite color known as sandy, bristled as the men came onto the porch, but he said nothing, though his jaw hardened a little.

"Come in, boys," he said, getting control of himself and resolving to make his visitors show their hand. He was getting mighty tired of being looked at with suspicion. "Listening to the radio," he added. "Never knew how much I missed that kid sister of mine until she went East. Kinda hot riding, isn't it? Better go out to the well and take on a drink of water!"

He pointed to an artesian well. The water came, ice cold, from an underground stream, shot two feet above the rim of an eight-inch pipe, then flowed over a gravel-bottomed creek bed to a clump of cottonwoods, where it spread out over a pasture when not diverted into a network of flumes.

Beneath the cottonwoods dozed twenty-five or thirty horses. Though bearing the Trailing S of the Sinclair ranch, the band might well be called wild. They ran the range beyond the cottonwoods in winter and spring when there was feed, but in summer they found the pickings scant indeed and naturally returned to the ranch. They worked only in the fall of the year, when Sinclair drove them to the railroad and shipped them to the various round-ups to serve as buckers. World championships had been won on their backs—and lost. Hundreds of thousands had thrilled at their antics; countless stories had been written and told about them. Nowhere in the country was there another similar band, and it was said that some of the horses were so wise that they understood what the rodeo was about and played square, quitting the instant the gun sounded. Certain it was, not an animal in the bunch could be termed vicious. Mild-eyed and mild-mannered they were until led into the arena, then they became exploding fiends until the gun was fired or the rider bucked off.

The sheriff did the talking, as Bill Sinclair figured he would.

"This ain't an official visit, Bill," he said, "but we've got a proposition to

talk over, and we rode out to invite you in to Dry Coulee. How about it?"

"Sure," Bill agreed. "I'll saddle and be with you in about five minutes. Make yourselves at home!" He sauntered down to the wild string, dropped his rope over a nag known to the world as Blue Blazes, and rode him bareback to the barn. Ten minutes later he was ready.

At Dry Coulee, Sinclair found most of the ranchers assembled in the schoolhouse. This time Kirkman talked.

"You know the situation, Sinclair," he began, "we've got to have water! Mike Wright was coming with money to see us through, and he was killed. The Hooded Buckaroo, whoever he is——"

Bill Sinclair was on his feet instantly. "Don't look at me like that," he cried angrily. "I've heard the rumors going the rounds; heard that the Hooded Buckaroo rode a Trailing S horse; heard that he was traced to my ranch, and that no one else was found in the country beyond; heard that I was the only one found on my ranch. I'm getting tired of this talk. If there's a man in this room who believes that I'm the Hooded Buckaroo, let him get up and say so. If there's a man in this room who has said to any one that he thinks I'm that hooded cuss, or said that it looked suspicious or bad for me, let him stand up."

He paused for a moment, but the men were silent. "Then you either think I'm O. K., or else you're a bunch of yellow dogs. Now, that that's out of my system, proceed. One thing more! Remember this, the hooded rider generally uses a stolen horse for his work. A horse that I missed a month ago, turned up the day of the killing. And he hadn't been ridden very far. Either your hooded rider is pretty close to Dry Coulee, or else he swapped horses to throw you off the trail. And there's been cracks about my blue eyes. Yep! I've got 'em and they're as blue as the Hooded Buckaroo's, but I'm not the only blue-eyed man in the world. Kirkman's got blue eyes; so has Bull Bridger; so have others that I can see from where I stand. I guess that's all!"

"I've heard the rumors, Sinclair," Kirkman said quietly, "and have not given them a second thought."

"I didn't expect you would," Sinclair answered, "but some have."

"To proceed! You know we are burning up, Sinclair. We've got to have water. Singleton and a group of his associates have agreed to build a pipe line to your well provided they can either buy you outright, or induce you to come into our association."

"I am agreeable to anything that will help you out, gentlemen," Sinclair answered, "provided I have first chance at the water. You live by raising fruit. I live by raising buckers and good saddle horses. You depend on water; so do I. If you will insert a clause that my needs come first, then we can do business."

Singleton got to his feet. "Obviously, gentlemen, we can't invest our money when everything is conditioned on his needs. We might build a pipe line, dams, and all that, then discover that he needed it all. The only proposition we will entertain is that Sinclair comes in with us—for a price, of course—and takes his share of the general flow."

"I can't do that," Sinclair answered. "Our ranch was there before there was a tree growing in Dry Coulee. I can't risk its destruction, even though I would like to help you."

Silence filled the room. As Kirkman had feared, they were deadlocked. Some one sighed heavily, and the echo seemed to sweep through the room. Booted feet scraped over the floor, and "Porky" Obak got to his feet. He

was the biggest man in the Dry Coulee country and a hot-head.

"Like to mention one thing," Obak rumbled. "Sinclair's the one man who holds the future of Dry Coulee in his hands. Owning the water, he can make his own terms; he could even burn us out, then build his own pipe line, and own a small fruit empire worth anywhere from five hundred thousand to a million dollars—with water. Sinclair, you're in a kind of shaky position right now. You want to think of that. Refusing to come along with us kind of confirms these rumors that you——"

Bill Sinclair leaped from the platform, ran over the desks, and landed before Porky Obak. "You'll take that back," he shouted. "You're the one man I know for sure has been talking too much. Now eat your words!"

Obak's face changed to a sneer. "I don't have to! On the face of things it's——"

Sinclair drove his fist deep into Obak's stomach. Then, as the big man grunted, he cracked him on the jaw with a right that started from his knees and had one hundred and eighty pounds behind it.

As Obak crashed to the floor, Sheriff Reed managed to reach Sinclair.

"Bill, you've got to be calm," he advised. "Things look bad for you."

"Easy, sheriff," Sinclair snapped. "I'm ready to hit anybody that looks at me with suspicion—you, too."

Obak was revived and before hostile eyes Sinclair mounted the platform. He spoke bluntly:

"Not to prove my innocence—because I don't have to—not to shut the lips of a lot of coyotes that haven't nerve enough to talk to a man's face, but because I feel sorry for you poor fellows, I'll make this proposition. You can take it or go to Jericho—and I don't care which you do!" He turned to Singleton. "Put in your pipe lines and dams. I'll give, not you, but these ranchers, every barrel of water that flows from that well five days a week; and the other two days that I don't need it, you can have that, too. You can have it, free of charge, for five years, which will put you on your feet. After that, at a reasonable charge. Make any arrangements you want to with Singleton for the use of his pipe line and dams. Nearly all winter and spring you'll get seven days' flow a week. And, now, don't any of you hypocrites start cheering. I know pretty well who my friends are in this crowd, as well as my enemies—also the back slappers. I'll be back in an hour to sign the agreement; got some business to attend to."

Amid silence he walked from the room, mounted his horse, and headed for the bank.

Greta Kirkman's blue eyes peered at him from behind the cashier's cage. The Kirkman State Bank, though large enough to handle the community's business, was comparatively small. The force consisted of an old bookkeeper; a severe-looking stenographer of some forty years who was also a sort of pinch hitter, filling in wherever needed; Greta, who acted as cashier when her father was away, and Kirkman himself.

"Good morning," said Greta quietly.

"Good morning," he answered. Sinclair was silent a moment, as if steeling himself for some ordeal, then he spoke, his words calm, distinct, and without anger. "Your description of the Hooded Buckaroo fitted me so dog-gone well, when you described him to the sheriff, that I'm wondering how much was imagination created by your excited state of mind?"

"I described exactly what I saw," she coldly replied, "nor am I accustomed to getting excited."

"Oh, I'm not charging you with unfairness," he assured her, "but your

lack of faith in me since then is what hurts." He grew very serious. "And, Greta, that hurts—deeply! I don't suppose you will care to keep our engagement to attend the dance Saturday night?"

"That is up to you," she answered, placing the burden of any break upon him.

"I shall not ask you to be seen with one under suspicion," he said, "but in the future, don't mix your personal and hasty conclusions with facts. That is all, Greta. I am sorry, sorrier than you think."

Then Bill Sinclair left the girl he loved and, without glancing to right or left, made straight for his horse. For two years, now, he had been in love with Greta Kirkman, but it was only during the past six months that he had taken her to the local dances and the weekly motion-picture show. Nor did he have the field to himself. Rod Bridger, or, as he was better known, Bull, was easily the best catch in the district, and as Greta was by long odds the most attractive girl, it was natural they should be seen together a good deal. There were other admirers, too, principally boys she had grown up with. But they were friends who deeply admired the girl rather than men of serious intentions.

The moment her father returned, the girl put on her hat and hurried down to the sheriff's office. With her customary directness she got to the point. "When I told my story, sheriff," she demanded, "Did I say anything that would point toward Bill Sinclair?"

The sheriff eyed her curiously. Women were queer, he thought. Often they would tell more than they intended, then, on reflection, seek to change their story if there was an element of love involved. Dry Coulee had wondered if Greta Kirkman was in love with Bill Sinclair. Certain it was that he was a colorful figure with his amazing horsemanship, his string of buckers, and his high place at the various rodeos in which he competed. Whether it was riding some outlaw, bull-dogging, or roping, he did it well. Yes, Greta Kirkman might have suddenly discovered she was as much in love with Bill Sinclair as he was with her. And so he continued to study her until she flushed slightly and added, "I want to be fair!"

"Of course you do, Greta," he answered. He had known her from childhood. "No, it was not so much what you said, as it was your amazement as you talked. You seemed utterly dumfounded over something that had come into your mind. Your description fitted Sinclair almost to a T. We began putting two and two together. The attempt to disguise the Trailing S brand was rather strong evidence. Owning a mighty fine well, even fifteen miles away, gives him the whip hand. In situations of this kind we can't assume, just because a man always been on the square, that that is a sign he has not slipped. He may have got the idea that he is too clever to be caught. I'm speaking generally now."

"Then you think——"

"I'm not saying what I think, Greta, I'm explaining why your story directed attention toward Bill Sinclair—your story, and the fact that he *could* profit by the ruin of the ranchers in Dry Coulee."

"Then why not arrest him?" the girl suggested, "and bring things to a showdown?"

"We haven't information enough to arrest any one. The Hooded Buckaroo is one of the most unusual criminals who has ever operated in the West. Three times he has struck in this district and each time vanished without a trace. Often, a criminal, after making a clean-up, will go to some city and spend it. He can be

traced that way, but the hooded rider has never made that slip. Perhaps, Greta, you would like to know that Sinclair has offered to give the ranchers water free, five days out of seven, if Singleton's crowd will build a pipe line and dams?"

"Is that so? Then that clears him of trying to block irrigation plans that will help the growers?" she said quickly.

"Yes, and no!" the sheriff pointed out. "He was certainly bitter about it all; spoke straight from the shoulder; told exactly what he thought of us, then left. If guilty, he may have figured that it would throw off suspicion. And now, Greta, you know as much as I do. Sooner or later, whoever it is will slip. Then we'll land our man. Sooner or later, Greta, they always slip." He drummed on the desk with his fingers, studying her; deeply pondering. "Greta," he asked suddenly, "I can see you are amazed to think you put us on Sinclair's trail. It was not so much what you said, as your astonishment that gave us the idea. What was back of it all?"

"Something in the eyes," she slowly explained, "and something else—something indefinite, very elusive. It was just a feeling that the man and I had met often. He was amazed to find me in the car with Mike Wright. We had gone over a bump, and I was reaching down to straighten my suit case, then I popped up. The car was just going, but he jerked me out. I can't shake off the feeling that I know him. And I promise you this, no matter how much I may care for any man, if he is guilty of any crime, he'll receive no sympathy from me. So, Mr. Sheriff, you don't need to study me as you have been doing."

It was the sheriff's turn to flush. He grinned. She smiled back and was gone. "And she'd do just that," he mused, "no matter what!"

CHAPTER III.

DRY COULEE RIDES.

SEVERAL weeks passed after Bill Sinclair signed the agreement, drawn up by Singleton's lawyer, which gave the ranchers free water for a period of time. Gradually the excitement of Wright's murder subdued. With the promise of water, men began taking stock of their own affairs. Nothing much could be done this year, but by next summer the water stored up during the winter would be sufficient, with other available water, to carry them through.

Under guard of Bull Bridger, acting as a special deputy sheriff, and a strong posse, Singleton gold arrived at the Dry Coulee bank and was duly deposited with a sigh of relief. Money had been actually transported without the Hooded Buckaroo striking! Every lonely mile the guard had expected something to happen, but all went well. Gradually came relaxation of the tension, and with it the hooded rider!

The swiftness of his raid was typical. One moment he had watched Greta and her father leave the bank, the next he had pulled the hood over his head and entered the building. His method of silencing the two customers was also typical. He cracked them over the head with the butt of his gun. The elderly stenographer and the aged bookkeeper were locked up in a small storeroom, the hooded figure, dressed as usual in the denim shirt and brush pants of the working cow-puncher, had the place to himself. He worked swiftly, making no false movements, gathering up the most valuable securities and the gold.

As he almost staggered from the bank, Greta Kirkman, returning for something she had forgotten, met him in the entrance. The girl did not hesitate, but, with a sudden leap, caught the man's hood and gave it a jerk.

The heavy fabric of the hood ripped sharply. The man dropped his burden, clapped his hand over the torn hood, and with the other hand gripped the girl. He spoke never a word, but worked with his usual deadly silence. And it struck Greta at that moment as queer that no one had recalled that Bill Sinclair could talk loud and fast enough on occasion, whereas the Hooded Buckaroo was reputed to have lost his voice because of a bullet wound.

Her thoughts were roughly recalled to the immediate present. Believing that the girl had identified him, the Hooded Buckaroo dropped almost to his knees, caught her on his shoulder, and gripped her body with one strong arm. She gave a single cry as he lifted the pack with his other hand. Head down, she could not see his face, no matter how she twisted and squirmed. With the staggering load, the man ran across the street and into an orchard. Already the alarm was being sounded, but quickly as the few citizens that happened to be in Dry Coulee at that hour gathered, the hooded rider was faster. There were two horses tied to a tree and this time, at least, neither bore the Trailing S brand. He tied a handkerchief over the rent in the hood, stowed the gold and securities in saddle-bags, lashed the girl to the saddle and was off at a gallop. The orchard was all that saved him. Zigzagging down the rows of trees he managed to shake off pursuit with the exception of a single rider. His disposal of this rather brave man was typical. Swinging his horse around, the hooded rider stopped, aimed, and dropped the other before he was aware of the maneuver.

Emerging from the orchard, he waited a moment until a rancher appeared on the highway. Greta Kirkman screamed a warning. As the rancher, who was driving a battered car, filled with boxes for fruit picking, looked up, the rider covered him. A wave of the weapon was sufficient to induce the man to stop and leave the car. The Hooded Buckaroo turned him about and with a well-directed blow from the pistol butt knocked him down. Greta, securely bound, was dumped into the car with the boxes; the loot followed and on top of this came the saddles from the horses. The bandit then leaped to the driver's seat and at top speed the car careened down the winding road and vanished over the ridge. The desert lay ahead of them; dry, forbidding, yet inviting, for it offered concealment. Greta Kirkman was surprised at her own calmness. She noticed that the hooded bandit was heading, generally, in the direction of the two water holes—Sinclair Ranch and Mesquite Hole. "What are you going to do with me?" she demanded.

He slowed down and traced with a gloved finger, this answer in the dust on the instrument boards: *I don't know, yet!*

Dry Coulee was riding!

One of the customers left stunned on the floor of the bank had regained consciousness in time to see Greta tearing at the black hood, and the rider's subsequent action. "He's a moose for strength," he informed the sheriff, "picked her up and carried her over his shoulder so she couldn't see his face. No, I didn't get a glimpse of it, but something about him seemed familiar. He packed his loot, and it must have weighed a hundred pounds, in the other hand. With all that load he ran—not staggered, but ran."

A horse, standing over a dead rider, was the next link in the chain of pursuit. The men of Dry Coulee were not only riding, but were in a mood to kill. The sheriff had taken command, naturally. His posse consisted of men who chanced to be in town at

that hour. They were variously mounted. He selected three men, known for their courage and fine mounts. "Fill your water bags and light out for Sinclair's ranch," he ordered. "Don't spare your nags. If he's there, tending to business, act like you'd come to ask him to join the hunt. If he isn't there, wait for him. When he comes, bring him in."

Those who stuck to the trail left by the hooded rider soon discovered that he had driven the car over a route that threatened to wreck it. Boxes were scattered along the way, and after two miles driving one of the rear tires let go. He must have driven five miles after that. Pieces of rubber were scattered about, and finally the rim marks showed distinctly. A quarter of a mile farther they found the car.

"Greta's still with him," Kirkman cried. "See! Here are her footprints! Come on, boys, don't spare the horses! We've got to get her; or make pursuit so hot he'll turn her free. That money weighs something, too."

The grim band did not need to be urged. Horseflesh was sacrified when minutes counted. And yet so carefully had the hooded rider crisscrossed the trail that the posse was delayed again and again.

Far ahead rode the Hooded Buckaroo and Greta Kirkman. A mile from the Sinclair Ranch the man stopped and studied the buildings with care. Satisfied that a posse had not arrived ahead of him, he forced the girl to ride in front, and, with her body as a shield against possible ambush, galloped up to the house. With a brief glance about, he entered and searched the rooms. No one, apparently, was concealed there.

"Do something for these poor horses," the girl suggested.

He did not even take the trouble to glance at the miserable animals. They were swaying with exhaustion from the cruel pace. Not from pity, but because it was practical, he decided to change mounts. In his mind he debated what to do with Greta. She hindered his operations, and yet, if she had identified him, he could not release her. Again and again he had expected her to call him by some name that might give a hint as to her thoughts. but she had mentioned no name. On the face of it, it looked as if she did not know who he was. Again, he reasoned, she might know, but be afraid to reveal that knowledge for fear he would kill her to save himself.

In the end he decided to take her with him. He rode down to the cottonwoods, tied Greta to a tree, then sent his singing rope over an outlaw's head. Saddle marks indicated that this animal was ridden a lot, and was perhaps the gentlest of the band. She was a little black mare, known to rodeo fans as War Bride. The girl's eyes flashed. "Strange, indeed," she whispered, "he knows this band well enough to pick out a gentle horse for me. I shall remember that!"

From among the remaining animals there was little to choose. The hooded rider moved along, screened by the trees, until he was within roping distance of a big roan known as Tumbleweed. He had won this name because of his peculiar, rolling gait when he bucked across the arena. Few had ridden him. The girl's eyes sparkled with hope. If Tumbleweed ran true to form, the Hooded Buckaroo would be thrown. She hoped he would be thrown hard enough to knock the senses from him while she carried out a plan.

The rope shot suddenly from cover and settled about Tumbleweed's neck. Before the horse could bolt, the man had snubbed it to a tree. Bit by bit he drew up the animal, then, after a brief struggle, saddled it. Everything went onto Tumbleweed's back; water

bags, filled from the well; the loot, and finally the Hooded Buckaroo. Fifty yards the outlaw ran, then he began his famous rolling buck. Again and again the girl cheered the animal, and as often the man clung to the saddle just when it seemed he must be thrown. No rules governed this contest; no judges rode close to give man and horse a square break. The rider dug his spurs into the webbing, pulled leather, and stayed on! Everything went into the animal's final attempt. In the midst of the battle, the rider drew out a small, flat stone and began pounding the horse's head. Dazed, Tumbleweed ceased fighting. Only by a flash of the eyes could the girl tell that the man was pleased, but in the blue depths of those eyes was something of the devil.

They set off then. As before, he drove her ahead of him. They rode across the desert, not for the Mesquite Hole, as she expected, but in another direction. As far as she knew there was no water hole for nearly a hundred miles. Long before they could reach it the supply the bandit had would be exhausted. Greta resolved to escape at the first opportunity, risking, if necessary, a shot. Anything, death even, was better than thirst under the killing blast of the sun.

Presently she spoke. "Say something," she cried, "or I'll go mad!"

He merely looked at her.

"Why drag me along?" she argued. "I don't know who you are? If I did, and you were some one I had known, I'd have something to say to you. But I don't know who you are. I swear I don't. So, why not turn me loose?"

He shook his head.

He seemed to know the country, for he rode into the bad lands without hesitation. As before, he took advantage of every natural obstacle to delay pursuit. Once he rode a quarter of a mile out of the way to cross a sand ridge where the hot wind covered their tracks almost the moment they were made. From time to time they drank. At each stop the horses were watered, but sparingly.

This man knows the desert, Greta reflected, knows it as well as—Bill Sinclair! I've a mind to tell him so! She slowed up, then changed her mind. Such a compliment might prove fatal. Silence is always golden, she thought, but never more so than at present. I might say the wrong thing at the right time.

They climbed a ridge and began working their way across it. On one side there was a sink filled with grayish muck; on the other was a small valley almost filled with mesquite. The slope from ridge to valley was almost perpendicular, but a sure-footed horse might make his way safely down. With a sudden movement Greta swung her mount over the edge. Gravity did the rest. The little mare braced her legs, and the whole world seemed to slide. The girl did not look back, but she felt a rope whistle over her head—and miss! The mare struggled free, leaped, almost fell, then slid again. The girl worked frantically at her bonds to free herself and avoid being crushed in case the mare fell. A moment later, War Bride plunged into the mesquite.

She looked back from the doubtful safety of the mesquite. The hooded rider had attempted to follow, but his horse, more heavily laden, had fallen. The rock and shale slide was carrying them slowly down to the valley floor. Greta did not wait for the black-hooded figure to extricate himself, but, digging her heels into the mare's flanks, put as much distance between herself and the man as possible.

It was an utterly strange country through which she rode in the blazing heat, but she was confident she could find her way out. At last she drew

up. "War Bride," she cried, "he has most of the water. We've only a little. You're doing the work, old girl, so you'll get it. I'll stick a pebble in my mouth." She dismounted, depressed the head of the high-crowned Stetson she had borrowed at the Sinclair Ranch, filled it with water, and gave the mare a drink. "Now to find our way out of this," she said.

Greta found herself in a maze of fantastic desert formations. There were buttes hundreds of feet high, with sheer, weather-carved walls; winding canyons that led her back to the starting point; other canyons that ended in blank walls. She grew worried, but not frightened. "I know in which direction to go," she cried, "but I'm stopped."

Night came suddenly. There was a brief period when the sunlight lingered, but the beauty of the sky blending with the savage coloring of the buttes, was lost on her. All Greta knew was that she was desperately thirsty and that the water which the mare badly needed was almost gone. "War Bride," she cried, "I'm lost! They say a wild horse will return to its home range. See what you can do, girl; I'll just sit here and wait."

CHAPTER IV.

AT MESQUITE HOLE.

THE Hooded Buckaroo did not waste his time pursuing Greta. She had been given a fair start, thanks to his horse falling halfway down the slope. He picked himself up, repaired a broken strap, then watched the sand and shale continue to flow, like some slow stream, down the slope. At the base of a large mesquite it parted, flowed on either side, and joined again. Acting on a sudden thought, he placed the treasure at the base of the mesquite and covered it with sand. The mesquite stood by itself, could be readily found any time he returned, and yet there was no danger of the loot being uncovered by the elements. Whenever the rocks were disturbed around the mesquite, the sand and shale above would start moving and cover the spot. He nodded with approval, watered Tumbleweed, and set off once more.

From a high ridge he looked over the country. There was no sign of the girl. Her disappearance did not worry him particularly. Water governed this land and sooner or later she must make for either the Sinclair Ranch or Mesquite Hole. Yes, she would come, perhaps with parched lips and the terror of the desert in her eyes. Her approach might be heralded by wheeling buzzards. If he thought it advisable, and pursuit was not too close, he would intercept her and make a bargain before water touched her lips.

From the ridge he located two distinct dust clouds moving slowly over the desert. These, he decided, were parties of deputy sheriffs in pursuit. One of them had almost reached Sinclair's Ranch; the other was headed for Mesquite Hole. He estimated the former party at from eight to twelve men; the latter three or four.

Had the sheriff been present to see what the hooded rider next did, it would have explained in a measure how the bandit escaped so easily after his raids. With deft movement, he set up a small radio aërial, grounded the other wire, connected the ends to a small crystal set and, with the receivers clamped over his ears, picked up the evening news bulletins that were broadcast at six o'clock each night.

Waiting, he watched the purple shadows fill the draws. Below, the desert dwellers were crawling into the sand for the night; the barren branches of a mesquite rattled gloomily, reminding one of the clanking bones of a wired skeleton swinging in the wind.

A small voice came to his ears. Yes, the announcer was speaking of him, telling of his sensational raid; of the missing girl cashier who had made a bold attempt to tear the hood from his head. The speaker concluded: "By long-distance telephone, Sheriff Reed reports that posses are guarding all water holes and that sooner or later he must come for water, when it is expected his capture will be effected, not, however, without a spirited battle. A finish fight is expected."

The hooded figure nodded, as if confirming this statement. Again his crystal set had gathered the vibrations that brought a human voice to his ears and told him what his pursuers were doing. The announcer made a brief statement of prevailing conditions at Dry Coulee, and added, as if by an afterthought:

"A check shows that all of the irrigation project money was taken. This will probably result in many mortgage foreclosures by Rodney Bridger, who, it is said, is on the verge of financial failure for overloaning on orchard land."

The hooded figure remounted and faded into the shadows. Overhead the stars came out. The first day had passed.

Sheriff Reed and his posse arrived at the Sinclair Ranch and found it deserted.

"Bill Sinclair's going to have a time explaining something," the sheriff growled. "Innocent or guilty, he's got to prove to public opinion that he is straight. He should be here! They had made a hard ride, but there was to be no rest this night. "Get yourself something to eat, boys," he ordered, "water your horses, fill up your water bags, and then strike for the bad lands. One of you may pick up their trail. They've been here, all right." He indicated the two exhausted horses lying in the pasture. One of them had got down and could not get up again.

And so for a brief time the Sinclair ranch house was occupied, then again it was dark. One man remained, concealed in the attic, ready to drop down on any one he decided was worth questioning, preferably Bill Sinclair.

The second party, in command of Dick Orlander, arrived at Mesquite Hole shortly before dark.

"Man and horse been here," Orlander announced. "No sign of no girl, though! H'm! Look at that!" He pointed to the imprint of a human hand in the mud. "Got down on his stomach to drink and rested his hand there! Don't touch it! I've got a scheme!" With the aid of a knife, he cut out a square of mud that included the imprint and carried it to a rock to dry. "We'll maybe know from this who drank here and filled water bags," he declared, "unless we find out some other way."

"I can tell yuh without that trouble," Fred Farnum declared, "that's Bill Sinclair's handprint. He got a rope burn and it ain't healed yet. Can't yuh see it writ right there in the mud?"

"Yes and no," Orlander replied. He stopped suddenly and squinted. "Look, boys, on that ridge! He's gone! Oh, dang it!"

"Sure yuh saw something? I didn't," Farnum answered, "but my eyes ain't so good as yourn."

"Let's go and see for ourselves. Kinda tough on the nags, but a stitch in time saves nine!"

Instead of riding directly for the ridge, Orlander figured the probable course of the phantomlike rider he had seen on the ridge. He was staking all on this one move. It was dark when he reached the spot, but he dismounted and examined the path likely to be followed by a horseman coming down from the high ground. "Nothing here,

boys. Listen, we'll spread out, fan-like. There's only certain places a man can ride. When you get to 'em, examine 'em. We'll bunch together again here in two hours!"

Orlander dismounted twice in the next half hour. Knowing the country, trailing came easily enough for him. He knew where to look and did not waste time. Presently an exclamation of satisfaction escaped his lips. "I knew it! Now for——" Orlander went for his gun at that moment. Ahead the brush had stirred. The silence of the desert night was broken by a single pistol shot.

It carried over ridges and draws to Fred Farnum's ears. "Hello!" he cried, "somebody's taking a shot at one of the boys. That came from an automatic pistol, and neither of 'em carry automatics." He wheeled and rode rapidly toward the sound, his own weapon ready for instant use, crouching low to avoid bullets that might come from ambush.' '

The click of hoofs against rock caught his ears. "Canby?" he called. "Orlander?"

The answer came quickly. "It's Canby. That you, Farnum? Guess they must have got Dick. That wasn't his gun!"

"Where is he?"

"Somewhere ahead. There's his horse!" The horse was standing near by, waiting, glad of a moment's rest. On the ground lay Dick Orlander.

Farnum dropped to his side. Canby's voice, filled with apprehension, came sharply. "Is he dead?"

"Dead!" Farnum shouted. Then in a lower voice he added, "The Hooded Buckaroo is around close. He done this. Just as well to make him think it was a good job. Dick ain't dead, but he's pretty bad hit—shot through the head, it looks like."

"What'd we better do?"

"You ride to Sinclair's Ranch and get a buckboard." Again he lifted his voice. "I'll stay here with the body!" Farnum clutched Canby's arm. "Listen," he whispered. "Dick knows who the hooded fellow is!"

Some inkling of what had happened fell from Orlander's delirious lips. He spoke loudly at times, repeating conversation that had taken place evidently after he had been shot. Suddenly he half leaped from the sand. To silence him, Farnum clapped a hand over the wounded man's mouth. Muffled, came a cry, "You? Good Heavens! You?"

"Who was it, Dick?" Farnum pleaded. "It's Fred, Dick, who was it?"

"Fred. Good ol' Fred! Look out, he'll get you!" Dick seemed to be returning to consciousness. Slowly his eyes opened. "Fred? Yeah—good ol' Fred."

"Who is the Hooded Buckaroo, Dick?" Farnum repeated.

"He's—he's——" Orlander coughed and the muscular effort seemed to distress him. He cried out sharply and lapsed into unconsciousness.

Farnum swore. "Didn't quite get it out! Ride, Canby, ride like fury! I'll stay here and—listen."

Long after the sound of Canby's horse's hoofs had died out, Farnum listened, half expecting to hear the crack of the gun that might wipe out another man's life. He had heard the swiftness with which the Hooded Buckaroo shot described as a gesture of impatience. When he felt sure that Canby was beyond danger, Farnum thought of himself and the wounded man. The hooded rider might return, but it did not seem likely. If he had been listening he must have heard Farnum's shout, "Dead!" and believed it. An examination indicated that the bullet wound had been slight; the real damage was caused by a blow from the butt of a gun and Dick's skull was fractured. Again and again during the

long, black hours Orlander muttered. Once he snarled, "Got that mask off your face!" Then came the usual cry, *"You?"* The discovery had astounded Orlander evidently. The next moment he had been knocked down, no doubt, for no other words followed. Farnum pleaded and coaxed, but he could never quite penetrate the fog that had descended on Orlander's brain.

The buckboard came at dawn. Canby led the way on a fresh horse, and was followed by the conveyance which had been piled with mattresses to reduce the shocks incident to travel over a roadless desert. A man who knew something about gunshot wounds was driving.

"It's going to take most of the day to get him to Sinclair's," he announced, "can't do much fast driving. When it gets hot, we'll have to hunt shade or we're going to lose Orlander."

"Do what you think's best," Farnum answered, "we'll follow along and give you a hand when you need it." He turned to Canby. "Any news?"

"No! They're using Sinclair's Ranch as a sort of headquarters. Bill ain't showed up yet. Ain't expected to now. No word of Greta Kirkman. Kirkman's about ready for a hanging, and he's mighty law-abiding, you know. Bull Bridger has showed up. Looks like he'll have to foreclose. Right now he ain't saying anything about business. Like the others, he's plumb crazy worrying over Greta. He's got a pretty bad case on her. For a while Sinclair was giving him a run, but since Bill got in wrong, Bull's got the inside track."

They followed the buckboard as it painfully crawled across the desert. For three hours they made a stop in the shade of a butte, then began the final leg of the journey to Sinclair's ranch. Throughout it all Dick Orlander had not regained consciousness, nor, in the opinion of the driver, would he until the pressure on the brain had been relieved.

On the last ridge Farnum and Canby paused and looked back. "Seems like we're leaving something behind," the former growled. "Somewhere out there in that desert are the Hooded Buckaroo and Greta Kirkman."

"You've forgot Bill Sinclair!" Canby suggested.

"Have I? I said 'the Hooded Buckaroo and Greta,' didn't I?"

"That's so!" Canby admitted. "That sure is so. Wonder where Greta is?"

"We'll go down to the ranch and find out if they've heard anything. If they haven't, then we'll turn right around and go back!"

But no good news awaited them at the ranch. None of the men had returned since Canby had come for the buckboard. Bridger, it was assumed, had joined in the hunt with Kirkman. At least, with others who had appeared about the same time the previous night, he had set forth on the posse's trail, carrying a great supply of water so the men would not have to return.

Farnum washed his face in the icy waters of the well and felt better. He stretched himself until the soreness had partly left his muscles, then gazed into the air. Earlier in the day he had seen the buzzards wheeling lower and had not liked the sight. But now they had returned to the higher level without descending. "Whatever it was that was fallin' has got up on its legs again," Farnum said. "It might be a horse, a man, or a—girl."

CHAPTER V.

A GAME LITTLE MARE.

GRETA KIRKMAN felt like crying, but she did not. The blazing sun was just about broiling her—literally. There are few figures of speech used in relation to desert heat. Her legs were torn by the brush; her skin

was burned by the sun. When she spoke encouragingly to the game little mare her words came thickly. She had denied herself water again and again that the mare might drink. Greta rode with head down, often swaying in the saddle, yet never quite falling. Once or twice she looked up and shuddered—buzzards! How did they know? And yet they did know. Something in the mare's attitude, perhaps her physical dejection, told them.

Greta saw a lake just a few miles off to the left—a lake with waving palms along the shore and a small boat drifting on its surface. There was a man at the oars, a girl in the stern. She could not see them plainly, but they were there. Taking courage, she pulled the mare off to the left. The animal obeyed, but the moment she relaxed her grip the mare turned. "War Bride," she cried thickly, "can't you see the water? Oh, girl, girl! Don't go that way!"

Again and again Greta turned the animal off its course, and invariably the mare swung back again at the first opportunity. Then, somehow, the lake vanished, and all was sand, desolation and heat, covered by the blue sky against which wheeled the black heralds of death.

Hours passed. There was a grade ahead, mostly sand, hard to climb, but necessary. It must be the right direction, for the mare insisted on going that way. The girl dismounted and walked, one hand on the saddle, the other swinging at her side. She did not look up, but plodded along utterly spent. When the going became easier, the grade less steep, she knew the top had been gained. She remounted and glanced ahead, eyes shaded by her big hat.

A lone rider was coming toward her, mounted on a horse almost as spent as her own. Gradually, he took definite form, and she caught sight of Bill Sinclair's broad shoulders. Her memory completed the picture—big, powerful hands, slim waist, intensely blue eyes, and hair whose color depended on the way the light struck it.

The horses headed for each other, as if seeking sympathy; the riders studied each other's condition. The man swung his canteen to his shoulder, dismounted, and ran toward the girl. He held up his arms and she slipped easily into them. "Greta!" he cried. "I've been about crazy!"

How did Bill Sinclair, supposedly away from town, away from other men, actually being sought by a posse, know she was on the desert, presumably a prisoner of the Hooded Buckaroo? Just then she did not ask herself that question. She was content to rest in Bill's arms while he moistened her lips with water. "Feel better?" he inquired.

"Yes! I've had to fight off a desire to run over the sand and scream. It's been so quiet, just the creak of leather, the sobbing of the mare's lungs; the click of her hoofs against the rocks." She moistened her lips with her tongue and he gave her another drink.

"Not too much," he warned; "you're in better shape than I expected to find you." The little mare was given a drink and then Sinclair turned again to Greta. "Where is the Hooded Buckaroo?" he asked.

She started, and yet the query was natural enough. "I escaped, Bill!" She looked at him sharply, but did not put the question forming on her lips. He seemed to sense it, for he looked away.

"My plan is this," he said, "I've a good horse planted in that clump of mesquite!" He pointed to a dark spot on the desert. "Your people are crazy over your disappearance! With water, you can make it. The horse will take you to the ranch, even if you didn't know the way. You probably

do, though, you found your way this far!"

"No, I didn't!" she answered; "I was hopelessly lost." She pointed to the buttes behind her. "I left it to War Bride!"

"Wise girl! Take my horse—it's fresher—to that clump and then change. I'll be in sometime late to-night—or to-morrow."

"Thanks, Bill," she answered. "Bill, how did you happen to know where to find me?"

He looked up quickly. When he spoke, it was not the query in words he answered, but the query in her eyes. "And still you doubt me, Greta? Well, does it matter? I'm here! You are safe! Good luck!" He smiled, then turned his back until she was gone. When she was out of hearing distance, he followed, leading War Bride because she had already done more than her share.

The horse Bill Sinclair had left in the mesquite was gentle and fresh. The trampled ground indicated that he had been tied there for some time. Bill Sinclair had made all plans with an amazing knowledge of what to expect —an exhausted girl; a nearly dead horse.

With plenty of water to drink, Greta recovered rapidly. She kept the horse at a steady gait, mile after mile, guiding him toward a butte that served as a landmark to those heading for the ranch. With far less worry in her heart than on the previous night, she again watched the shadows settle. A light shone in the ranch house, bright, friendly, offering rest and welcome. "To-night I'm going to sleep, and sleep, and sleep!" she promised herself.

As she arrived, men were unloading an object from the buckboard. They moved across the yard and up the steps with shuffling feet, and entered the house. In the half light in front of the door she recognized Farnum and Canby. Then Bull Bridger came upon the scene. He was covered with dust and had ridden far. "No word of Greta," he said. "Who have you here, the Hooded Buckaroo?"

"Dick Orlander!" some one answered.

The girl dismounted. "They are as tired as I am, I suppose," she said.

Bull Bridger looked up in surprise—he was examining Orlander's wound—as she entered. "Greta! Where did you come from?" he cried.

"I just arrived!" she answered. She decided not to mention Bill Sinclair just yet. Anyway, Bill had said he would follow on the tired horses. "I managed to elude the Buckaroo and a good horse did the rest. Here, let me do what I can for poor Orlander!"

From somewhere came the necessary strength, and she took charge. Farnum and Canby said something about going out to the bunk house and hitting the hay. "We'll be right there handy," Canby added, "if you need us, call us."

"I'll stay here!" Bridger said, "and keep Greta company."

The buckboard driver had performed a rather crude operation on Orlander, which he hoped would relieve the pressure, and was now preparing to ride to Dry Coulee for the doctor.

Bridger dozed in his chair, occasionally opening his eyes to note possible change in the wounded man's condition. At times he seemed about to revive; then again the clouds would close about him. Greta, sitting at his bedside, nodded. She was cruelly tired, but there were times in one's life when one must carry on despite personal exhaustion.

The silence was abruptly broken. "You!" Orlander was sitting up, staring at the girl. "Good heavens, you?" he cried.

Bridger stepped around to the head of the bed and gripped his shoulders.

At the touch, Orlander slumped back, then opened his eyes. "Where's Farnum? Oh, it's you—Greta!" He drifted off and muttered, "water!"

"Just a moment, Dick!" she answered. "Rod! This water is warm already. Get some at the well, will you?" She handed him the glass. "Just a minute, Dick!"

Half conscious, he began muttering. "And I dived right at the brush before he could fire again and got him. Ripped the mask from his face!"

The girl dare not interrupt. Perhaps he would name the Hooded Buckaroo. She held her breath, and the atmosphere seemed to suddenly become charged with danger. Instinctively she glanced up. Framed in the window were the head and shoulders of the Hooded Buckaroo. The glass suddenly shattered, a roar filled the room. Even above the report Greta heard the sickening impact of lead against flesh. Orlander grew suddenly rigid, then dropped back—dead.

Outside, the clatter of hoofs sounded and the clump of a running man's boots. As the hoofbeats grew fainter, Bull Bridger ran into the room. The glass was half filled with water. "What happened?" he cried.

"The Hooded Buckaroo returned," she answered, "and finished poor Dick Orlander!"

Bridger placed the glass on the table and glanced at the silent figure; then he drew his weapon, examined it, and started for the door. "I'll see what I can do," he announced.

"Look again," the girl cried, "and be sure that gun hasn't been tampered with!

Bridger drew out the weapon and examined it. "It is ready for business!" he answered.

"Take care of yourself!"

"I will," he promised.

As Bridger set forth, Farnum and Canby rushed in. "Somebody shoot?" Farnum demanded.

"Yes, the Hooded Buckaroo returned and silenced Orlander for all time. Rod Bridger is on his trail now."

"Guess we've slept enough," Canby growled. "Come on, Farnum, let's give Bridger a hand. He's done plenty for us in his time." He folded Orlander's hands across his breast, covered the face with a sheet, and closed the door. "Get a little rest if you can, Greta!" he urged.

She heard them talking to the horses, but within a few minutes they had disappeared down the trail. For a time they heard Bridger's galloping horse, then silence. They urged their own mounts ahead faster, galloped over a ridge, and came upon the amazing situation of a fist fight in the darkness. The grunts and groans of the fighters came frequently, and it was evident that Bridger was one of the men. His opponent was fighting a lot and talking a little. Suddenly he whipped in a blow that caught Bridger full on the chin. He went down with a crash, but he was not out. Seeing the two men approaching, he yielded. "Get him, it's the Hooded Buckaroo himself!"

Farnum and Canby slipped behind their horses, expecting the bullets to fly. "Stick 'em up—quick!" Canby ordered.

"Keep him covered, Canby, while I strike a match," Farnum cried. Under the flickering blaze the rugged features of Bill Sinclair were outlined. "By gosh, we've got him!" exclaimed Canby.

Sinclair was cool. "What for?"

"Killing Dick Orlander and several others, Mister Hooded Buckaroo!" Farnum charged.

"You fruit growers are getting crazier every day," Sinclair retorted. "And of the lot, Bull Bridger is the

worst. Without warning, he lands on me all sprawled out."

"You lie," Bridger shouted, "and you know it! You just shot Orlander. You followed him in, knowing he might regain consciousness and speak. Orlander saw the Hooded Buckaroo and paid for it with his life. You shot and got away in a hurry, but not quite fast enough. Watch him, boys, he's bad medicine!" Rubbing his jaw, Bridger got to his feet.

Maddeningly calm, Bill Sinclair turned to Canby. "I'm supposed to have just fired a shot," he said. "Run your finger down the barrel of my gun and see if it hasn't been oiled. Also, notice whether or not it is warm!"

Canby held his finger to the light of a match. "She's cool; and she's oiled! What'll we do, Farnum?"

"Take him in. There's a lot of things he's got to explain. One of 'em was where he was during the raid, and why wasn't he here on the ranch tending to business a short time afterward?"

"I'll explain 'em!"

"Better wait until we get you in court," Canby grimly suggested; "you're going to need all the cards you've got to see this game through. Now we'll go down to the ranch."

They found Greta sound asleep in the room Sinclair's sister had once occupied. She was utterly exhausted, and no one disturbed her. A guard was placed over Bill Sinclair, and he promptly fell asleep. Some time before dawn several of Sheriff Reed's posse returned. One of them, on a fresh horse, was sent to recall the others.

Kirkman arrived alone, almost frantic until he heard his daughter was safe, then he collapsed. Morning found weather-burned men swarming over the ranch house; their expression seemed to say: "We've got our man!"

Sheriff Reed and several others questioned Bill Sinclair, without satisfactory results. "You make me tired," Sinclair growled, "so tired that I'm going to stand trial and get this over with."

"You're darned tootin' you're going to stand trial," the sheriff promised curtly.

"Yes, and be acquitted," Sinclair cut in, "and then I'm going to spend the rest of my life riding into Dry Coulee once a week and laughing at a lot of people."

In time, Greta Kirkman came to him. He was ironed to a chair. "Oh, Bill!" she cried, "somehow, I can't believe you would shoot a wounded man."

"Could you believe I'd rob a bank?" he demanded.

"No," she admitted slowly, "and yet, Bill, the evidence! What'll I do, Bill?" she cried. "I'll have to testify if you go to trial."

"Tell the truth," he answered; "no one expects you to do otherwise—or wants you to!" He added this rather heatedly. Plainly, his patience was becoming exhausted.

But the evidence continued to pile up. Farnum, prowling around, found the infamous black hood in the brush and, what was equally important, an oiled rag that had been recently run down a gun barrel. "There goes his old alibi!" he cried. "After he shot Orlander, he cleaned his gun and reloaded it just to prove it hadn't been fired recently! Sinclair's one of the cleverest crooks the West has ever known!"

Hard on the heels of this discovery there came staggering into the pasture near the cottonwoods the remains of what had once been a fine horse. There were wounds on his head showing where a stone had been used to subdue him; his tongue was protruding, and only a fighting heart had carried him

through the inferno of the desert heat. Where had he been abandoned?

"Guess that completes the case!" the sheriff announced. "Greta says the Hooded Buckaroo stole Tumbleweed. You changed horses, Sinclair, but not often and fast enough."

Bill Sinclair leaped up, then swung the chair behind him, and the bottom and legs cracked into kindling, leaving his wrists ironed to the back. He strained and snapped the wood. His arms were now free, except for the handcuffs. "By the gods, sheriff, I won't take such a charge from any man! You'll eat those words right now or I'll take a drilling!" His blazing eyes looked unafraid into the gun the sheriff had drawn. "You know I never treated a horse that way. Now speak, darn you!"

"It's kinda hard to believe, Sinclair," the sheriff began, "and it ain't like you, I'll admit, but circumstances might bring such a situation around. I'll have one of the boys take care of Tumbleweed. Now, come here and let me fix those irons. No fooling."

"Oh, I won't fool," Sinclair answered; "too many half-cocked ranchers around here!"

"You needn't be afraid they'll kill you," the sheriff countered, "not until they've found out what you did with the gold and securities you stole from Mike Wright and from the bank!"

Bill Sinclair wearily shrugged his shoulders. "Laugh, Bridger," he suddenly snarled; "I gave you a royal old lacing last night! I'll live to give you a long, loud laugh, too!"

"Bridger's got a clear field now," Canby said in a low tone to Farnum. "No wonder he's laughing. I'd laugh, too."

At noon the party started for Dry Coulee, with Orlander's body on the buckboard that had brought him, a badly wounded man with precious knowledge, to Sinclair's ranch. A breed whom Sinclair trusted was detailed to look after the stock. There would be no bail in a first-degree murder case, and Sinclair would not be seen around the ranch in some time—if ever!

His first act was to send for a good lawyer and demand an immediate trial. The lawyer, a man named Bertrand Fritz, was for postponing the case. "Wait until public rage has died down," he suggested.

"Wait nothing!" roared Sinclair. "I'm innocent! Public opinion isn't going to die down as long as orchards are burning up. Get me out of here! I want to run the Hooded Buckaroo to earth and give these birds the laugh. Now, listen, while I talk!"

"Say," Fritz demanded, "who is the lawyer and who is the client in this case, any way? You've done all the talking so far."

"And I'm going to do some more!" Sinclair promised. "I'm going to talk myself out of jail. Now, listen."

And Fritz listened. "It sounds reasonable," he admitted, "but the State has a strong case against you. Their chief witness is a Miss Greta Kirkman—know anything about her?"

"Some! I've asked her to marry me a couple of times. Now don't you get rough with her, Fritz, or the sparks will fly. Let her tell the truth, and she'll tell it in her own way. How soon can I stand trial?"

"I'll see!" the lawyer promised.

CHAPTER VI.

GUILTY AS CHARGED.

EIGHT men, good and true, and four women, even better and equally true, made up the jury.

In the witness box Greta Kirkman was facing a courtroom full of people she knew while she testified against a man who had twice asked her to marry him. Bill Sinclair seemed very much

deserted just then. And yet, a second glance convinced Greta that Bill was the sort who could get along without a mob trying to help him. "I'm going to tell what happened in my own way and I don't wish to be interrupted by either attorney," she began. "You all know me, know I'll tell the truth. Nor am I here to help or hinder Mr. Sinclair. I am here to tell what happened, as it happened, so please don't interrupt me with technicalities!"

"Proceed!" the judge ordered.

In a clear voice Greta related what had happened; beginning with the hour she left the bank, only to return unexpectedly for a letter she had forgotten, there to be picked up by the hooded rider when she attempted to tear the mask from his face. "I did not see his face then; nor do I know positively that I have ever seen it." She declared, and continued with the story of the mad flight in the ancient car and later on horses that the Hooded Buckaroo had concealed at some distance on the desert. "We arrived at the Sinclair Ranch ahead of the posse and there he roped two horses. He had difficulty in mastering Tumbleweed and that convinced me the Hooded Buckaroo was some one not familiar with the horses."

This was helping Bill Sinclair's case, as every one present knew him and knew that he was on intimate terms only with the band of buckers.

She told of her escape and the long hours on the desert; of Bill's locating her without difficulty; of the extra horses he had waiting. Then she grew tense as she related Orlander's excitement, his attempt to speak, and the sudden shot through the window that ended his life!

Bull Bridger then was sworn and took the stand. His testimony was brief. "I was looking over an orchard in the south end of the Coulee and didn't hear about the holdup until I arrived home that night. I don't recall who told me—somebody passing along I guess—anyway, I decided they needed men and headed for Sinclair's ranch, where I later joined the posse. Nothing much happened until I came in that next evening and saw them bringing in Orlander. I did what I could, being in better shape than Canby and Farnum. Miss Kirkman sent me out for a glass of water, as Orlander was coming to his senses. While I was at the well I heard a shot. It sounded as if it came from the room, but it was on the opposite side of the house I found out. Miss Kirkman told me what had happened, and, hearing a horse's hoofs moving from the ranch, I followed. The man drew into a clump of brush, figuring, no doubt, that I would pass by in the darkness. At the same instant I saw him, swerved my horse, and the two of us came together. I grabbed him and we went to the ground, fighting. In the mix-up I was hit on the jaw and went down. Farnum and Canby caught the man, and on striking a match it proved to be the defendant!"

Canby and Farnum testified to what they knew, including the finding of the hood hidden in the brush, and the oiled rag that had been run through a weapon.

After several others had added to the evidence, which really had piled up in an alarming manner, Bill Sinclair was called to the stand.

"I'll be asked why I happened to be away from the ranch," he began, "so I'll explain. There is no mystery about it. The news of the holdup was broadcast. I was listening in. The holdup happened about noon and fifteen minutes later my receiving set picked up the news. It looked as if the Hooded Buckaroo might head for either the Mesquite Hole or my ranch. I counted the ranch out because I figured he would expect to find some one

there. I made direct for the water hole, and took two extra horses along with me. And as I rode I watched the desert, the ground, and the air. It was wheeling buzzards that showed me where some one was staggering along. I went there and found Miss Kirkman. She was nearly exhausted. I gave her the freshest horse and followed with the others.

"There was a wind blowing that night, you'll remember. Down in a little draw I moved into the mesquite to light a cigarette, and the next thing I knew Bridger had galloped down and was fighting me. Do you suppose if I had just shot Orlander, as he claims, I would have been caught with both hands to my face? Not me! I'd have had a gun handy, knowing pursuit would begin mighty soon, and Bridger wouldn't be here now—lying!"

In summing up in his plea to the jury, the prosecuting attorney characterized Greta Kirkman's evidence as "shaped and presented in a manner to aid a man she undoubtedly once cared deeply for. It is the instinctive desire of every woman to protect the thing she loves. For this instinct the world honors womanhood, and I would not have it different if I could. Nevertheless, the jury must weigh this in its consideration of her testimony."

With supreme confidence, Bill Sinclair awaited the outcome of the trial. The jury retired, and minutes passed —minutes that ran into hours.

The crowd dwindled, only to return. From somewhere had come the rumor so long expected and feared. Bridger's lawyer had forced him to foreclose and get what he could of the money he had invested in Dry Coulee mortgages. "It's because they couldn't make Bill Sinclair tell where he hid the money!" one of the men growled. As they talked it over, the ranchers became excited. Rage eddied slowly at first, then faster and faster, mounting like flood waters sweeping over a lowland. The very air seemed charged with hostility. Fritz, pacing the room, felt it. He looked toward the jury room and wondered if this mounting rage could penetrate the oak doors to the hearts of those twelve men and women and possibly affect the verdict.

"It couldn't have come at a worse time," he growled, "but it was logical. Bridger expected something to develop that would bring the treasure back. It failed to do so. He is foreclosing. The poor wretches have a year to make good, but it'll take more than a year." He shot a dark glance at the prosecutor. How he had stressed the motive behind Sinclair's alleged crime —keeping the ranchers helpless until he had ruined them, then with his water reclaiming an empire! How the prosecutor had pleaded for a verdict of "Guilty as charged!"

"Guilty as charged!"

The ringing cry came again and again to Fritz's ears. Bill Sinclair must hear it, too. It was impossible to escape it. Fritz could see the jury, tense, leaning forward. And how long they were taking to decide! It looked bad and indicated that some of them believed him guilty; others innocent.

Food was brought in at noon; again in the evening. At midnight the jury filed solemnly into the jury box. The judge had been called; ranchers began pouring in. The sheriff and several deputies were on hand to keep order. The judge warned the crowd against any demonstration. The foreman passed a slip of paper to the clerk of the court who glanced at it and passed it to the judge. The latter examined it briefly and returned it to the clerk. Bill Sinclair was leaning forward, searching each face as if expecting to read the decision in their eyes. The red tape was maddening. The clerk cleared his throat and read:

"We, the undersigned jury in the case of State vs. Sinclair are unable to agree and request that we be discharged."

"Neither guilty or innocent!" Bill Sinclair groaned. A low rumble of restrained rage came from the crowd.

"There will be no demonstration," the judge said sharply. "The sheriff will clear the courtroom. The prisoner will be held pending a decision by the prosecuting attorney as to another trial."

"We believe the defendant guilty, your honor," the prosecutor said. "The necessary steps will be immediately taken for a new trial."

Bill Sinclair was stunned. He turned to Fritz. "Can it be possible they'll find me guilty?" he cried. "Good Lord! I never dreamed this would happen. Why, I accounted for everything I did."

"You told a story that many believed, including some of the jury, Sinclair, but it did not convince all of them. We've got a fight on our hands!"

"Send for old man Rodgers, 'Uncle Tim,' as most people call him!" cried Sinclair. "Somebody's got to look after my ranch! That breed won't do if I have to stay here for weeks! 'Guilty as charged!' I might as well have been found guilty. I've got to fight back now—fight in earnest."

"You should have done that, Sinclair, before you were arrested. Imprisonment will hamper you somewhat."

"Yes, that's true! Fritz, there is one living creature that will identify the Hooded Buckaroo if he ever meets him again!"

"Who?"

"My bucker—Tumbleweed! They say a criminal always makes a slip. Well, when the hooded bandit beat that horse over the head with a rock he made his slip. That nag's sense of what is square is almost human. He has a code of fair play all his own, but I once saw a breed club him. I had a heck of a time saving that breed's life." Sinclair was silent a moment. "Why can't they put all these things together and then see that I'm not guilty?"

"Because," Fritz answered, "everything you have said or done, every reason you have given for certain things are the acts and excuses of a man who might well be guilty. Yes, even to beating up your own horse. It's tough, Sinclair, but you see how you stand?"

Bill Sinclair shrugged his shoulders, paced his cell for several moments, then, seating himself on the cot, put his head in his hands. The attorney looked at him sharply. "Buck up, Sinclair!" he said.

"I'm not giving up," Bill growled, "I'm trying to think and I haven't much to think with!"

CHAPTER VII.

MOB LAW.

ONCE the forest fire is well under way it is impossible to tell exactly where it started, or who dropped the lighted match or cigarette butt.

No one will ever know just who started the mob toward the county jail at Dry Coulee. Men who were ordinarily solid, hard-working citizens, found themselves crying for revenge. Back of it all, perhaps, was the instinct to fight for their homes. The orchards they had slaved for and created were slowly slipping from their grasp. It mattered not that they had a year in which to redeem them, for the year of grace was merely postponing the agony. These men were deeply rooted to the rich soil of the coulee and now they were being torn from it and those roots snapped.

Some one had cried, "Let's force the truth from him! Let's make him

tell where he's hidden that gold! He's human, we can make him tell!" There was a grim note in the threat. The mob accepted Sinclair's guilt as a fact; gave him not the benefit of the doubt the law gives.

On they rushed until they reached the concrete structure, where they spilled on either side like a river striking a rock. In his cell Bill Sinclair heard them. He did not look, for his appearance would only have fanned the flames. The sheriff hurriedly appeared. "Keep out of sight, Sinclair! You are guilty, but I'm going to defend you. I'm here to enforce the law and I'll enforce it—at the cost of life if need be! Keep out of sight, don't make it harder, if you value your hide!"

But Bill Sinclair, ever daring, risked it. Cautiously he moved his head upward until his right eye showed in one corner of the cell window. Though it was night, nevertheless, in the moonlight he could make out several he knew. In the crowd was Uncle Tim Rodgers. His pointed beard, white as snow, flowing mustache, and long, black coat distinguished him in any crowd. Sinclair smiled. "One friend among the enemy! If they get me, he'll act. If not, he won't do a blame thing but watch the excitement. It's the first comforting sight I've seen in days."

Uncle Tim was smoking a cob pipe and watching things with interest. But within a half block he had parked a fast car on a down grade so there could be a quick get-away. A good friend was Uncle Tim, and a bad enemy until he got the upper hand, then he would bewail the soft streak in his nature that prompted him to be generous.

The heavy crash of a pole against a door on the opposite side of the building sent the crowd around that way. Uncle Tim did not move. He shrewdly guessed it was a scheme to cloud the issue—a make-believe attack in front while the real attack came from the rear. Hardly had the crowd vanished before some fifty men emerged from an orchard. On their shoulders they carried a telephone pole. Running at top speed, they drove the pole against the wall. A crack formed and plaster fell. Backing away, they came again. Time after time the battering-ram smashed against the concrete while those in front kept up the fake attack.

Finally, Uncle Tim left the rear and made his way to the front. The sheriff was holding the mob at bay with sawed-off shotguns. Uncle Tim lifted his hands. "I want to talk to you, sheriff," he announced. "You're overlooking an ace!"

"Shoot!" the sheriff growled. "You know all the tricks in the trade."

Uncle Tim whispered for a moment, then withdrew in his usual dignified manner.

From several windows came the nozzles of fire hose. The sheriff lifted up his hand and cried: "You boys are just mad enough to run into bullets. I don't want to kill any of you, but I'm going to protect my prisoner. You know how much water we've got left. None for our orchards, none for the backyard gardens; just enough in the reservoir to carry us until the fall rains. And at that we may have to bring it in in tank cars. This mob's got five minutes to clear out. Then if you're not gone I'm going to turn the hose on you, and I'm going to keep it on—wasting water—until you do go!"

Few believed the sheriff would really shoot, unless he fired over their heads. Even then there was always a chance, and the hot-heads always figure in this way, that the bullet would hit the other fellow. But water! That was striking at all of them. Most of them had

been caught with empty canteens. They knew its value as no others did.

Water!

It was a blessing, a threat, and a weapon. With the weapon, water, they believed Bill Sinclair was taking their orchards; with the weapon, water, the sheriff was hitting not one, but all. Mumbling angrily, they withdrew. Uncle Tim knocked the ashes from his pipe and returned to his room. For a day or so at least he would linger around, then, when certain the flames had died, he would head for the Sinclair Ranch and look after Bill's interests. Rodeos would soon be in order, and the Sinclair buckers must be ready. The first rodeo would be held at Ranger, and it was this show that Dry Coulee attended, though it was over the border in another State. The Ranger rodeo, while not as great as Pendleton, had the advantage of mounts right off the range and full of pep. And that reminded Uncle Tim that Bill Sinclair was on his way to winning the coveted Bender Cup. The cup, a beautifully engraved creation of silver and gold, had been presented by Nat Bender, a gruff old cattleman, who was afraid the old order of things was dying out and lesser men were taking over the scheme of things. Old Nat had bet that there was no man living who could win the cup three years in succession. Bill Sinclair had two wins to his credit, and it looked as if Bender would have to make good his threat of stuffing the cup with hundred-dollar bills when a man won it the third consecutive time.

A week passed before Uncle Tim deemed it safe to leave town. Dry Coulee was dying hard. Every day some rancher was in court in regard to mortgage foreclosure, and sometimes there were there in groups. With tears in his eyes, Bull Bridger stood before them. "I've gone the limit, boys," he said. "I'm sorry! I've hoped and hoped somebody would come to the rescue."

And they, one and all, had assured him they understood the situation and thanked him for his generosity thus far. From time to time Bill Sinclair was questioned by the sheriff and prosecutor. And once it was hinted that he could get off on a manslaughter charge if he pleaded guilty and informed them where the gold was hidden.

Bill Sinclair had laughed at them. "The Hooded Buckaroo is a million miles from here and blowing in the money," Sinclair answered.

"But you are not having the last laugh as you promised," the sheriff grimly reminded him. "You've got to come through, Bill. The sooner the better. Listen, you have never liked Bull Bridger because he was interested in Greta Kirkman. Can't you see that by holding back this money you are playing into his hands, giving him Dry Coulee?"

"Yes, I see all that, but it can't be helped," Bill answered. "But, as I've said before, if the Hooded Buckaroo ever gets around my horse, Tumbleweed, he's going to be identified whether he's got his hood on or not."

Eventually, they gave up trying to make Bill talk. Dry Coulee became like something dead. The serious, dejected manner of their elders at home had its effect on the children. Laughter was seldom heard, either at school or in the different homes; quarrels were frequent among families and neighbors. Every one was on edge.

Greta Kirkman not only found it necessary to take frequent stock of the financial condition of the community, but of herself as well. The prosecuting attorney had publicly claimed that love had prompted her to go to Sinclair's defense and dull the barbs her story might have had. Had it? She wondered.

In any event, she had tried to be honest. And yet when the evidence was examined, she was dismayed. How one charge dovetailed with another until the mass of evidence was sufficient to convince almost any one that Bill Sinclair had taken life and money that he might own Dry Coulee!

Bull Bridger was gentle toward Greta these days, as if he understood the shock to the girl. He did not push his own case at all, but he was a reed she could lean upon when she wanted to. Once he said: "Greta, I love you so much that if I could wave a magic wand and purge Bill Sinclair of his sins so that he might be free to marry you, I'd do so!"

"I believe you would, Rod," she answered. "But—oh, I don't know! It is such a mess. I can't believe Bill would do some of the things he's charged with."

"Under pressure, men are likely to do most anything, Greta," Bridger explained. "We're a poor lot, we men. The best of us is not worthy of any girl." He smiled. "Let's go for a walk. It is a lovely night!"

They had been sitting on the porch, but now he took her arm and led her down the road. By day this road was hot and dusty. Yet in the moonlight it might well have been the pathway to Paradise.

They climbed an old trail leading from the coulee to the tableland above. Presently they stopped, and she looked down. At her feet Dry Coulee might well have been the Garden of Eden. The soft moonlight had cast a veil over the squares that marked the different orchards. One saw the general effect of growing trees, hedged in by desert walls. The withering green leaves, the sick and dying trees, could not be distinguished. Silence fell between them. He took her hand. "What are you thinking of, Greta? Why, darling, you are crying?"

"I'm thinking of what this might have been," sobbed Greta. "Now, with the tragedy hidden, it looks like what it might have been. The dam could have been built there—will be built there some day—and the water flowing into reservoirs will be used on the way down to generate power. I can almost hear the shouts of happy children, the hum of motors, almost feel that indefinite something that tells us we are near happy homes. Haven't you felt it? Of course! But down there it is gone!"

He slipped his arm about her. "Don't feel badly, Greta. It will all turn out for the best. Who knows? Something may happen. We may get a wet winter; the promise of a good crop, and perhaps the growers can get money enough on their crops to start over again. Come on, let's enjoy ourselves for the moment! To-morrow we will face harsh facts once more—the moonlight will be gone."

"Maybe something will happen," she said hopefully. "I hope so!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETHING HAPPENS!

BILL SINCLAIR'S voice was thick with anger. "I don't believe it!" he said, "I don't believe a word of it. I don't care who said so, I don't believe it!"

The jailer, who had just conveyed an interesting item of news to Sinclair, frowned darkly. "I don't care whether you believe it or not, Sinclair, Old Kirkman told me so himself—said Greta and Bull Bridger had become engaged last night. It was a nice moonlight night, you know!"

Did he know?

For hours he had stood there looking at the moon, longing for freedom; thinking, searching his mind for incidents that might prove important in his fight for freedom. And now this!

Greta, the one girl he had ever cared for, going over to his rival. Although he shouted his disbelief, yet inwardly he told himself the world always kicked a man when he was down. "There's a lot of the wolf pack in human beings," he mused, "a lot of it. But Greta doesn't love Bull Bridger. She couldn't! She loves me! I know it! Once when I found her dying of thirst and she fell into my arms, I could tell. Another time was when the jury came in and disagreed. There was more hurt in her eyes than in mine."

All day Sinclair stood it, but when night came and with it another moon, something in the soft light seemed to madden him. "I'll stop it!" he snarled. "I won't be caged!" He wanted to hurl himself at the bars, to scream, curse, sob, and tear the iron from the concrete. With an effort he checked himself. His imagination tortured him. The soft music of the wedding march came to his ears; and there Greta stood, with Bridger waiting at the altar. How beautiful she was! Bill Sinclair hurled himself at the bars, gripped one, and pulled. His back bent, the muscles stood out on his arms, his face grew red, then purple. Something snapped, and the bar came from the concrete and bent upward. Sinclair dropped to the floor, utterly spent, panting. Five minutes passed, then he looked up. Incredible! It was not a dream! He had actually pulled a bar free! Sinclair examined the concrete, and understood. The mob's battering-ram had cracked the concrete and loosened the bars. The second bar came with little struggle. He hurled himself at the third, and it gave after a stubborn fight.

The heat of his fury had gone, leaving the mind cold, determined, deadly. He scrambled through the opening. His feet struck the ground; he stretched his arms and legs. He was free!

He ran swiftly through the dying orchards and then listened. "No sound," he muttered, "seems as if I should have some hard luck about now!"

Sinclair made his way to Kirkman's house. Greta was sitting on the porch in the hammock, Bridger in a chair, talking. Sinclair could not hear what they said, nor did he attempt to. But he remained within sight, watching with flaming eyes, wishing the man would go. The hours dragged, then Bridger rose to leave. He mounted his horse and galloped away; the girl vanished into the house. From an upper window a light gleamed suddenly. Sinclair climbed the porch rail and crawled along the roof. The window was open and he stepped in. "Not a word, Greta!" he warned.

She looked up, startled. "Bill!" she cried. "How did you——"

"I heard you were engaged to Bridger! You're not going to marry him. You are going to marry me! Don't try to escape, Greta—you can't! I pulled out two or three iron bars to get to you. I'm here!" He displayed his hands, cut and bruised from the pressure he had applied. "Get your riding things and—pretties! I've got two saddle horses waiting."

She looked into his eyes. There was no doubt of it, his determination to keep her from Bridger was almost fanatical. Nor would he consider going down the stairs. "We go down the porch post, the way I come up. We can't be seen. Going down the stairs might wake up your folks."

He sent her ahead, lowered her clothing, then Greta herself. If she expected he would turn his back long enough to slide down the post, she was mistaken. Sinclair selected a soft spot and jumped. He picked up the bundle. "Come," he ordered. Greta obeyed.

On the rim above the coulee the girl stopped, as she had on a previous

night, and looked down. Captive though she might be, the beauty was not lost on her.

"We've got to ride plenty far before it gets hot," Sinclair said; "come, let's drift!"

She recalled the hope she had expressed the other night that something might happen. Something had happened! Something she had not expected.

Dawn found them in a small town over the State border. Sinclair awakened a sleepy man whom he called "Slim" and spoke briefly. "I'll do it for you, Bill, but for nobody else!" was the answer.

Slim mounted an aged horse and led the way to the courthouse. "Fill out these blanks," he ordered, then yawned. Through half-closed eyes, he observed the girl. Then he seemed to wake up. "Peach!" was his verdict. "But kind of worried; half afraid, or is she? Danged if I know, women getting marriage licenses act funny sometimes!"

"Come along," Bill ordered, "we'll rout out Judge Buckingham. He'll tie the knot!"

As Slim moved ahead, Sinclair whispered to Greta: "Now don't try to make a break. I'm making certain you won't marry Bridger by marrying you myself. One false move and I'm clearing out, but I'm taking you with me—married or not!"

Silence from the girl—silence that was disturbing. They entered the judge's house and were shown to a room to wait. Bill Sinclair shifted a gun that he had borrowed to a more convenient position. If Greta rebelled he would shove Slim and the judge into a convenient closet and lock them up.

"Some day, young man," she now grimly informed him, "you may be sorry for this!"

"I'll take that chance, Greta!"

The judge came down in a bath robe and was presently followed by his wife. The marriage ceremony was performed without interruption, and then Bill took Slim aside. "I left—er—home so hurriedly that—I came off without any money, Slim," said the bridegroom. You paid the license fee. Slip me a twenty for the judge. I'll square up later. And, while you're about it, slip me a ten for the wedding breakfast. Thanks!"

Outside, Bill apologized. "I was sorry to kiss you, Greta, but if I hadn't done it the judge might have thought it was funny."

"Oh, you were, were you? Well, that's over!" she said. "Now, what?"

"It won't happen again! I'm sorry I had to marry you, but now you won't be able to marry Bridger until you get a divorce from me."

"What a beautiful fixer you are!" she observed. "But suppose you wanted to marry somebody? Your style would be cramped, to say the least."

"I've married the only person in the world I want to marry," Sinclair answered. "Just remember this, Greta, no matter if you turn me over to the nearest sheriff, I'll always love you! That's a funny thing about love, you can't help yourself! I'm glad it's that way. Come, we'll be drifting. Tonight we'll camp near the Trailing S and I'll sneak in at midnight and get some supplies and fresh nags—if it's safe! Then—well, if we were real honeymooners, instead of you being a sort of kidnaped wife, we'd go to Lost Canyon. It's in the bad lands, about a hundred miles from the ranch. There are a lot of cliff dwellings there and we'd camp by an icy spring and explore." He sighed. "Well, what's the use of dreaming, as the poet says."

They rode for ten miles before stopping at a sort of ranch house and general store combined. Meals could be

obtained here, but one must eat with the family. They entered and inquired about breakfast. "Ready in a half hour," answered a woman who seemed to be both storekeeper and waitress.

Greta observed two things—the parlor and the telephone within the parlor. "I may as well powder my nose," she suggested. "I won't try to escape," she added in a low tone. "That's a promise. I'll be right here when you want me!"

Bill believed her and went to superintend the breakfast preparations.

In the parlor Greta put in a long-distance call. In the midst of her nose powdering the telephone rang. She answered. "Sheriff Reed? Greta speaking. Yes, I've been kidnaped again! It is getting so that when any one leaves Dry Coulee they kidnap me. Bill is quite decent, so don't worry. Listen, sheriff, we will be at the Trailing S Ranch some time to-night. Now, don't come with a posse. Come alone, and don't shoot. I'll see that Bill's gun is empty. And, sheriff, you had better manage this quietly. We don't want another mob scene at the jail. You might tell Bert Fritz to be there in the interests of his client."

Greta's face was serene when she emerged. She and Bill ate a hearty breakfast, then rode slowly over the desert. Fall was approaching, and the heat was less intense. They rested an hour at noon and ate a lunch the ranchwoman had prepared. Bill said little, avoiding Greta's gaze as much as possible. "I sure hated to marry you this way," he said once or twice, "I sure did!"

"Then why did you do it?"

"To keep you from marrying Bull Bridger until I could have another trial and be free."

"Oh, then you are sure you will be free?"

"Why not! I'm innocent!"

They rode along leisurely that afternoon, and occasionally Bill commented on the lack of dust clouds on the desert. "By rights there should be several posses out there," he said more than once. "There ain't one!" Greta could have explained that the search had been called off because Sheriff Reed was coming alone, but she did not.

On the edge of the Trailing S they stopped shortly after dark. Bill studied the situation with care. "I'll wait until it's dark," he decided. "Uncle Tim's there, I see. They don't make 'em any better. He'll do anything for me—anything that's straight! And look at the buckers! Greta! Dog-gone! Look at Tumbleweed! Just as good as he ever was." Bill grinned. Then he whistled sharply.

Tumbleweed lifted his head, then came slowly toward them. "Squarest horse that ever lived—plays the game," muttered Bill. At the risk of showing himself, he got to his feet and met the big animal halfway. He rubbed the horse's nose and apologized for his lack of sugar. "Now beat it, big boy; it won't be long now until you're bucking 'em off! That place where he was belted over the head is all healed, too," Bill added, turning to the girl.

He returned to Greta and sat slightly in front of her. The butt of his gun was conveniently near. Suddenly she pointed. "Look, Bill, is that some one slipping down to the house?" she asked.

She thrust her arm over his shoulder and pointed. "See, right there by that clump of brush! Right there! Now, can't you see a movement?" And while she talked loud and pointed frantically she removed Bill's gun broke it, spilled out the loads, and returned it to the holster.

"Yeah, I see now. It's a calf!" He turned on her suddenly. "But why should you warn me against danger?"

"Why should I?" she answered.

"Yes, why should I?" She saw the hope come into his eyes, but did not respond to it.

"A honeymoon in Lost Canyon, poking around among the homes of people that lived in cliffs a thousand years ago, would be fun," he mused. "Well, it's darker. Let's go!"

They walked slowly toward the house and entered. Uncle Tim greeted them. "Expected you, but not the lady! Heard you had broke jail and that the girl was missing, but didn't put the two together!"

"Yes, Uncle Tim. Meet Greta—er—Sinclair. She'll be that until she can get a divorce. Until that happens, don't bet on her marrying Bull Bridger. Say—what was that?"

"Put 'em up, Bill!"

Sheriff Reed had almost followed them into the room. "There! Stand right where you are!" He jerked Sinclair's gun out and examined the chamber. "You're a girl of your word, Greta," he said, "the gun's empty!"

"Yes, it's empty," she answered. "I saw to that!"

Bill Sinclair gave her a hard look. "Greta, you—sent word to the sheriff?"

"Why not, if I could do it without being caught? It was a battle of wits, and if you relaxed for a moment——"

"Fair enough!" he admitted. "Oh, well!" Then he smiled. "But you won't marry Bull Bridger for a while and that's what I broke jail for."

Bill Sinclair was slipped quietly into Dry Coulee and again lodged in a cell.

Greta returned home, very well satisfied with herself. "Now, don't get excited," she said to her parents, "but I am Mrs. William Sinclair!"

Her father said, "Great snakes!" Then he reached for his gun.

"Merciful heavens!" gasped her mother. Then she turned to Kirkman. "Put that gun down, you can't shoot a man in jail, though he deserves it! Greta, how did it happen?"

"It goes back to father's announcing my engagement to Rod Bridger—a conclusion he jumped at, by the way! Bill was rather upset by it, and so he stopped it by breaking jail and forcing me to marry him. I will say that he was a gentleman about it—though a very firm gentleman. Then I got word to the sheriff, and here we are. Hello, somebody's at the door! It's Rod, I suppose!"

And Bridger it was! "I'm for lynching that whelp!" he shouted. "Law is all right in its place, but it was never intended for such as Sinclair. The new trial is set for the fifteenth, Greta. Suppose we celebrate by marrying the day Bill Sinclair is convicted?"

"Marry you the day Sinclair is convicted?" she inquired. "Rod, I'll consider that! But right now I'm Mrs. William Sinclair. Father will explain. You'll excuse me, won't you—I'm dead tired!"

Bert Fritz was in a nervous mood. He had exhausted most of his challenges, and despite this the jury box was filled with men who looked as if they would cheerfully hang Bill Sinclair. The prosecuting attorney, to make matters worse, had got rid of the women. "A jury of hard-boiled men," Fritz growled; "oh, for a tender-hearted woman!"

The case moved along swiftly once the jury had been selected. The prosecuting attorney was in fine fettle, confident. He had had time to re-arrange his case; to profit by the mistakes he had made in the other. He planned to bring out Greta's testimony in a much stronger manner. There were important points to be driven home. He carefully laid the foundation for the defendant's motive in killing Dick Orlander, and then, with the

courtroom tense, he called, "Miss Greta Kirkman!"

"I assume you mean me," the girl said. "At present I am Mrs. William Sinclair, the defendant's wife!"

Nothing had been said of the forced marriage and few one knew of it, except Sinclair, the Kirkmans, and Bull Bridger. The sheriff, who had heard of it as he arrested Sinclair, had maintained silence.

"The defendant's—wife?" the prosecutor gasped. "But did you not bring about his recapture?"

"Certainly!"

"Then—why? I give up! Miss Kirkman—darn it—pardon me! This is disturbing. Mrs. Sinclair, I should say. Please relate, in your own words, what took place on the day the Hooded Buckaroo robbed the Kirkman State Bank?"

"If the court please," Fritz smoothly interrupted, "a wife cannot testify against her husband!"

"Unless she so desires," the judge ruled.

All eyes were on Greta! The courtroom was silent. The girl did not look at Bill Sinclair, nor at her parents, who were behind Bull Bridger; she smiled sweetly at the judge. "I do not desire to testify against my—husband," she said in a clear voice.

Bill Sinclair gasped. So did the prosecutor. Kirkman snorted. Bridger growled. The jury distinctly heard Sinclair say, "I never will understand women!"

"The witness is excused," the judge said. Smiling, and without glancing at Sinclair, Bridger, or her parents, Greta walked from the room.

"Proceed with the case!" the court ordered.

Again something had happened that no one expected.

The case proceeded, but with evidence so slim that Fritz addressed the court. "If your honor please, there is not enough evidence remaining to convict a yellow dog. I move for a directed verdict of 'Not guilty!'"

The motion was granted. The sheriff hustled Bill Sinclair away. This time Sinclair was locked up for his own protection, not to protect the world against an alleged murderer. "You are lucky, Sinclair," the sheriff informed him. "Guilty, yet you cheated the gallows. It is my duty, but not my desire, to protect you. When it is safe, you will be released My advice to you is to leave the country."

"This is my home, sheriff. I'll remain here. I've had time to think a bit, study motives and things. Beginning now, I shall play a little game that may bring results which will surprise you!"

"Huh!" The sheriff grunted. "I'll release you to-morrow. Right now, this town thinks you married Greta in order to spoil her as a witness against you."

"I married her to keep her from marrying Bull Bridger," answered Sinclair. "Turn me loose to-night with a good horse and I'll make the Trailing S without trouble. The Ranger rodeo is ahead of us and I've got to get my buckers there! When I return to Dry Coulee, I'll take my laugh at some of you lads, then settle down!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAY OF A MAID.

BILL SINCLAIR was released that evening. He was for going out the front door and looking the citizens of Dry Coulee in the eye, "as an honest man should." The sheriff sent him out the back way and told him to drift. Sinclair made his way down back roads to the Kirkman's and boldly knocked at the door. "May I see Greta?" he inquired.

Kirkman thrust a gun into his ribs.

"If you want to see me tried for murder, you villain, just ask for Greta!"

"I'll write her a note, then," Bill cheerfully answered. "See that she gets it, please."

Bill scribbled:

GRETA: Thanks for the help. I sure needed it, just then. The jury was out to send me over. Some day the world will know the truth. Love,

BILL.

P. S. Please go over in your mind everything that happened every time the Hooded Buckaroo was about. Maybe you can help me. B.

"Now, Kirkman," said Bill as he handed him the note, "if you know when you are well off you'll give this note to Greta and not be so hard-boiled. It may save you a lot of backing down—later! Remember, I'm coming back for my laugh!"

On the steps he met Bull Bridger coming up, and forced him to get out of the way. "Figure to win the Bender Cup this year, Bull?" he queried, as an afterthought. "Well, if you do, you'll have to ride. I'm out in time to get it myself!"

"I'll be among those present, Sinclair, but I doubt if the committee will let an acquitted mur——"

"Don't say it, Bridger, or I'll finish what I started one night some time back. That wasn't a lucky punch I slipped over on your jaw—that was one of my regular lefts." Bill stalked down the steps. "Darn it, I've got to have an outlet!" he exclaimed. "I was hoping Bridger would make a pass at me."

Five days later, at the Ranger rodeo, Bill Sinclair was given a brief note, which read:

Bill, I want to see you. I'll be in the lobby of the Ranger Hotel. GRETA.

Bill needed a shave and a bath. He had worked hard, getting his buckers from the Trailing S Ranch to Ranger. Uncle Tim Rodgers had helped him, but somehow Uncle Tim had arrived without damaging either his person or clothing. The buckers were in the corrals and the old-timer on guard. Bill was eager to see Greta, but also he desired to look his best. All records were broken as he bathed and shaved. Then he hurried down to the lobby.

Greta met him with a serious face. "What have you accomplished?" was her first question.

"A little! I've suspicions I must confirm. And I think I'll confirm 'em!" he replied.

"I've found this. I made a special trip to Mesquite Well to get it. Farnum and Canby mentioned that Orlander cut the imprint of a man's hand from the mud beside the well. It baked in the sun. Here it is. Let's see your palm, Bill!" He displayed it. "Belated evidence proving that you were where you said you were," said Greta. She had the baked clay taken to her room. "Now, come with me. Bring your gun!" As he gave her a quick look, she shook her head. "There's no killing to be done!"

"Why are you doing all this for me, Greta?" he demanded.

"Suppose we call it a desire to respond to the urge of my sense of justice to clear a man's name. There is nothing sentimental in it, I assure you."

"Ouch! I hoped there was."

She led the way to a point beyond the limits of Ranger. "Now, shoot!" she ordered. "Return your gun immediately to the holster, then pull it out, and show it to me!"

Sinclair fired; thrust the gun into the holster, then pulled it out "O. K.?" he inquired.

"Yes!" She almost gasped it. "Oh! Now I know who the Hooded Buckaroo is!"

"What did you see, Greta?"

"I saw a thin wisp of smoke come

from the barrel! Oh, if I only had some real evidence! That is so slight!"

He looked at her curiously, then began talking, apparently without purpose. "The prosecutor looked for a motive in my case and found one. It was without foundation, but it was logical. Going back to the killing of Mike Wright—the Hooded Buckaroo vanished, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"There was time enough for him to have killed Wright, then reached Dry Coulee, and been among those present at the rancher's meeting, wasn't there?"

"Yes, we were ahead of our schedule. A man with a fast horse and the help of a car could have attended the meeting. If he arrived late no one would have thought it unusual, for no knowledge of the crime had reached them."

"And he could have kidnaped you, Greta, let you lose yourself on the desert, doubled back, joined one of the posses, and hunted for himself!"

"Yes!"

"I have such a man in mind and—the motive!"

They looked into each other's eyes. "Write your man's name on a piece of paper, Bill. I'll do the same. We'll exchange and if the names are the same we won't say a word, but keep right on gathering evidence!"

"Good!" He scrawled a name and handed it to her. She returned a slip of paper on which she had written a name. Each glanced at it. The names were the same!

As they rode back, Bill Sinclair regarded her curiously. They were married, and yet it did not seem like it. She acted as if he were a stranger. He supposed a man could make a date with his own wife, and yet when he thought of asking her, the words refused to come.

They parted at the hotel. Greta hurried up to her room; Bill galloped over to the office of the rodeo. Drawings were about to take place. There were two strings of buckers present. Bill, of course, was not permitted to ride any of his own string. He, in fairness to the others, must take strange horses in all competition.

Bill drew a tough animal named Leatherneck! It was said that like the marines, for whom he was named, —he landed often and always had the situation well in hand.

Bill talked long and earnestly to Uncle Tim. "No," the old man protested, "I ain't never done nothing like that. Still, if there's a reason——"

Uncle Tim's eyes widened as he listened. "You don't say!" he exclaimed. "Well, Tumbleweed ain't the worst horse in the string by a long shot. Oh! yes, I can do it. He'll draw last, and I can make believe to stir up the names left in the hat. Instead, I'll scoop up and drop a half dozen folded slips, all bearing the same name, Tumbleweed. Then he's bound to get that horse!"

"Thanks, Tim, you won't be sorry!"

One by one the men drew, and alternately grinned or groaned, depending on whether they got a hard bucker or an easy one. The last man was coming up. Tim's old fingers gathered up the remaining names and from his sleeve there trickled several bits of paper. Holding the hat high, he signaled the final man to draw. Bridger reached in, grew tense, then opened the slip. "Tumbleweed!" he exclaimed. "There's one horse I can ride!"

Uncle Tim made mental note of the exclamation. "Sooner or later the best of 'em make a break!" he mused. "If he's never ridden Tumbleweed in competition—and he hasn't—how does he know he can ride him? Unless he has ridden him some other time!" The fine old head nodded sagely. "The net is closing!" exclaimed Uncle Tim.

The rodeo!

Corrals of outlaw horses; other corrals of steers, a buffalo, two donkeys ridden by clowns, blaring bands, canvas chutes through which rush the steers to be either bull-dogged or roped. Other steers with a rope and a bell, which men pay a dollar or so for the privilege or riding and win five dollars if they stick beyond the white line. The band is blaring. Stolid Indians sit astride fine horses and watch. Most of them are wealthy wheat farmers and have come in high-priced cars. Now for a dollar each they appear and act as the noble red man is supposed to act. Some dance in their costumes and look foolish. There is a squaw race and some of them fall off. A stage-coach race fills the arena with dust. Massed crowds grow tense as they watch the outlaws saddled, with heads snubbed tightly, necks resting on the backs of other horses. That's the rodeo!

A loud speaker clicks and a metallic voice cries: "In the west end of the arena, Bill Sinclair on Leatherneck. This is for the Bender Cup. If Sinclair wins this time, Nat Bender has promised to fill the cup with hundred-dollar bills and give it to him. There he goes!"

The blindfold is snatched off and Leatherneck settles down to the serious business of bucking. The judges follow closely, watching to see whether Bill pulls leather, whether he digs his spurs into the webbing of the cinch, or forgets in the business of sticking on to "rake him!"

Somebody yells, "Where's your hood, buckaroo?" The stands filled with those from Dry Coulee are quiet. Other stands are cheering. The horse rears again and again, twists and turns, goes down in a heap, comes up, sunfishes, goes down, and Bill steps clear, but as he comes up, Bill is on his back. "Ride him, cowboy! Ride him, you game son of a gun!" Leatherneck's grunts come sharply. He gives a final plunge into the air and comes down stiff-legged. The man in the saddle groans, his face turns gray for a moment, but he continues to ride him slick. The gun barks sharply and from the throng bursts a cheer. A man catches Leatherneck's bridle. Some one else lifts Bill from the saddle. He drops to the ground and waves his hand. The color is returning to his face. There are few tougher than Leatherneck; he landed frequently, but not once did he have the situation in hand. Bill walked over to his own horse and climbed into the saddle. A cowboy on the ground isn't at his romantic best.

Another rider came up and was bucked off. Blue Blazes turned that trick, and Bill was a step nearer the cup. A third and fourth rider made fair rides, but their mounts did not do much. Then Bill grew tense and uncoiled his rope. The loud speakers were saying: "In the east end of the arena! Bull Bridger on Tumbleweed!"

From the first the horse had fought. Twice he had reared until his forelegs were over the other horse's back. But now Bridger had ceased rubbing his hands and licking his dry lips. He was in the saddle. The announcer's voice continued: "The squarest horse in the game. A child can play with him, except in the arena and then—but watch him!"

The horse seemed to literally burst. Legs flew, back humped up, and twice he was coming up as the rider was coming down. The arena was filled with the horse's screams of rage, and old cowmen looked at each other. As if sensing drama, the crowd grew silent. Tumbleweed's back seemed to arch, and the rider was thrown clear. Then it was that Bill Sinclair raced into the open. His rope was swinging

over his head. But, quick as he was, Tumbleweed was quicker. He bared his teeth, gripped the frightened Bridger, lifted him high, and hurled him to the ground. Tumbleweed's hoofs came down with a sickening thud. Men turned their heads in horror; women screamed and fainted. One of the judges drew a gun, but Sinclair rushed in between them. His rope settled over the maddened horse's head; Bill's feet hit the ground with a thud. The rope between the saddle horn and the horse was tight as a bow string. "Back!" Sinclair cried. "Back!" He looked down at Bridger. "The one slip you made, Bridger," he cried, "beating that horse! I've a mind to let him finish you!"

Bridger's words, in the anguish of a hurt body, were akin to a confession. Bill Sinclair pursued his advantage: "Sent out to get a cup of water for a dying man, you sneaked around the house, shot him, then returned. Greta discovered that! There was another slip. When you pulled your gun out to show her you were well armed and could safely pursue the Hooded Buckaroo, a wisp of smoke trailed from the muzzle. She forgot it in the excitement, but remembered it later.

"Motive? A cinch! You wanted the orchards in Dry Coulee. With them you wanted the name of being a generous fellow; a sort of tin god! You've lost! Come finish him, Tumbleweed, and save the State a nasty job!"

"I'm dying, man," gasped Bridger; "don't let him——"

"Where's that money hidden? Out with it, or I'll turn him loose before the hospital boys get here!"

Ghastly in color, Bridger's lips moved nervously. They were still moving when the white-coated figures carried him off the field.

But the show went on!

Toward the end the loud speakers again asked for silence. "Bull Bridger is not seriously hurt," said the announcer. "Don't cheer until you hear the rest. He thought he was dying and confessed that he was the Hooded Buckaroo. The location of the money he stole on two occasions has been revealed to Sheriff Reed, who is a visitor here to-day. The horse, Tumbleweed, is not by nature vicious, but was beaten badly by Bridger during one of his raids. To-day was Tumbleweed's day. Only Bill Sinclair's prompt action averted a tragedy. Bill Sinclair, by the way, wins the Bender Cup for the third time. Step out, Bill, and take your bow!"

Bill rode in front of the grand stand and accepted his cheers with modesty until he reached the section reserved by Dry Coulee. He stopped there and viewed the silent rows of people curiously. Then he threw his head back and laughed uproariously and long.

And Dry Coulee gave him a rousing cheer.

Bill Sinclair and Greta had just met. It was evening and the meeting seemed quite by chance, but it wasn't. Greta had watched which way Bill was going, galloped down a parallel street a block away, and headed him off. She pretended to be surprised. "Why, hello, Bill!" she said.

"'Lo!" Bill answered. There was silence for a time. "I'm wondering what to do about you," he ventured finally. "A forced wedding and all that! I suppose you'll want a divorce!"

"What do you want to do with me, Bill?"

"I'd like to keep you, Greta!"

"Then why don't you?" she suggested.

"My gosh sakes, Greta! Do you mean that? You mean you love me and not Bull Bridger?"

"Poor father is the only one in our

family who loved Bull. I liked him, that was all, because he seemed so generous. But I loved you, Bill. Do you suppose you could have forced me to marry you? Not in a thousand years! And, Bill, do you suppose I was surprised when it was said in court that a husband could not testify against a wife, nor a wife against a husband? I knew it all the time! That's why I telephoned the sheriff to arrest you. I wanted to get the trial over, so you could be free to clear yourself. But once I almost weakened!"

"When was that?" Bill inquired.

"When you mentioned the honeymoon we might go on—to that valley where the cliff dwellings are and the cold spring. I wanted to go right then and there."

"Well," he suggested, "let's go!"

"When?"

"Right now. We can pick up the horses and grub at our ranch. Old Tim Rodgers can take care of things here."

They turned their backs on Ranger and rode into the moonlight. Behind them came the tumult of people at play, and those playing the hardest, were the visitors from Dry Coulee.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Golden and Cape May Warblers

AMONG the many species of warbler, the golden warbler, or yellow summer bird, is perhaps the best known. A brilliant fellow is he, to be met with in nearly all parts of North America, frequenting the orchards, gardens, and fences, but seldom seen in the deep woods.

The warblers build their nests in every available situation, sometimes in a barberry bush in the open field, on the limb of an apple tree, or among the shrubbery underneath the windows of the farmhouse. They are very incautious birds, seeming not to fear human beings at all.

These warblers breed during the first week in June, and the song of the male is heard constantly at this season. It is loud, clear, and somewhat varied, and uttered with such force that the singer's body quivers as the notes outpour.

The bright-yellow coat of this species renders the birds rather conspicuous as they flit brightly here and there in pursuit of flies and insects. They seem to prefer moist and shady locations, probably due to the greater abundance in such places of caterpillars, which they consider choice diet.

THE Cape May warbler is a beautiful species, to be met with in nearly all parts of North America. These birds often frequent the tops of spruces and pines, sometimes at a height of a hundred feet. As they seem to be always busy searching for insects among the thick foliage, it is not often that they expose their bodies. They appear to be fearless of people, often hovering among branches but a short distance above the passers-by, and seek inhabited portions of the country rather than secluded parts.

A peculiar feature of this species is the construction of the bill, which curves downward. The tongue is also singular, being more deeply cleft than is usual among warblers. These birds have a yellow breast, profusely speckled with brown, and the back is mostly brown also.

Musky, the Mighty

By Kenneth Gilbert
Author of "With Bared Fangs," etc.

THE blizzard ended abruptly, after lasting two days; and, like a curtain being rapidly rolled up, the wall of white went racing across the barren lands into the southwest. A fragment of blue sky showed through the murky, leaden heavens, and the sun—which had returned to the arctic, for the season was now early March—lightened a bleak world of undulating, snow-covered tundra. All was white; even the scrub brush being borne down by the weight of snow. It was an immaculate land, and seemingly utterly devoid of life.

Yet life there was, even in this desolate region whose unvaried monotony ran to the rim of the horizon in every direction. From nowhere, it seemed, there appeared a flock of ptarmigan, snow-white as their surroundings, save for black-feathered tails. Doubtless they had been beaten down by the storm while crossing the barren lands, and had sought refuge in the snow until the blizzard was past.

Hardly had they taken to moving about, as though hopefully seeking food—perhaps the tops of weeds near the surface of the snow which might offer a few seeds—than they sprang into the air and went beating swiftly away for perhaps a mile before they settled again. And after them for a short distance sprinted a white arctic fox, an amazingly beautiful little creature, whose mild face was wrinkled in a mask of disappointment and rage.

Seeing that he had failed in his effort to stalk the ptarmigan, he stopped and voiced scorn of them—a short, barking, squalling cry. The sound did not carry far, save down wind, but it did have the effect, at least, of breaking the last bond of white silence. For it seemed that even the snow-covered ground awoke.

Until that moment, there had been in the bottom of a shallow gully a number of what appeared to be rather large, rounded boulders, curiously placed quite close together. But at the squalling bark of the fox, these snow-covered boulders erupted, underwent a change. They arose, shook off the snow; and behold; they were dark, shaggy forms of living creatures. Twenty-five or thirty of them, all musk oxen; and the biggest of them was the leader himself, who stood apart from the others.

Ol' Musky was a seasoned veteran of the arctic wastes; and while he and his herd were amply protected against the most severe blasts that blow south from frozen polar seas, he had led them to the gully, which offered some slight protection, there to lie down and wait for the blizzard to pass. It mattered not that the snow banked over them; Ol' Musky and his kind wore the warmest coats possessed by any mammal—an outer covering of coarse hair, nearly a foot in length, which was curled and matted; while next to the skin was a growth of fine wool, so dense as to be waterproof. No icy wind could penetrate it.

Moreover, nature had given the musk-ox clan, broad hoofs for carrying them over all but soft snow; a capacity for living in a region where any other ruminant would starve. Tough lichens, moss, and very little of that, were sufficient for Ol' Musky and his herd; and it mattered not that this scanty food had to be uncovered by pawing away drifts of hard-packed, frozen snow. As protection against foes, each musk ox wore a pair of solid-bossed, down-curved horns; but Ol' Musky's were the biggest. These horns were sharp, dangerous weapons, and could be used effectively in warding off ordinary attacks by whatever enemy which might come that way and decide to dine off musk oxen. Like his absurdly short tail, which was not visible because of his thick coat of hair, Ol' Musky's ears were hidden. But they were keen, nevertheless; and the power of scent which he possessed in his hairy nostrils was sufficient to warn him of danger while the latter was still far off.

And apparently it did so now, for he faced into the northeast, as he got to his feet; and breathed long and deeply of the bitterly cold wind which blew down out of white nothingness. His eyesight was rather poor, and he invariably relied on his nose and ears. So it was that while he could see nothing, nevertheless, he appeared uneasy and disturbed by some message which the telltale wind brought him. For a long time he stood there, facing in that same direction, while his herd, as though utterly confident in his ability to apprise them of coming danger, fell to browsing.

There were a few yearlings in the herd, and likewise several mature bulls; but none of the latter approached Ol' Musky in size. He was big, even for a musk ox; standing nearly five feet at the shoulder, and nearly seven feet in length. Since his eighth year, when he had attained his prime, he had been ruler of this band. When summer came, Ol' Musky, as would the other bulls, invariably sought solitude, as though the presence of frisky, newborn calves disturbed his sense of dignity. But when the short arctic summer passed, and the first blizzard roared down out of the north, Ol' Musky would set about gathering his herd.

Or, rather, they drifted to him, as though understanding the need of being under his protection. There were times, when that gathering took place, when he was compelled to discipline other sturdy bulls who, coming into their full strength, were ambitiously desirous of testing his leadership. Nevertheless, so ponderous were his weight and bulk, and so ripe his craft and cunning, that none of them could stand up against him.

One of them, however, a newcomer who had showed up in the herd only that fall, probably having drifted in from the Melville Sound region, seemed determined to keep the feud alive. Even during the winter, with the mating season past, this bull was combative; and, time after time, Ol' Musky had to administer punishment to him. Yet the other bull refused to

stay whipped, and would try to catch the bulky leader off guard, that he might drive a sharp-pointed horn deep into Ol' Musky's side. Ol' Musky did not banish his rival forever from the herd, however; he seemed to be content with merely maintaining his sovereignty.

But even as the leader, attention focused on some word which the northeast wind brought him, seemed oblivious of his surroundings, the lesser bull, with lowered head, moved slowly upon Ol' Musky from behind. He was a slow-witted creature, and it seemed that he had to bring his courage up to a certain point before he dared attack. Yet, as his hoofs trod upon the drifted snow, he made no sound. He was within twenty feet of Ol' Musky, which was easy charging distance, when he made a grievous error. He shook his head and gave a low bawl.

Instantly Ol' Musky whirled, and saw him. Gone, then, was all thought of danger approaching from afar; Ol' Musky understood that he was being challenged again, and the necessity was great that the lesson he must teach the offender would be a lasting one. He hesitated not at all, but with an agility surprising in one of his bulk and weight, dropped his head, roared answer, and charged.

Had the lesser bull been merely content with sneaking up from behind and catching Ol' Musky at a disadvantage, the battle might have gone against the leader. Instead, however, he had foolishly warned Ol' Musky at the last moment; and now no bull in all the barren lands could have withstood the shock and suddenness of the leader's charge. The lesser bull was not even given time to set himself when he was struck squarely in the head and borne back.

Vainly he struggled; although his strength was great, it was not equal to that of the old master's. Back and back he went, while a spear-pointed, down-curved horn bit through the thickly matted hair on his left foreshoulder and laid open the flesh. With an agonized bawl of sudden fear, he sprang aside, and whirled to flee.

But he was not allowed to escape so easily. Ol' Musky's patience had been sorely tried by this particular bull; and he pursued him hotly. In a wide circle around the herd, which stood watching the fight with interested eyes, the two fighting bulls raced; the smaller bull only seeking to escape. But almost at every galloping leap he took, sharp horns prodded him from behind, until he fairly outdid himself in speed. Abruptly, then, the battle ended.

For the rest of the herd had left off watching the fight; and all had turned up-wind, to sample the air with distended nostrils. They, too, caught a strange, unfamiliar scent, which seemed to suggest danger of the most deadly sort. Even Ol' Musky and the lesser bull, their feud forgotten for the time being, likewise faced up-wind; and for a long moment the herd stood there, all motionless, like dark, graven images against the dazzling, white background.

Yet after a minute the spell was broken. It was evident that the danger, whatever it could be, was approaching no nearer. The sun, having shone briefly, was sinking; and the long arctic night was at hand. The sky was nearly cleared of clouds now; and the cold stars were ready to appear; moreover, the wind was dying.

Still, Ol' Musky had not liked that menacing scent; and he deemed it best that the herd move on. Moreover, the herd was hungry, and there was a better spot where lichens and moss could be obtained than where the musk oxen were now. Slowly, then, he led them away; pausing occasionally to face into the northeast and sniff again. Thus they went on for nearly six miles across the silent land, now in the spell of the

arctic night, before Ol' Musky called a halt.

They fed at length; then, like ordinary cattle, they bedded down in the snow, as comfortable as though housed in a barn. Only Ol' Musky remained on guard. It was well past midnight when the solitude of the spot was broken by a new sound, one which galvanized the old bull into sudden activity and sent him to his feet, snorting fiercely. For, out of the scrub willows which fringed a small, ice-locked lake, there had come to his ears the wavering cry of a wolf.

Even then, however, Ol' Musky knew that this was not the danger which he had scented earlier. But a danger it was at this famine season; and he made ready.

The two Eskimo hunters, with a team of five dogs pulling a *komitik,* or sled, had got under way as soon as the blizzard stopped. Back in the Iliut village, the pinch of hunger was being felt. The Iliuts had known bad luck the previous summer. Their annual caribou hunt was successful, but the weather had remained unaccountably warm, and most of the meat which they were curing had spoiled. Sickness had spread among them; but they recovered from it, for they were a sturdy breed.

They had taken many fish, and it was upon these that the villagers lived during the winter. But when March came, the fish were nearly gone, and it became necessary to replenish their food supply.

There was, however, but little game. The village was located on a great bay which faced southward; and twice during February the wind had driven much of the ice from this bay. A few seals and walrus had appeared; but the wind changed, and no sooner had the water become placid, than it froze again, and the sea creatures vanished.

Early in March, the two best hunters, Okemow and Kenak, had decided to strike inland in search of meat. There was a possibility that a stray polar bear would be abroad, having ended his winter hibernation; and that being the case, they would proceed to round him up with dispatch. There was a remoter chance that at the edge of timber they would find a band of caribou. So Okemow and Kenak went on, making good time despite the gaunt weakness of their dogs. When darkness came, they camped, quickly built a snow house, and made ready to resume the hunt as soon as daylight arrived.

As they slept, their dogs kept vigil outside, most of the time buried in the snow for warmth; yet, now and then, one of them would point his nose toward the cold stars and voice the eerie, mournful cry of the wolf pack. And it seemed to the lightly sleeping Eskimos, who would rouse from slumber each time that the weird cry was uttered, that it was but an answer to a similar call which the old dog-team leader had heard; which indeed it was, for the wolf strain was strong in the Huskies, and only the influence of a clear and still night was needed to bring the characteristic out. But the Eskimos read into it a deeper meaning. If the wolves were abroad, sounding their "kill" cry, there must be game about; which should mean food for the needy Iliuts back in the village.

So, as soon as it was light enough to travel, Okemow and Kenak were under way. Okemow, whom men called "the tireless one," set the pace. Armed with a two-foot stick of wood, he ran beside the lightly laden sled, and when one of the dogs appeared to lag in his harness, Okemow would hurl the stick accurately at the loafing dog. Each time Kenak would retrieve the stick, and hand it to his companion. No word was said. It was near noon when the dogs, scenting game

from afar, abruptly swung aside and broke into a faster pace. Thereupon, Kenak loosened the long-bladed spears which were strapped to the outfit on the sled. For the dogs had caught scent of Ol' Musky and his band.

At sound of the wolf cry, Ol' Musky's action in getting to his feet had brought the other musk oxen up standing. They all faced the direction whence the cry had come; and for the space of a minute their was no sound save their placid breathing.

The call came again; but this time it was from another point of the compass, and the musk oxen faced that way. Seemingly the wolf clan was gathering. Either they had marked the position of their shaggy prey, and were summoning others to the attack—a wolf can wind game at an incredible distance—or the calls they uttered were mere questions as to what promise of food lay in sight.

Ol' Musky and his band waited on for a time; but no wolves appeared. Ol' Musky, however, was too ripe in wisdom to be assured under such circumstances; he understood perfectly that if the wolves knew of the whereabouts of the musk-ox band and decided to attack instead of rounding up more certain game, such as caribou, it would be merely a question of time when the wolves would appear. So, after a brief wait, he once more led his charges away through the arctic night.

This time he was headed eastward, toward an arm of the frozen ocean. The country was more open there, and he doubtless reasoned that the wolves would be more inclined to work along the scrub timber. At the end of three hours he halted the herd; then faced back in the direction he had come, and tested the air to see if the wolves were following. But he no longer heard their calls; and presently the herd fell to pawing away the snow to get dead grass, moss and lichens beneath. At last, they all bedded down, and silence settled down over the herd.

Even Ol' Musky seemed to relax. After what had been a long march for them, the heavy musk oxen were tired. In this spot they remained until daylight; and it was just as the slow dawn was pinking the sky that the thing happened.

It came without warning. Dozing, eyes half-closed, Ol' Musky heard one of the yearlings bawl affrightedly; and the bulky leader awoke suddenly. But on the heels of the frenzied cry of the young musk ox, there was a guttural roar, the thudding impact of flesh upon flesh, and another choked bawl from the yearling. At the edge of the suddenly milling musk oxen, the old leader made out a moving white shadow, so nearly the color of the snow as to be invisible at first glance, but which was distinguished by a black-tipped nose. Then, with a bellow of rage, Ol' Musky flung himself toward the polar bear who, forsaking his winter den, had come upon the sleeping herd.

But the yearling was down, hard hit, for that smacking blow which the bear had struck during his short but swift charge would have nearly felled an elephant. Before the bear could follow up the advantage, however, Ol' Musky was upon him.

Agilely, the bear flung himself aside, and the rush of the shaggy gladiator carried the latter past. Yet Ol' Musky stopped short, revolved on pivoted hoofs, and once more charged. Again the bear nimbly avoided him, and aimed a blow which, had it landed full, would have broken the big bull's neck. Instead, however, he parried it with his hair-matted shoulder—although the scimitarlike claws of the bear opened the flesh—and at the same time gored sideways. The down-curved horn,

sharp as a poniard, ripped the bear's paw halfway to the shoulder.

The pain and unexpectedness of it made the bear stumble for a fraction of a second; and that was fatal. Quick to follow his advantage, Ol' Musky drove forward once more; and this time the bear was literally bowled over, while one horn stabbed his side. His great paws struck sledge-hammer blows, but such was his position that he could not put full force into them; nevertheless, he had Ol' Musky gripped around the neck, while his eviscerating hind claws tore handfuls of matted hair from the bull's chest. Ol' Musky was slashed to the bone; and with the weight on his neck, he stumbled.

But it was a fortunate move for him after all for, as he fell, the bear fell beneath. Then Ol' Musky, clear for a moment, half straightened, and bore down once more with his horns. There was a sickening crunch of breaking ribs; a choked, despairing cry from the bear, and of a sudden, fight went out of the snow-white beast. He wanted nothing now so much as to crawl away to some spot where he could die in peace and seclusion. He had attacked and killed musk oxen ere this, but never had he met such a battler as the doughty old bull who championed this herd. Yet even his last desire was not to be granted.

For, even as he sought to drag himself off, Ol' Musky, suffering from many wounds, his fighting blood thoroughly aroused, struck again. Once more the bear whirled to fight, but even as he did so, life went out of him. He was battered into the snow, gored, stamped upon by broad and heavy hoofs.

Nor when it was done, did Ol' Musky leave off. His rage was such that he could not quit so long as anything that resembled a bear remained. But after a time, when his strength was spent, and his rage died, he did pause, to stand there with lowered head as though watchful for another sign that his enemy still lived. And as he stood there, he suddenly faced down in the direction the herd had come, and uttered a coughing bellow of fresh anger. For the light wind which had sprung up with the dawn had brought to his nostrils the taint of wolves!

Poor eyesight as he had, he could not see them at first; but, as though at a command, the herd of musk oxen executed a military maneuver. They formed into a compact mass, bulls on the outside, cows and yearlings in the center. Shoulder to shoulder, they presented an unbroken circle, with Ol' Musky on the rim nearest the wolves. There they stood, with lowered horns, and waited for the new danger.

A few feet in front of Ol' Musky lay the mangled body of the bear; while farther to one side was the yearling, now dead, which the bear had attacked. It seemed that the wounded old veteran was offering the dead bear as evidence of what happened to enemies who attacked the herd. They had stood there but a few moments, when Ol' Musky discerned the oncoming wolves, running with bodies hung low to the snow, and in a fanlike formation. They came on until it seemed that they were about to sweep over the massed musk oxen, when they stopped, and spread out until the herd was completely surrounded. Then they paused, squatted on their haunches in the snow, panting from their hard running, their tongues lolling from opened jaws until it seemed that all were laughing over the predicament in which the musk oxen found themselves. In reality, however, the leader of the wolf pack, a tall, rangy creature whose nicked ears and scarred chops told of the many battles which he had fought to win leadership of the pack and then maintain it, was sizing up the situation. He understood perfectly the fu-

tility of charging those lowered lance points of the unbroken ring; and, like a good general, he decided upon craft. If the pack could cut out a yearling, or even one of the cows—for the horns of the female musk oxen were not so heavy and well-developed as those of the bulls—there would be feasting. The thing to do, then, was to break the formation.

The wolf leader saw the mangled form of the bear; saw, too, the dead calf. When the fight was over, the pack would clean up these quickly enough, but for the moment the dead creatures were under the direct guard of Ol' Musky himself.

Suddenly the wolf leader broke away from the pack, and trotted forward until he was within forty feet of Ol' Musky. Then the wolf did a strange thing; he flung himself in the snow, rolled over and over, waving his four feet in air, and generally displaying the utmost playfulness. But all the while he did so, his cold, green eyes were watching Ol' Musky closely.

As for the big bull, the antics of the wolf were astonishing; clearly, Ol' Musky was puzzled. But at the same time his cautious nature warned him against a trap. He rumbled defiance, but kept his head lowered, and successfully fought off an impulse to charge at the seemingly reckless wolf playing in the snow. But not so the bull, who was the continual challenger to Ol' Musky's leadership.

It seemed to him an excellent opportunity to show his prowess by lunging at the wolf, before the latter could scamper to its feet again. Without warning, then, he suddenly charged. And in that instant the ringed defense of the musk oxen was broken.

Naturally, it was the thing the wolf had been waiting for. Hardly had the foolhardy bull covered half the distance, when the pack leader was up. He seemed to utter a silent command to his followers; for, like a swarm of bees converging upon a common enemy, the gray cloud swept threateningly forward on the breach in the line.

Ol' Musky desperately lunged at the nearest wolves, but the damage was done. The startled musk oxen, seeing the oncoming gray horde, gave way, spread out; and although the onslaught of the wolves was merely a threat, a feint, it was sufficient. A young cow and a yearling became separated for a moment from the herd, and the wolves fell upon them, slashing cruelly at the tendons in the hind legs. With a bawl, the stricken creatures fell helplessly in the snow, and, although Ol' Musky and the other bulls charged swiftly at the wolves—gored three of them in fact, and scattered the others—it was too late. The cow and the yearling were as good as dead, for they were now unable to stand.

The fury of the old herd leader broke bounds, then, and for a minute he was here, there, and everywhere, hurling himself at every wolf who came within his range of vision. But the cruel killers knew that their work was already done, and that all they need do was to wait until the herd moved on, when they would fall upon the wounded musk oxen and complete the work of destruction.

Evidently Ol' Musky was determined not to give them that opportunity. It was not likely that he understood the real predicament of the cow and the yearling; he may have thought them merely wounded, and it was not his plan to abandon them to the wolves. Charging repeatedly, he kept the wolves off; and he paused only long enough to trample those already gored. With him in the fight was the foolish bull who had been tricked into breaking the once impregnable phalanx of spears; and it seemed that the lesser bull was trying to make amends for his mistake by offering battle to the

entire pack of wolves. Yet every move he made only increased the hazard of the herd, for the wolves, hanging on the outskirts of the herd, were looking for other hapless musk oxen to hamstring.

It seemed finally that Ol' Musky understood this, for as though at a command, the ring of lance points reformed; and with lowered heads—cows and yearlings in the compactly massed center of the herd—the bulls awaited the enemy.

All but the lesser bull who was the cause of the trouble! Outside the ring, although never going far from the protection of the others, he continued to rage up and down, offering battle to the elusive foe. The wolves, however, merely scampered clear of him, and hungrily kept the herd encircled, looking for an opportunity to repeat the coup they had effected.

So the battle went on, hour after hour; while the sun quickly reached its low zenith, and began sinking into the southwest. Hour after hour the battle waged, while Ol' Musky kept his formation intact despite the braggart thunderings of the lesser bull. And, then, suddenly, there came a change among the wolves.

As though at a word, all drew together, and for a long moment they stared fixedly to the eastward, while their keen noses wrinkled as they winnowed a new scent from the mild wind. Then, suddenly, they began to melt away, slowly at first, but increasing in speed as they put distance between themselves and the musk-oxen herd. Something was coming from the eastward; something which the wolves interpreted as a dread danger. In ten minutes they were out of sight among the snow-covered hogbacks. And then a low rise to the eastward, perhaps a mile away, was suddenly topped by the two Eskimo hunters and the dog team.

Okemow and Kenak stopped short at sight of that huddled ring of black forms. The Iliut men had scarcely counted upon musk oxen. Here, however, was a goodly herd of them. Verily, the gods of fortune smiled upon the hunters! At a word from Okemow, the dog team, which had likewise come to a halt, sprang forward. The Eskimos knew that their prey could not escape them. Even as the polar bear had done, even as had the wolves, the Iliut hunters foresaw feasting. They ran the *komitik* down within two hundred yards of the dark grenadiers, and came to a halt. Then they unharnessed the dogs, and dragged forth the long-bladed walrus spears.

Freed, the dogs sprang forward, and made a mock charge upon the embattled musk oxen, who met them in moveless silence, with lances still down. Just short of the herd, the dogs stopped and spread out. Like the wolves they were at heart, they understood that cunning was needed. Behind them, almost shoulder to shoulder, came the Eskimo hunters, spears at ready.

Presently the dogs saw the lesser bull, who had moved away from the ring, and now stood there, pawing the snow and rumbling defiance; and they seemed to take counsel among themselves. The Eskimos likewise marked the bull.

"Yonder is our prey, Tireless One," suggested Kenak, indicating the truculent bull. "The others will not flee, but will stand fast."

Okemow nodded, and they came closer, still with spears at ready. The dogs, sensing what was about to take place, and heartened by the presence of their masters, sprang forward, hair roughed and fangs showing.

The leader suddenly ran up close to the bull's head, as though he was about to seize the shaggy battler by the nose. While the leader did this, the other dogs closed in abruptly from

the rear; and just as the bull, his fury giving way at sight of the dog leader close to him, lunged forward with a coughing bellow, the rest of the team slashed at the ox's flanks.

The countermove seemed to disconcert him, for instead of following up pursuit of the dog leader, now dancing away, the bull swerved to attack the others. And as he did so, he presented his shaggy left shoulder for an instant to the Eskimo hunters.

There was a subdued, whistling sound; and then Okemow's spear was buried deeply in the bull's side. The thing had been done as accurately and neatly as though the Eskimo had fired with a rifle. Through thick skin and hair, through fat and flesh, the spearhead, its edges sharp as a razor, cleaved its way, split the heart, and the bull, with a grunt as of surprise, dropped to his knees. Slowly he rolled over on his side, while the jubilant Okemow tightened grip on the *babiche* thong, or line, which was fastened to the haft of the spear, preparing to drag it loose. But even as he jerked, there came a frantic cry from Kenak:

"Run—run! The Great One—he comes!"

For, Ol' Musky, the many misdeeds of the lesser bull forgiven, and seeing only in the stricken animal a herd member who had fallen to the enemy, had charged!

Like a catapult he hurled his six-hundred pounds of massive bone and muscle at the two Eskimos. Even as Kenak cried out, the Eskimo drove his own spear at the onrushing herd master; yet, although it went true, stuck deeply in Ol' Musky's chest, it was brushed aside, broke off short. Kenak had time only to leap aside, when Ol' Musky's left horn stabbed the air where the Eskimo had been. In the opposite direction sprang Okemow, and the veteran herd leader passed between the two men, pivoted on four feet, and came charging back.

Weaponless, for Kenak's spear was broken, and Okemow's was still fast in the bull who was down, the Eskimos were at a disadvantage. The snow was too deep for them to run swiftly, whereas Ol' Musky seemed capable of moving about with astonishing agility, his broad hoofs bearing him up. Yet they scattered; but at the rear of Okemow pounded the vindictive herd master, now a demon aroused. Closer and closer came the coughing, grunting bull, head low for the gore and toss.

And it was the dogs which saved Okemow. Whether they understood that their master was in danger, or whether they were merely stirred into pursuit at sight of the running bull, was unimportant; the big thing was that while two of them struck at his flanks, the leader and two others raced along abreast of him, now and then leaping for his nose, but never quite reaching it.

The aggravation was more than he could stand; and at the moment when he had almost overtaken Okemow, his irritation gave way, and he whirled to gore savagely at the maddening fiends about him. Still running, Okemow put distance between himself and the bull; and when Ol' Musky finally did recall the man, the latter was beyond the range of the bull's vision. Ol' Musky thereupon took to fighting the dogs.

Even that palled on him, however, for it became apparent to him that they were too agile. He lumbered back to his herd, where the other bulls had obediently maintained the solid ring of lance points. Half a mile away, Okemow was joined by Kenak; and the two Eskimos stood there, regarding the massed herd with mild wonder.

"He is not a beast, he is a devil,"

declared Kenak at last. "But for the dogs, Tireless One, there would be mourning in your igloo."

Okemow nodded. Too well he understood how close he had come to death, and the thing had impressed him.

"You are right, Kenak," he replied, still panting from his hard run. "It is no musk oxen, but the spirit of a devil in that form. We will wait."

And wait they did, until the brief arctic afternoon passed, and the night wind took on a more chill and biting edge. Gathered about them were the dogs, wondering, perhaps, why the masters no longer sought to kill the musk oxen. Without weapons, save the short skinning knives which would be useless against such a bulky monarch as Ol' Musky, the Eskimos had no other recourse. Besides, their sled and outfit were down there near the shaggy herd, and they dare not attempt to rescue it in the face of the herd leader's ill temper. They had visions of spending the night out here, without sleeping robes or shelter, save the snow house which they could quickly build.

In the end, however, it was Ol' Musky himself who saved them from that hardship; for, with all enemies defeated and withdrawn, the fury of the giant bull had cooled. The still forms of a bear, three trampled wolves, and four musk oxen—including the unruly bull who would no longer challenge Ol' Musky's' sovereignty—lay starkly out there in the snow. There was nothing left for him to fight for; Ol' Musky's triumph had been complete.

The herd milled about uncertainly. This spot was already stripped of what forage it had offered in the beginning, and they craved new pasture. They were hungry.

So, too, was their leader, for with head held low, and ignoring any pain he might have felt from the head of the Eskimo spear in his chest, he moved away, the herd following. Before he went, however, he paused at the still, dark form of the bull who had caused him so much trouble. Ol' Musky blew his steaming breath upon his late rival; a valediction, perhaps. Then he was gone with the herd.

And when the night had swallowed Ol' Musky and his band, the Eskimos went down to the scene of the battle, and were reminded that not always to the victor belong the spoils. For here was meat a-plenty, more than they could haul on their single *komitik*. There would be feasting in the Iliut village, when the hunters returned, with what they could pack of the carcasses of four musk oxen. Of all who had preyed on the musk-oxen herd, and whom Ol' Musky had successively defeated, only the hopes of the Iliuts came true.

DISCOVERY OF ABORIGINAL CANAL

DISCOVERY has recently been made of a New Mexican relic of antiquity that was apparently used in prehistoric times. The report comes from Alamogordo, New Mexico, that foresters, working in the Lincoln National Forest, came across a crude irrigation canal, which was to all appearances the work of aboriginal hands.

The canal is believed once to have been a channel in the earth that carried water to a prehistoric town. It is three quarters of a mile long, and leads from a small spring. Apparently there had been no water in the ditch for many years, although sedimentary deposits made by flowing water were in evidence.

Three on the Trail

By Max Brand

Author of "The Path to Plunder," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A BIRD AND HIS FEATHERS.

THE landlord leaned in the doorway. He had not paused to knock, but, softly turning the knob, had let the draft carry the door wide. Now he was able to observe his guest seated in shirt sleeves at the pine table between the cot and the window. He observed that the shirt was silk; also that it was so frayed that one elbow appeared in view, while James Geraldi, otherwise known as "Slim Jim," manipulated a pack of cards.

Even the harsh eye of the landlord was enchanted by the skill of the youth. The fifty-two separate cards in his fingers became one liquid unit. His shuffling made no sound other than a light whispering, so dexterously could he mix the pack. Now he dealt, saying softly: "You lose—I lose—he wins."

The deal completed, he flipped the five-card hands face up, withdrew the useless ones, and then smoothly transformed a pair to a full house, three of a kind to four, and a useless flush of four to a most useful flush of five.

He gathered in the cards again, and again he shuffled with the same noiseless grace.

However, the landlord had seen enough: "You lose, kid!" he announced harshly.

Slim Jim moved neither head nor hands, but he tucked his feet quietly behind the front legs of his chair, so that he was prepared to spring up in any direction, in case of need.

After this, he turned leisurely his head and surveyed his host with an inviting smile. He was a handsome fellow, this Geraldi, with blue eyes and blue-black hair and a flashing white smile. He possessed the lazy, feline beauty of a black leopard which looks vaguely through the bars of its cage. But suppose that the bars were down—what then?

The landlord thought of this as the calm, contented eyes of his guest turned upon him. But, on the other

hand, he had some confidence in breadth of shoulder and downright weight, even if a vast deal of that weight was concentrated in the region of the stomach. Moreover, in case of need there was a hard lump in his right hip pocket, a pocket specially fashioned to accommodate a long-barreled blue-nosed Colt revolver.

So he ventured into the room, but only a single step.

"Sit down, Mr. Chalmers," said Slim Jim. "Sit down and take a little hand with me!"

"Kid," said the big man, "I've been watchin' your deal, and I see that you've got the conscience of a buzzard, or a hungry coyote. But I would like to know, since you can do all those things, why you ain't rich, instead of owing me three weeks for this room?"

"I'll tell you the answer," said Geraldi with a sigh, and in his velvet voice. "I've wasted most of the years of my life."

"You have? And doing what, kid?"

"Working," said Geraldi, and sighed again.

The landlord started to laugh, but he ended with a grunt that was not a pleasant sound.

"Wasted your time working, eh? Is that work, me son?"

"Ah," said the other, "but this is a recent discovery of mine! This is a talent which I never thought of using until I came to your charming old city, Mr. Chalmers."

"You've had three weeks to work this charming old city," growled Chalmers, "but I ain't seen any rent paid down."

"That's because there is only one defect in this graceful old town," said Slim Jim.

"And what's that?"

"There are no suckers in this place," said Geraldi. "There are no suckers, plain or flowering. Solomon was the grandpa of every man here. And certainly," he added, peering at the formidable bulk and the keen face of the big man, "and certainly he must have been yours, Mr. Chalmers!"

The landlord admitted the effect of this compliment with a chuckle which shook his deep bosom. It rumbled like far-off thunder. However, it did not soften his mood for a moment. He immediately answered: "I've waited long enough. I never would have waited this long, except that the old woman dunned you before, and you turned her fool head around. If she didn't come to me this morning and try to get money to lend you!"

He leered at Slim Jim, and then chuckled again.

"Pay or jail, kid," said he.

"Very well," sighed Geraldi. "I'll arrange the payment this afternoon."

"You will not, me lad. You'll arrange it pronto, now."

The sleepiness of Geraldi's eyes disappeared for a moment. He raised his head a little, and for an instant there was a yellow gleam as he looked at the big man. He banished that expression with care and made himself smile again.

"You mustn't be too hard," said he. "You simply must remember that I've had a long streak of bad luck. The worst sort of bad fortune, you know!"

"Good fortune for the suckers, though," grinned the landlord.

"I could find the little fellows, quickly enough," said Slim Jim. "But I don't want to catch minnows. I want full-sized fish. One fills a basket. I don't want fools, either. A hard-boiled sucker is the variety that I'm after, Mr. Chalmers."

"You want to skin the sharpers, eh?" said Chalmers.

"I am a frigate bird, so to speak," said Slim Jim.

"And what's that?" asked Chalmers, interested in spite of himself.

"A frigate bird," said the guest, "is

a bird which hasn't much bulk, d'you see"—here he stretched himself, and then seemed to wave away the significance of his hundred and sixty or seventy pounds of supple muscle—"very little bulk, but chiefly wings and beak and talons."

"I get part of that," agreed the host, considering the boy narrowly.

"It is constantly on the wing," said the boy.

"I guess you don't sit on the nest very often," commented Chalmers.

"It never rests on the waters, and yet it lives on fish—like me."

"How does it catch 'em," said the landlord, highly intrigued. He had a deep-rooted interest in natural history, like most idle fellows.

"You must understand that in the part of the world where the frigate bird lives there are many varieties of fishing hawks and other fishing birds. They make their catch and rise heavily with it. Then the frigate bird drops off a cloud and flashes his talons in their eyes. They drop their fish. The frigate bird dips down through the air and takes it again, one wriggle from the sea. And there he is with his dinner!"

Mr. Chalmers scratched his chin.

"You rate yourself that high?" he asked.

Geraldi smiled his flashing smile, though his eyes remained as sleepily dull as ever.

"I take my chances," said he.

"And wear out your shirt, eh?" concluded the other.

"Practice makes perfect," amended the frigate bird.

"Young fella—me lad," said Mr. Chalmers, "there's some sharks due to come down here from the mines, any day, after they've lifted the month's pay off the miners. How would you come off with 'em?"

"I came into these waters," said the frigate bird, "specially to meet them."

"There ain't a dirty trick of the card game that they don't know, and if they spotted you at anything, they'd shoot the smile off your face, kid!"

"There's danger in everything," replied Geraldi. "There's danger of blood poisoning from a pin prick, or a falling brick, or a stumble in the dark, or, for that matter, a mouthful of bread may choke one."

Chalmers chuckled.

"Dog-gone me if that line don't make me ache for the old days," he said, "because I used to hear it slung, here and there!" He added: "I've spent my time with the sharks, too, I don't mind saying. But I settled down. Bullets and the rope finished off too much brains, from what I saw. I settled down. And now, Slim Jim, I'll take that money."

"As a matter of fact," said Slim Jim, rising to argue the point—and wonderfully graceful were his motions, and wonderfully leisurely—"as a matter of fact, I could pay you double, as soon as the flood comes down from the hills!"

Chalmers spread his legs and thrust his hands into his pockets, thereby revealing a dingy vest, decorated with a heavy golden chain.

"Don't take me for a fool or a sucker, kid," said he. "Not plain sucker, nor flowering!"

Slim Jim sighed.

"Do you insist, really?" he asked.

"I'll cut the yapping short," declared Chalmers. "Just step to the window and look down in front of the hotel."

His guest complied. He leaned from the window and scanned the roofs of the town, for he was in the third story of the hotel. A whirlpool of dust formed down the street and swept furiously away. It caught a group of children coming back from school for lunch and threw them into a confusion of flying papers, shouts, laughter.

The frigate bird smiled gently upon them.

"They have grand children in this town," said he.

"Does he look like a child?" asked the landlord, who had come to the window in turn. He called the attention of Slim Jim to a wide, thick man who sat on the edge of the watering trough, at that moment biting a chew from a plug of tobacco.

"That's Dick Wing," he explained. "He keeps this town in order. D'you think that he could keep you?"

"He looks very rough," said the gentle Geraldi.

"Looks ain't nothin' to what he is," declared Chalmers. "On the side, he collects my bills—from dead beats, frigate birds, and such!"

He chuckled at his jest.

The frigate bird sighed again.

"How much do I owe you?"

"You know very well."

"I really don't."

"Three weeks at sixteen bucks a week is forty-eight, and twenty-seven for extras makes——"

"Twenty-seven for extras!" murmured Slim Jim, opening his lazy eyes a trifle.

"Well," complained the landlord, "can you have extra steaks, and roast chicken at a buck and a half a roast, and broiled ducks, and cream in your coffee three times a day, and then kick at a measly extra twenty-seven?"

"I suppose not! I suppose not!" murmured Slim Jim.

"Well, I don't want to make any trouble about it. I detest arguments. So here you are!"

He took from his pocket several bills, and the eyes of the landlord opened wide upon them. Into his fat hand were counted four twenty-dollar greenbacks.

"Well—well!" murmured Chalmers. Then he began to fumble vaguely. "I owe you five bucks, besides," said he.

"It's quite all right," answered the frigate bird. "Keep that for the good service, the clean floors, the well-washed windows, and the respectable atmosphere of your hotel, Mr. Chalmers. You're very welcome."

Chalmers recognized the irony, but he merely grinned.

"Look here, kid," said he, "tell me why you held out so hard? Did you think that you could beat me in the finish? Did you think that you could talk me out of seventy-five iron men?"

The fact is," said the frigate bird, "that I always hate to reduce my working capital below a certain figure."

"Sure," grinned the landlord. "A bird has got to have feathers, eh?"

And he turned from the room, while Slim Jim, stepping to the window, shied out of it a well-worn pigskin wallet. It took the air beautifully, and skimmed to rest on the gutter of a roof across the street. After that, he glided to the door and locked it.

CHAPTER II.

A BIRD IN HIS FLIGHT.

HE hardly had accomplished this before there was a thundering at the door, and the handle rattled as it was being turned frantically back and forth.

"You—hey!—you yella dog!" shouted the landlord.

Geraldi went to the cupboard at the side of the room, opened it, and swept out an armful of clothes. These he sorted with speed, going through them with some slight attention to each garment.

"Hey, Geraldi!" yelled the landlord.

"Yes? Yes?" said Geraldi cheerfully. "Is that you, Mr. Chalmers?"

This polite inquiry seemed to madden the big man.

"Is it me? Is it me?" he bellowed. "You dead beat—you sneak thief! Open that door, and I'll show!"

He hurled his weight at the door.

Not another barrier in the hotel would have withstood that assault, but it so happened that this door was newly restored and of stout new wood. Even so it shook and gave under the battering.

The frigate bird watched the door with the calmest unconcern, but when it seemed on the point of yielding, he took out from some part of his clothing—with a gesture far too fast to be followed—a full-sized .45-caliber Colt and weighed it for a thoughtful instant in his hand.

In that instant a trained observer—such as the landlord, for instance—could have noted that there was neither rear nor front sight to blemish the smooth and polished barrel of the gun; neither was there a trigger hinging in the trigger guard. The very hammer of the Colt had been filed and rubbed so that it would give the least friction to a rapid touch.

Slim Jim, noting that the door promised to hold out against the weight of the landlord, restored the gun to its former place, and again the speed of that motion baffled the eye. He continued to sort his clothes, while Chalmers boomed:

"Are you gunna open this here door? If you don't, I'll hang you in my backyard like a stray dog!"

"Tut, tut!" murmured the youth. "Are stray dogs hanged in this town, Mr. Chalmers?"

Another roar answered this pleasant remark, and then Chalmers was heard crashing down the hall. His voice thundered in the distance: "Here, you Mike and Pete! Watch that door till I can get help up here. I'm gunna jus' nacherally kill that sneak!"

His footfall banged on the stairs, descending, and the frigate bird, having gone through all his effects and apparently having decided that none of them were worth a delay or the care of transport, sauntered to the window and sat on the edge of the sill. There he rolled and lighted a cigarette, and saw his host dart out from the entrance to the hotel, seize on the bull-like man who waited at the watering trough, and with him reënter the building.

At the same time, his resounding voice had echoed throughout the neighborhood, and women and children and men began to run out and stand gaping at windows or doors. Distinctly, Geraldi heard a frightened woman across the street wailing that there was going to be another murder in the hotel.

Still Geraldi retained his place on the sill.

He waited until the charge of the assailants was rolling down the upper hallway. Then he snapped the cigarette through the window and sat up with his weight resting largely on his hands. There was not a trace of lazy indifference about him now, and the misty blue of his eyes was shot with dangerous yellow.

He seemed to know exactly what all his surroundings were, and when the moment came for action, he did not delay. He stood up on the sill of the window. Below him dropped three sheer stories to the dusty ground. Above him there was the small molding over the window head, and several feet higher the roof projected on untrimmed rafters. Between those rafters and the crossboards which supported the shingles was a slight gap—sufficient to admit the grip of a hand around the beams.

All these things must have been noted long before by Geraldi, for he set to work at once. At one corner the molding of the window-head had slightly warped away from the wall of the house. In this he fixed the grip of his left hand. With the spring of his legs and the thrust of his left arm, he drove himself suddenly high up and gripped his right hand around the pro-

jecting rafter. There he dangled, while an hysterical yell rang up and down the street beneath him.

He had removed himself from the window, but his position seemed hopeless.

He shifted his grip farther out, to the very end of the rafter. Then he swung his body to the side and twitched a leg over the gutter of the roof edge.

He tested its strength with two convulsive jerks. When it held, he gave it his entire weight, and instantly he was over the rim of the gutter and lying along it at full length, while a wild cheer came from the watchers.

At the same instant the heads of the man of the law and the landlord were thrust out the window.

"Where is he?" roared Chalmers.

A wave of noise answered him, but presently pointing hands indicated the roof, and Chalmers snarled with satisfaction.

"I'm gunna shoot that bird right off of the roof, Dick," said he to the man of the law. "There ain't any place that he can go to!"

And he turned to run down to the street level again.

In the meantime young Geraldi stood erect, one foot on the slanting roof, one in the gutter. There, poised dizzily, he looked about him, dusting his hands, and then waving gracefully to the noise in the street as though he accepted and acknowledged the applause.

He was on the highest summit of Sankeytown, and from it he could look over the roofs everywhere, and beyond to the hills north and west, and the shimmering desert in both other directions, with the bright gleam of the railroad tracks disappearing in the distance.

He passed now along the roof to the side of it and halted there an instant to consider again.

The next house was a story short of the height of the hotel, and therefore the roof lay ten feet below the level at which he was standing. Moreover, there was a ten-foot gap between the two projecting edges. However, as he surveyed the gap, Geraldi nodded in content.

He retraced a few steps along the gutter and then turned and ran forward. Those who watched, gasping and chattering comments, now grew silent. Faces were strained, eyes bulged, until Geraldi, reaching the side of the roof, bounded high from the gutter and drove through the empty air.

Then all throats were loosed. There was a cheer from the men who saw that feat; there was a scream from the women.

When he lost the momentum of his leap, he dropped his feet, which he had carried tucked well up. His legs dangling, his arms trailing above his head, he fell toward the lower roof.

All who watched expected surely that the shock would throw him, on the rebound, from the sharply slanted roof line and down to the ground below, where only Providence could keep him from a broken neck. However, he fell loosely, and lay in a limp heap for an instant. It seemed that he must have snapped every bone in his body, but the next moment he had risen again and was traveling rapidly, on all fours, up the slope until he topped the ridge of the house.

There he poised himself. Volleys and boomings of applause washed up to him, and Geraldi, removing his hat, bowed profoundly to either side, his hand over his heart, his feet perched precariously on the rooftree of the building.

And here Chalmers, running from the front entrance of the hotel and lurching far into the street, saw his quarry.

"By heck, he *is* a bird!" yelled Chalmers. "But here's where I bag him!"

He snapped up his gun for the shot,

but Geraldi was dropping as the weapon exploded, and no one who watched could be sure that the pursued had slipped down to safety, or fallen with the shock of the .45-caliber slug that would roll him down the steep incline and send him hurtling to the ground in the back yard of the house.

CHAPTER III.

A LUCKY DAY.

ORDINARILY, no one could have been more sure of his marksmanship than was big Chalmers, of the hotel. However, in this case the distance was a bit far for a revolver, and his heavy panting after rushing up and downstairs several times, might well have thrown his shot out of line.

From the crowd he had little help. Chalmers was by no means popular, for every one knew that his money had been gained, as he had confessed to Geraldi, among the sharks and the sharpers until fear of the law at last made him retire to quieter ways. He was a good deal of a bully, as well, and therefore, not knowing what crime could be laid against Slim Jim, the townsmen put their hearts behind his escape and stirred not a hand to help the pursuers.

However, Chalmers had with him the man of the law, a practiced and relentless fighter. He had, moreover, a crew of waiters, stablemen, and bartenders to follow at his heels.

This army he directed swiftly to proceed in two flying wings, one around one side of the neighboring house, and one around the other.

"He's picked my pocket of a thousand bucks!" said Chalmers, frothing with rage. "I'm gunna pick his bones! Boys, I'll pay a hundred to the gent that drops him!"

They needed no encouragement. There is something in a hunt that draws all men forward, whether the quarry be a fox or a human. They sprinted around the adjoining house. There was no sign of the fugitive either on the slanting roof on that side or writhing in the back yard.

"He got down onto the roof of that shed!" yelled Chalmers. "He's on a hoss, by now. Run, can't you, run!"

Run they did. But when they tore open the door of the horse shed, they found a startled horse in each of the four stalls. There was no Geraldi in the haymow above. There was no Geraldi in the woodshed behind. There was no mark of his feet in the alley to the rear of the yard.

For Geraldi had found a skylight on the far side of the roof, to the rear. It was not a new discovery. For every good general, even on ground where he does not expect to fight a battle, is sure to consider means of retreat and proper lines thereof, just as he is sure to consider means of advance and attack upon the enemy.

He now went straight to the skylight, and found it locked.

But from inside his coat he drew a short bar. It was neither thick nor heavy, but it was made of the finest steel money could buy, and one end was sharpened to a chisel edge. This edge he drove into the crack, and presently the skylight was turned back on its hinges. Geraldi peered down at a dusty ladder, and this he descended into a narrow attic room, piled at the sides with boxes and old trunks, all generously layered over with such dust as blew from the desert during a sandstorm and had penetrated the cracks of the skylight above.

The door to this room was locked, as the skylight had been, but this time Geraldi did not draw the steel bar. He allowed the jimmy to remain in the lining of his coat and took from his pocket a narrow little blade of steel, tough and supple. This he passed into the lock, and worked for a moment,

his eyes closed, his whole being concentrated in the sense of touch. After a brief moment the lock turned, gave forth a rusty squeak, and young Geraldi stepped into a narrow hall, very dim even at midday.

He passed down its length, descended a flight of steps, and found himself on the second floor of the building. At the same moment, heavy footfalls beat up the stairs, and Geraldi noiselessly opened the first door behind him.

One glance assured him that it was empty, and he stepped inside and closed the door behind him. He touched the key, as though to lock it, but changed his mind and waited.

Several men had climbed into the hallway. He heard the loud bellow of Chalmers:

"I'm gunna search every room of this house! Beg pardon, Mrs. Asprey, I gotta find a low hound that picked my pocket of a thousand-dollar roll!"

Geraldi, at that, conjured the revolver into his hand once more.

"I wouldn't use a gun," said the voice of a woman.

He whirled to the side, a very dangerous man indeed, now, and that yellow glimmer was flickering back into his blue eyes.

He saw that the speaker was sitting in the farther corner of the room. Chintz curtains draped the two windows, and the dress she wore was of such a bright and cheerful pattern that it went with the curtains perfectly. He was not surprised that he had not noticed her when he first entered. Or, she might have been standing in the window niche, and stepped out to the chair while he was at the door, listening.

Two things seemed wonderful to Geraldi. The first was that, being a woman, she should be so composed; the second was that any creature on the old face of this man-stained world should be so fresh, so beautiful.

He drank all the picture in with that first wild, threatening glance. Her hair was red gold; her eyes were blue as his own; and her slender hands, folded in her lap, seemed too transparent to be mere flesh.

She did not wince under his stare, and that could have been the third marvel to Geraldi, for though in his short days he had wandered over most parts of this globe, he had only met men two or three who could bear the full weight of his glance. And those men, two or three, had not lived to talk afterward of their daring and their nerve.

"I wouldn't use that," she repeated.

"No," answered Geraldi in a voice as soft as her own, "you're quite right. He's not worth killing. Besides, it wouldn't do much good."

He fled across the room with a soundless step that a dancer would have envied. Out the window he glanced and noted a climbing vine which raised its strong stalk along the wall of the house. At that instant a hand beat on the door of the room. Geraldi in the split second revolved two thoughts in his mind.

One was to leap through the window and go sailorlike down the vine. But was it not far more than probable that, before he reached the ground, a bullet would drive downward through his brain? It would be better to whirl about and fill that doorway with a heap of dead bodies.

And yet instinct made him do neither. He slipped in behind the curtain and waited there, while the door was thrown wide, and three or four men rushed in.

He heard big Chalmers booming furiously.

"Fast but careful, boys. That bird will shoot your eyes out, if he's cornered! Hey, hello, Miss Asprey! I didn't see you. Did anything come in here, last couple of minutes?"

"I don't know what you mean," said

the girl, with apparent wonder in her voice.

"A man—a slim-looking, handsome gent with black hair—slick and fast—did he come in here?"

"Oh, no!" she answered.

"You been here right along?"

"Yes. I've been here reading."

"He couldn't've slipped in without you seeing?"

Miss Asprey laughed.

"I tell you, ma'am," cried Chalmers, "that gent can move like a shadow!"

"No shadow has come in here," said she with decision.

And Geraldi heard the scrape of her chair, as she pushed it back—no doubt to rise.

It did not seem strange to him. Somehow he had known that she would shelter him, and he took what she said for granted. And yet her perfect poise, her calm indifference to the noise and the excitement of Chalmers and his bloodhounds seemed wonderful to Geraldi. He was almost tempted to peer out from behind the curtain in order to watch her face as she confronted the others.

"That's all!" said Chalmers suddenly. "Get out of this, boys. Sorry, Miss Asprey!"

They retreated.

"Search every corner. He's *got* to be here!" Chalmers was roaring in the hall.

It was the cue for Geraldi to step forth from his hiding place, but he kept in cover, instinct ruling him again.

And suddenly the door was cast open. The draft it let in fanned back the curtain into the face of Geraldi, and he knew that his feet must be showing beneath the edge of it.

"Well?" said the quiet voice of the girl.

"I'm sorry," snarled Chalmers. "But there ain't nothin' like makin' sure."

He withdrew, and the door banged this time with decision.

So Geraldi moved from behind the curtain.

He crossed the floor with no more noise than a blowing leaf, and full as silently, cautiously, he turned the key in the lock.

Then he turned to the girl.

"That's that!" said he.

She was resting two rounded elbows on the polished surface of a little table, and watching him with her head tilted a little on one side. But what amazed him was to see that there was the faintest of smiles upon her lips.

"You're having a grand time of it, aren't you?" she asked him.

Slim Jim smiled broadly in turn.

"It was rather a close thing," he admitted. "But a nose is as good as a length, isn't it?"

"Of course it is," replied the girl, "if no one protests the winner."

He bit his lip.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked him. "You seem to be tired."

He took a chair close to her. *He* did not thank her. He did not ask her why she had spoken for him. Such questions seemed to be quite out of place at the moment.

She continued to look at him with interested and kindly eyes.

"This is a lucky day for me," said she. "I've been watching you for days, and hoping that I could talk with you."

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THE BIRD LEARNED TO FLY.

THE frigate bird found himself at a stand. How she could have seen him while she remained invisible was to him a miracle, for there was little that escaped his eye, hardly more than escaped the glance of the bird whose character he claimed. So he made no answer, except to bow to her a little,

and then waited. One could have said that it was a respectful distance which he kept from her. On the other hand, it might have been set down as the attitude of one who expects commands. But the girl interpreted this silence in neither of these ways.

She said, with that faint smile of hers: "I peeped out the window and saw you one morning as you were sauntering downtown. And then I asked about you."

The frigate bird smiled in turn, a dry, ironical smile which gave not the slightest hint of kindness to his eyes. It merely sharpened them to a more penetrating keenness.

"I couldn't learn very much," she went on. "And I've been waiting and hoping that I could see you."

"I am glad," said Geraldi, "that you happened to be in when I called."

They even smiled together, now. He was sure that she was not so frank as she seemed; indeed, that she was letting out only so much as she had to say. Also it was evident that she did tell the truth when she said that she wanted to see him. There was something both eager and critical in her glance; it reminded him of the face of a horse dealer at a fair, one about to buy, eager to buy, but kept in check by unknown reservations.

Geraldi grew more interested with the passing of every moment.

"I suppose you guess," she went on quietly, "that I wanted to see you because I had need of some one?"

He bowed to her again.

"We may not have much time," she continued. "You know that we may be interrupted—though really I hope that you're safe here. May I begin to ask questions?"

"Of course you may," said Geraldi heartily.

"To begin with—you're not employed?"

"No, I'm not. Except in getting away from Chalmers—and you've taken that off my hands."'

"You may not be through with him yet," she warned him. "I know a good deal about Mr. Chalmers. But if you are free, I am going to ask you if you would undertake some very hard work for me?"

He closed his eyes as though the words gave him pain.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I never have worked in my life," said Geraldi plaintively.

She leaned back in her chair and laughed at him; not entirely in amusement, but in delight, for it seemed that for an unknown reason his answer had been just what she wanted. A wave of noise ran across the street; they could distinguish the bull voice of Chalmers roaring, and others answering him.

"He's going quite mad," said the girl. "What did you do to him?"

"I picked his pocket. Of a thousand dollars, he says. I really haven't counted it."

In spite of her self-control, that answer made her flush and compress her lips a little; but Geraldi lifted his head higher and regarded her with perfect calm.

"You had something against him, however?" she tried to explain his action to herself.

"He was going to jail me for a three weeks' bill. That was all. I paid him with his own money."

The flush had died from her cheeks, now, and she nodded a little; not that she agreed with the morality of this action, but that it seemed to interest her and give her a certain amount of satisfaction.

"You've never worked," she said. "But still you've had to live."

"Yes, I've managed to do that."

"Do you mind a great many questions?"

"You have a right to ask 'em," said

the frigate bird. "I'm glad to answer. For a while, at least."

"Well, if you've never worked, what *have* you done?"

"Picked pockets, for instance," said Geraldi, with a little lift of his head again.

"You're ashamed of that, though. I think I see that you're ashamed of that!"

"Perhaps I am," he admitted. "But I learned young."

"How young?"

"Seven."

"Really at seven?"

"Yes."

"That's dreadful! I beg your pardon. I mean, it seems dreadful to me!"

"You've read 'Oliver Twist?' "

"Yes. Was it like that?"

"I found a 'Fagin.' Otherwise, it wasn't a bit the same."

"Why do you say that?"

"Oliver was a good little boy. He cried when he had to pick pockets, I believe."

She nodded.

"I didn't cry," said Geraldi. "I was perfectly at ease. I loved it!"

He chuckled a little.

"I used to be a newsboy. I used to dress up in rags and tatters and work the afternoon crowd of business men and the evening crowd of theatergoers. Not going *to* the shows, but afterward. That's the time to get 'em."

"Why should it be?"

"Every one feels pretty good. The women because they've seen some pretty dresses or had a laugh or a cry. The men because they're better off than the poor fellows they've seen on the stage."

"But how did their state of mind help you? Would they give you more —tips?"

Geraldi grew red.

"I've never begged," he said shortly. Then he enlarged with perfect ease and good-nature. "I've done everything else, I suppose. But I meant to point out that when people are happy they're blind. You want to keep a dog hungry to have the best of his eyes or his nose."

She narrowed her eyes a little, looking deeply into the truth of this.

"But you found a good home, eventually?"

"Yes, I did."

"And then it was broken up?"

"I was an under butler for two years—studying the ways and words of the upper set," said Geraldi.

Her eyes flashed—as though that explained a very great deal to her.

"Yet," she said, "I suspect that you've seen a good deal more than the service side of—polite life?"

"Oh, yes!" said Geraldi, with an open-handed gesture. "Oh, yes, I've been a gentleman for months at a time, when I could afford it."

He looked back into the past and nodded slowly.

"I've hunted in Leicestershire, you know. And one winter on the Riviera I nearly married a rich countess. An Italian countess, I should say."

"Are they different?"

"Very!"

"But you didn't marry her, after all. Did you run out of funds?"

"No. As a matter of fact, I still had more than half of a very expensive diamond necklace."

"Why didn't you marry her, then?" asked the lady.

"She had a mustache," sighed Geraldi.

"Did some one give you that diamond necklace?"

"Some one's steel safe gave it to me," said Geraldi. "That was a grand night!"

A sort of professional enthusiasm burned in him.

"It was a triple safe," said he. "I drilled the first shell. I blew the sec-

ond. And, after the crash, there was the third lock looking me in the face."

He shook his head and laughed with pleasure at the memory.

"No one had heard it, though?"

"Ah, yes," answered Geraldi. "That was the point. Doors began to slam, and stairs began to creak, while I was on my knees with my ear against the combination, trying to hear the tumblers fall."

"You *did* open it?"

"That was how I got the necklace. It was in the first drawer. I didn't have a chance to open any others!"

Their talk halted for a moment.

"You've picked pockets, and you've picked safes. Have you done a great many other things?"

"I'm a fair hand with a pen," said Geraldi. "And then I've fiddled about with smaller matters. I've even been in a circus."

"Really in a circus?"

"I was only a boy," said Geraldi. "As a matter of fact, I was with the circus four years, doing trick riding and shooting, with a few acrobatics and a little juggling on the side."

"Even juggling!" said the girl.

He took a narrow metal case from his pocket, pressed a spring, and a long, delicate blade leaped into view. He spun the poniard into the air and caught it on the tip of a finger as it came down.

"It's really much harder than it looks," said Geraldi.

He threw it again. It spun up in such swift circles that it looked like a dim dish of silver, a silver shadow, a silver mist. And again he caught it on a finger tip and balanced it adroitly.

"You could make a very good living, doing such things," she said.

"Not a gentleman's living," said he.

Then he summed up: "That's the story. I could give you a few proofs, if you cared to have them."

"Oh, not at all, thank you."

"Very well. Now that you know what I can do, tell me how I can help you." He added: "I haven't mentioned cards. They came rather late in my life."

"You mean——"

"Crooked cards, of course."

"Marked?"

"Yes. I can mark them, or run them up. Stack the pack, I mean. Do you understand?"

The girl looked down to the floor and sighed.

Then: "You've had your hands on fortunes!"

"Time and again."

"But here you are in a little Western town! And not very prosperous, it seems?"

"The fact is that I've never had a stake quite big enough to serve as principal; I've simply enjoyed very fat interest, from time to time. When that was spent—and I have expensive tastes—then I had to start again. But I was born in the West, and therefore I keep coming back to it. Besides, when one is fairly constantly on the wing, one's trail begins to loop across a good deal of the world."

"You've been in a great many places?"

"Hundreds. Yes, of course."

"England and France, it seems? And Italy, too!"

"And Germany and Russia."

"Really?"

"And a dip into Africa. A time in India."

"What could you have been doing there?"

"Shooting tigers," said Geraldi, "and studying."

"What?"

"How to live without working."

"Like a Brahman, you mean?"

"No, just the opposite."

She chuckled. Her pleasure seemed greater than ever in this odd confession.

"Other places, too?"

"I hunted a great mare in Arabia, and I hunted a great pearl in the South Sea Islands. Those are the main parts of my travels."

"You've crowded a great deal into a young life, it seems to me! Languages, too, I have no doubt?"

"Yes. Half a dozen. One of them dead, I'm proud to say."

"But how could you do it? Unless you have a photographic brain!"

"Not a bit. But in my sort of life there's always a great deal of spare time. You know what kills most men?"

"Well?"

"Eight hours a day in an office. Two hours more, to go and come, another couple of hours doing nothing—or something foolish—in order to relax. That's twelve hours out of twenty-four. You can see that they haven't much time left to live in!"

"I never thought of that," admitted the girl.

"Whereas every moment of my life is my own, unless I'm being hounded by the law."

"Has that happened very often?"

"A dozen times or so. I mean, a dozen times or so when the detectives hung to the trail a long time."

"But you always got away?"

"Always. I know the jungle!"

"What does that mean?"

"The underworld. There's a Paris jungle, a London jungle, a Manhattan jungle. Then there's the jungle that runs back and forth across this country. Along the railroads one can disappear."

She sat up straight.

"You've done a great deal of flying from pursuit. Did you ever do any pursuing?"

"Tons of it," he answered carelessly.

"Why should you? Were you taking the law on your shoulders and helping it out?"

"I was enforcing my own private laws."

"I don't understand that."

"Usually I've worked alone. But now and again one has to take in a partner. And almost always the partner tries to double cross one in the end."

"Do they really?"

"Of course they do! Then one has to get on the trail to get what is one's own."

"I can understand that. It must be dreadfully difficult."

"It is. That's how I went to India, in the first place."

"On a trail?"

"Yes. It started from a little town in Saskatchewan. In two months that trail looped into South America, to the Azores, to Cape Town, to Bombay, and toward Calcutta. It ended before Calcutta came."

She, watching him closely, thought that she saw a faint trace of dim-yellow, dangerous light in his eyes. She had seen it once before, when he had turned, gun in hand, toward the door of the room, and she recognized the motive.

"Well," she said, "I thought at first that it wouldn't work out. But I begin to think that it may. That's what I've hoped for. I mean, that's what I'd want to ask you to do. To run down a trail for me."

He had no time to answer. There was a rapid, crisp knock at the door, and then the handle turned impatiently, as though there was some one in the hall who had a right to enter.

"That's mother," said the girl.

The frigate bird was already at the curtains.

"No—you'd better not," said Miss Asprey. "I want you to face it out, if you will!"

He looked steadily at her.

"Certainly," said Geraldi.

And she went to unlock the door.

CHAPTER V.

A MAN WITHOUT FEAR.

MRS. ASPREY entered, in a whirl. She was just the opposite of her daughter, who appeared to Geraldi neither tall nor short, neither fat nor too slender; whereas her mother was decidedly short. She had the head and neck of a girl, except when the light showed the wrinkles of forty-two; but the rest of her was much too big, so that she gasped and had to talk short after the exertion of walking up the stairs. Upon the heaving bosom of Mrs. Asprey a necklace flashed; and as she clasped her hands, jewels glittered on them.

"Louise!" she gasped. "Did you ever hear of such a thing? Did you ever hear? Did you ever dream? They came crashing right through our house! They didn't even ring the front-door bell! I'm going to have Cousin Edgar simply—simply—did you ever hear of such a thing, Louise?"

"Mr. Chalmers," began the girl.

"The—the creature!" said Mrs. Asprey. "The—the unspeakable *thing!* As though any one would dare to come into our house—except the lawless rabble themselves who——"

"But some one did come," said the girl.

"Louise!"

"Yes."

"It can't be! How do you know? Where could he have gone in this house?"

"Will you promise not to scream?" asked the girl.

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"He came into my room."

"Ah-h-h!" shrilled the mother, immediately breaking her word. "Louise! Do you mean it? Here? In this room! How frightful! What did you do? Did you scream? Did you faint? Did he take anything? Child, where's your jewel box?"

"I don't know," said Louise.

"You don't know!"

"But there's the man," said Louise.

Mrs. Asprey turned. Her daughter had placed herself conveniently near, and, therefore, Mrs. Asprey was able to support herself by clutching the strong young shoulder of the girl.

"Gracious heavens! Gracious heavens! Gracious heavens!' said Mrs. Asprey. "What must we do, Louise? What must we do? Must we put up our hands? Will he shoot us?"

She supported herself still with one hand on Louise; the other hand she raised as far as possible above her head.

A door closed downstairs.

"There's Cousin Edgar now," said the girl. Hadn't you better call him in?"

"How dare I stir!" moaned Mrs. Asprey.

"He won't hurt you at all," said her daughter. "But you might as well call in Cousin Edgar soon."

Mrs. Asprey, her eyes and her mouth opened wide, moved sidelong toward the door, and when she was close to it, she toppled through, half leaping and half falling. At once her scream diminished down the hall, down the stairs, as she cried: "Cousin Edgar! Cousin Edgar!"

"I'm sorry," said the girl, "but there was no better way of having her meet you. It would have been just as much of a shock, no matter how I'd managed it. You'll find Cousin Edgar —different!"

She said that with a significant little pause after the name; but what the pause meant, Geraldi could not make out. He was growing a little nervous, under his cool exterior, for it seemed to him that the screams of Mrs. Asprey were loud enough to rouse the entire household.

Presently that lady's voice was heard moaning and gasping and chattering

up the hall again, and a deep, smooth bass voice was reassuring her.

"Well, well, well! We'll see about it! We'll see all about it. Dear Cousin Olivetta, trust it to me. My shoulders are broad enough to carry greater burdens than this, I trust!".

"Oh, Edgar!" cried Mrs. Asprey in a passion of relief and gratitude, "how could we live without you? How could we exist at all without you? How could *I* live without you?"

They came into the room, and Geraldi saw a big, smooth, pale man, not fleshy enough to be encumbered by weight, but with sufficient fat to banish wrinkles. He had a little pink spot low down on either jowl, and in times of excitement or of any emotion, that pink spot waned and diminished, or increased in size and brightness. His eyes seemed rather small and bright, but that might have been because of the fullness of his face.

Nothing about him fixed the eye of Geraldi so much, however, as his hands. They were remarkably large, and very white and soft, so that when Edgar Asprey pressed his hands together, as he often did while speaking, it seemed to Geraldi as though there were no bones in the fingers.

"And this is the man!" said Cousin Edgar, as he entered the room.

"Don't go too near him, Edgar dear!" pleaded Mrs. Asprey.

Cousin Edgar paid little attention to the interruption.

"A very young man, too," he went on. "An exceedingly young man. What is your name, young man?"

"James Geraldi," said the frigate bird, growing very sleepy-eyed indeed.

"James Geraldi! A foreign-sounding name, isn't it? But, in these cases, there is usually a foreign-sounding name, and foreign blood as well, I dare say. I daresay foreign blood as well."

He stood in the center of the room and smiled on the shrinking form of Mrs. Asprey, who clung to him more violently than ever; he smiled upon Louise Asprey; he smiled upon the frigate bird himself, and now Geraldi began to grow very interested, for he saw that for the first time in all his life he had met a man without fear!

CHAPTER VI.

IN A FRIENDLY WAY.

IT is an easy thing to bandy about the word "fearless." The nerves of James Geraldi himself were just a trifle stronger than steel cable, but he understood at once that there was a difference between himself and this big, soft man. Now that Cousin Edgar had come well into the light, there was no mistaking him. His soft, thick voice, his genial smile, his pulpy body, his graceful gestures were all saying one thing; but his eyes were another matter. It was as though the soul of an eagle had slipped into the body of a minister, living fat and snug in the secure harbor of a rich parish.

It would not be fair to say that Geraldi was frightened as he confronted this man, but a swarm of disagreeable pictures or comparisons started across his mind, and the one that stuck was the thought of a white-bodied octopus floating at ease in the water, with cruel beak and deadly eyes at watch.

This melodramatic idea made Geraldi shrug his shoulders and smile a little. He was determined to be wide awake.

"Now let us begin at the beginning," said Cousin Edgar.

"He's a thief!" said Mrs. Asprey. "He's stolen money from—do call out the window, Cousin Edgar! Louise, do something! My nerves are giving way."

"Lean on me, my dear," said the hypnotically smooth voice of Cousin Edgar. "Lean on me—trust in your cousin. I will soon put everything

right! And by 'the beginning' I did not mean the beginning of this young man's crimes. That might be a long story—or a short one. Am I right, Mr. Geraldi?"

He went right on, unctuously, never pausing for an answer:

"I mean, the beginning, as it affects this house."

"How simple you make everything, dear cousin!" said Mrs. Asprey.

"Only by going logically and quietly about things, my dear child, my dear Cousin Olivetta!" said the fat man. "And so, Mr. Geraldi, will you tell us how you came into our lives, if I may be allowed to put it that way?"

From the corner of his eye, Geraldi saw the girl glance down to the floor, and he guessed that she was much annoyed. For that reason, he made himself cheerful.

"Through the roof," said Geraldi.

"Through the roof!" screamed Mrs. Asprey. "Gracious heaven! Edgar! Dear Edgar! What are we to do?"

"We are going to be patient," said the big man, and his soft hand squashed over her frantically gripping fingers. "We have made a little beginning. He came, it appears, through the roof. So far, so good! Now, let us proceed!"

It sounded to Geraldi like the talk of a self-complacent fool, but all the time he was most keenly aware that this man was neither complacent nor a fool. He was a strong, vigorous, swiftly moving brain, which simply went about its work in a way that differed from the ways of other men.

"Let us go a little further. Having broken through the roof—the skylight, if I dare suggest——"

"The skylight," admitted Geraldi.

"Do I dream?" said Cousin Edgar gently, "or did I really at one time suggest that an iron frame was much better for a skylight? An iron frame, and a chain, and padlock?"

"You did! You did suggest it!" moaned Mrs. Asprey. "Oh, heavens! Oh, gracious heavens, why do I ever stand out against any of your ideas?"

"Your own are very good! Your own ideas are admirable, dear Cousin Olivetta," said the fat man. "But by taking thought—by patience—one marches ahead. One develops. What would Napoleon have been without his marshals? A brain without hands. That is what I want to be, Cousin Olivetta. A hand to you, to help you, and to sustain you!"

"You are, Edgar!" said she, her eyes filling with tears as she looked up to him. "You are all of that, and much more, much, much more!"

Louise Asprey looked upon the pair, and Geraldi saw that her blue eyes had turned as gray as steel.

"Then we must learn how Mr. Geraldi happened to take shelter in this room," continued Cousin Edgar. "And how could it have been, my dear young friend, my dear young, misguided friend! I trust I may be allowed to say 'misguided?' "

"The thief!" breathed Mrs. Asprey.

"Ah, my dear," said the big man, "who among us is without sin!"

"I simply opened the first door," said Geraldi.

"But it isn't the first door," said Cousin Edgar. "It isn't the first door at all. It's quite in the middle of the hall, if I may be allowed to say so! So suppose you tell us frankly what brought you to this particular door, when there were so many doors which you might have opened?"

Here his glance wavered for the subtle fraction of a second toward the girl.

Another would have failed to notice it; but the frigate bird saw all things, even from afar.

"I don't know what you're driving at," he answered carelessly, though he was beginning to guess very well. "I

only know that as I came down from the top floor I heard steps coming up from below, and I turned in at this door. I didn't see any one in the room until I was well inside," he added candidly.

"He didn't see any one," said Cousin Edgar, shaking his head, while the fat fold beneath his chin shook in sympathy. "He didn't see any one! Not even my dear Louise, my sweet Louise, who is such a light among girls? He did not see even Louise, in her gay dress? Come, come, Mr. Geraldi, you must be more candid!"

And he shook a large, soft, white forefinger at the frigate bird.

The latter grew a little restive. His own smile flashed bright, but there was no mirth in it.

"I can't give you a new set of facts," he suggested.

"Perhaps you are right," said Cousin Edgar gently. "Yes, perhaps you are right. It is usually better to stay with one story. It gives one a sense of confidence. I have been a lawyer. Oh, yes, I understand a great many of these little things!"

"You understand everything, Edgar!" cried Mrs. Asprey, so filled with admiration that she forgot everything else, even her fear of the moment before.

"But here we are," went on Cousin Edgar. "We have him safely, after a troubled voyage, in the room of our dear Louise. And then? And then? Did I understand that this room was searched, Louise, my child?"

"Yes. It was searched."

"And yet he was not found? But, no doubt, since he came in without seeing you, he came in without being seen in turn. Soft as a shadow he flitted, let us say, and hid himself under the bed?"

He beamed upon the girl. Her answer came back like the clinking of metal.

"I saw him the instant the door was ajar. And when the search came, of course, I sheltered him."

"Ah-ah-ah!" murmured Cousin Edgar. "Is that it? Is that it?"

Again the dewlap wagged beneath his chin.

"My wise, bright, clever Louise—sometimes I forget that you are in the romantic age. May I be permitted to say 'the romantic age,' Louise?"

The girl caught her breath, sorely tried.

Geraldi, with hot rage in his heart, controlled himself sternly and maintained his careless smile.

"That's not a fair thing to say," said Louise Asprey. "Of course, I couldn't turn him over to the head hunters!"

"Of course you couldn't, my dear! Of course you couldn't!" said Cousin Edgar.

He put back his head, and his smile covered his eyes until nothing except a single bead of light was visible.

"You observe, dear Olivetta," continued Cousin Edgar, "that she could not, of course, give him over to the head hunters. And I don't blame her. Of course, I don't blame her. If I were a young girl and saw such a handsome young rascal—I hope I may be forgiven even by you, Louise, for saying 'rascal?' "

"Cousin Edgar, you are making me very angry," said Louise Asprey.

"Louise!" exclaimed Mrs. Asprey. "I never have heard such a speech in all the days of my life! Louise! Can I believe my ears? To your dear Cousin Edgar! My gracious! My gracious heavens!"

"Oh, don't make a mountain of a molehill," said Cousin Edgar gently. "The young are thoughtless, Cousin Olivetta. But it would take far more than a thoughtless speech from a girl—a dear girl whom I love—to make me forget my duty. And my duty is to serve you with all my heart and all my

mind, I trust I may be permitted to say that?"

"Edgar, I can't speak," said Mrs. Asprey. "I'm—I'm overcome. Louise, apologize this moment! Louise, I never——"

"Please—please—please!" said Cousin Edgar, in mortal pain. "That there should be trouble in this house on my account! A great many things I dare to say that I have borne—forgive me!—but that I could not bear! I never could endure it!"

"See, Louise!" cried Mrs. Asprey. "See what you've done! Our dear, noble Edgar—with never a thought for himself—I could cry!"

Tears, in fact, made her eyes wet, and one rolled slowly down her cheek while she looked upward to Cousin Edgar.

He did not seem to see it, but with a cheerful voice he continued: "But let us get on—let us finish this little matter. How small it will seem in a few months! Time is the great physician. Even for romantic hearts, I dare hope. I do dare to hope that, Louise, dear girl!"

She had stood more than she could bear, and now she cried angrily: "I won't be badgered any longer. I've told you the exact facts. I sheltered him. I'd do it a thousand times again. My father taught me what hospitality should be in the West. You were raised in the East, you know. That makes a difference!"

"Louise!" cried Mrs. Asprey, outraged again.

"Girls are young, both East and West," smiled Cousin Edgar. "East and West, and North and South, they are young, young, young! God bless them—and keep them safe!"

"Edgar!" gasped Mrs. Asprey, in what was meant to be an aside. *"What* do you mean? Call the police! Get the sheriff——"

"Hush, dear," said Cousin Edgar. "Everything slowly—the sudden strain breaks the rope. Humor her, Cousin Olivetta. Youth has foolish fancies!"

He added aloud, for the rest had been a plainly audible whisper: "Perhaps you are right, Louise. And the very best thing is for us to keep the young gentleman for dinner—so that we can talk everything over in a friendly way!"

CHAPTER VII.

BIG-GAME HUNTERS.

SO the frigate bird was carried away by Cousin Edgar. He could not make out whether that gentleman had from the first intended to keep him in the house until dinner, or whether it was a last-minute change of tactics, when he saw that he had infuriated the girl to such a degree. Mrs. Asprey was left behind in the room of her daughter, and the last Geraldi heard was the high tremolo of the lady assailing her daughter. However, he had no doubt as to how a duel between the two would come out.

Cousin Edgar did not allow any embarrassing silences. He began to talk as he escorted Geraldi along the hall and down the stairs, putting in his words slowly, so that they covered a good deal of space.

"So here we have him again!" said the big man. "Here we have the young adventurer—the gentleman adventurer," he added, as though afterthought.

He had changed his tone most decidedly since they left the room; there was a rich good-fellowship in his voice.

"We'll go down to my study and have a bit of a chat, unless you prefer a siesta."

Geraldi did not prefer a siesta, so he was ushered into a room on the ground floor, not a very large room, and one that seemed yet smaller be-

cause of what was in it. The skin of a great lion hung on one wall. The stripes of a royal Bengal tiger decorated another. A wild boar champed his tusks in a corner, and above the fireplace the dreadful mask of a leopard grinned at them.

"You're a collector," suggested the guest, perfectly willing to maintain pleasant relations with every one in this house until the coming of night should give him an opportunity to escape from the place and the whole town.

"In a small way I've been a collector, in the days of my youth when I, also, was an adventurer," smiled Cousin Edgar. "But not with money, my dear young man. Never with money. These are the pick, each in its own way, of all the trophies which have fallen under my rifle."

"I see," said Geraldi, "that you give the place of honor to a leopard."

"Does that surprise you, my friend?"

"Not a bit," answered Geraldi. "The beasts will kill you as easily as a lion or a tiger, and they're twice as brainy and three times as fast."

The eye of Cousin Edgar grew luminous with sympathetic agreement. He seemed inspired to talk by this opening, and for a long time he breezed gently through a narrative of hunting exploits. Sooner or later, nearly every wild thing that may happen to a hunter was embraced by the discourse of Cousin Edgar, and Geraldi, listening with his pleasant smile and his dull, sleepy eyes, made sure that it was a pure fiction of the mind. It appeared that Cousin Edgar wished to make an impression upon him.

"But," he said, when the narrator paused, "you don't say anything about the leopard?"

"That was an ugly thing," murmured Cousin Edgar. "I rarely speak about it. It was an ugly thing. I was hunting with a young maharaja——"

Geraldi looked down. Maharajas, no matter how often they appear in hunting tales, do not ordinarily take every chance adventurer to add to their shooting parties. He looked up again as Cousin Edgar continued:

"He was a beautiful young prince, slender as a sapling, as the saying goes, and strong as a spring of steel. He really was. We found ourselves together in the midst of a hunt. The servants and the other hunters were out of sight when I wounded a leopard. It was growing dusk. I wanted to turn back, but the maharaja insisted that the dead leopard would be found behind the very next bush—and then the next. We got deep into the woods. I stumbled and wrenched my knee, and by the time I had got up and was starting to walk again, my companion was far ahead. I hurried to catch up with him. He grew from a glimmer to a man, ahead of me. And then I saw a black shadow drop on him from a tree.

"It was the leopard, of course. I tried my rifle. It missed fire. There was nothing to do but to close with that snarling brute. But by luck—the greatest stroke of luck that I carried with me—the point of my knife drove through the eye of the leopard and reached his brain!"

Geraldi looked his host fairly in the face.

"That was a wonderfully brave thing to do," said he, and in his heart he told himself that this was peculiarly gross as a lie. Cousin Edgar should polish up his stories, for some of them were too old-fashioned.

"It does sound brave," said Cousin Edgar. "As a matter of fact, this thing happened in such a flurry that my actions were instinctive. I didn't have time to think. It's in the pauses, I dare say, that fear gets hold of us! I expected to find the prince ripped to shreds, but, as a matter of fact, he was

almost uninjured. I had occupied most of the attention of the leopard, and there were only two deep gashes down the face of the maharaja. A dreadful pity, I have always thought, that such a handsome fellow should have been spoiled! But then he was rash, I dare say, rushing ahead like that into the dusk of the jungle!"

The listener flipped back the pages of his memory. He, too, could remember a maharaja who had been struck down by a leopard. He was neither young nor beautiful, but rather resembled a fat, crouching spider, with a hideous, sallow smile; and half of his face was writhed to the side, horribly drawn by two jagged scars. He remembered the story that had been told of the prince in the rashness of his youth, and a gigantic white man who had gone in heroically and killed the leopard with a hunting knife.

The unctuous recitations of the host no longer seemed to Geraldi unimaginative lies. They were true. All were true! He looked upon Cousin Edgar with new eyes. But, after all, from the first glance at that smooth face and the hawklike, active little eyes, he had been prepared for almost anything.

Suddenly the talk was no longer about the hunting exploits of Cousin Edgar. It concerned another subject, Geraldi himself.

"I take it that you are out of employment?" suggested Cousin Edgar.

"I am," said the young man.

"And I dare say that as for the work that comes your way, you hardly care whether it is safe or dangerous. For I see that you are of the true metal, my young friend!"

Geraldi honored the compliment with a smile. And the other continued with an odd narrative: A friend, a good friend, was persecuted by a malignant scoundrel. The friend was desperate. Owing to peculiar circumstances, it was impossible to reach the offender by the law. Matters had come to such a pass that it was essential to find the culprit and, in short, put an end to him. With the same quiet unction with which he had told of his hunting exploits, Cousin Edgar finished his tale, joined his soft, white hands, and looked above them at Geraldi.

"I think not," said Geraldi with an equal quiet.

"It would mean no small sum. It would mean ten thousand dollars in cash—and half of that paid in advance!"

"You are very kind to trust me," said Geraldi. "But I never have killed a man—except in self-defense. I don't intend to begin. Furthermore, I rarely act as a hired man."

Cousin Edgar did not press the point for an instant.

"I understand exactly," said he. "A sort of knight errant, riding in an unlucky century."

But Geraldi knew that the fat man was disappointed. He knew, in fact, that he had been taken down to the study for the special purpose of working him up to this point, to this handsome offer of ten thousand dollars blood-money for a murder done. No matter how lightly Cousin Edgar turned from the subject, it was a shock to him to have his offer refused.

Shortly afterward, he excused himself. Geraldi was to make himself comfortable in the study—there were plenty of books to read. Cousin Edgar had other matters to attend to. Geraldi would stay that night to dinner and afterward, having performed the duties of a good host, Cousin Edgar would show him from the house and bid him Godspeed on his journey.

With that, he left the room, and Geraldi lay down on the sofa under the window with his hands behind his head and tried to piece the matter together.

This was a household which seemed

to enjoy plenty of money. The jewels of Mrs. Asprey and the dress of her daughter were eloquent on that point, but it seemed odd that such an apparent fortune should be lodged in a small Western town, shouldering a noisy, brawling hotel.

That was not the only singular thing. Mrs. Asprey could be put down merely as a nervous and rather foolish woman. But Cousin Edgar was unique, and so was the girl.

Moreover, it could not pass for anything but queer that the girl, at the very first meeting with him, had proposed that he go on an adventurous trail to do certain work he knew not what. And, on the heels of that, Cousin Edgar suggested ten thousand dollars for a murder!

However smooth he might be, it was nonsense to imagine that the fat man was representing any friend. This was work of his own, to be paid for out of his own pocket.

Yes, it was an interesting household! And the unwilling guest began to smile grimly.

However, there was time to be spent. He took from his pocket a small pack of cards, and, sitting down to the little center table, he began to practice the latest of his games. For one never could tell with what implements one would have to work! It might be with edge-thickened cards in a lumber camp; it might be with a miniature pack like this in a box car. And the player believed in being prepared, in all the possible circumstances of war. This was his moment of peace.

But, between shufflings and dealings of the cards, his mind harked back to Cousin Edgar. He never had met the like of that man before. He doubted that he would ever meet his like again, and to the very marrow of his bones, he was possessed by a thrilling sense of danger to come.

The afternoon wore away. He heard cheerful voices. And, venturing a glance out the window, he saw that in the tennis court at the rear of the house and to the side, Mrs. Asprey and her daughter were playing tennis, Mrs. Asprey with gaspings and puffings and shrill cries of despair, and her daughter left-handed, and even so unable to play down to the level of her parent.

A very odd household, indeed!

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT FOR ANY PRICE.

IT was a singular dinner, when at last the four of them assembled at one table. Geraldi was disappointed because he had not had a chance to talk with the girl again, but, doubtless, Cousin Edgar and Mrs. Asprey, between them, had arranged to keep Louise occupied every moment. After dinner there might be another chance. He was reasonably sure that she would not rest contented unless she were able to speak with him again before his departure.

At the table, Mrs. Asprey attempted to be the bright hostess—no matter under what disadvantages—but he could not help being aware that she was continually casting side glances of horror and disdain at him.

Her daughter, on the other hand, was quietly pleasant, and Cousin Edgar pointedly included the bird of passage in the talk. It began to be a dialogue between them, with a word from Louise, from time to time. It was to be noted that Cousin Edgar was willing to let the conversation turn on the accomplishments of the singular guest.

"I have been up to the skylight," he said, "and I saw that you had some sort of lever to work on it?"

"A little steel bar," said Geraldi.

He produced it from the inside of his coat.

"A jimmy, in other words," said Cousin Edgar.

"Cousin Edgar, how wonderful!" said Mrs. Asprey. "You really know about everything!"

He hardly could speak without bringing down her bright, uncomprehending admiration upon his head.

"One travels about the world," he admitted. "One picks up a few ideas, here and there, Cousin Olivetta! But after the skylight was pried up in that clever manner, when you came down the stairs from the attic, there you found a locked door at the end of the passage, did you not?"

"Yes. It was locked."

The two women attended with interest—that of Mrs. Asprey being tinged with horror.

"And how did you manage that?" continued Cousin Edgar. "I saw no signs of a jimmy." He added: "Not that I wish to pry into what might be termed professional secrets. No, that is far from my mind."

"You're quite welcome to know," said Geraldi.

He produced a little sliver of bright steel.

"That was my pass-key," said he.

"A very simple device," said Cousin Edgar.

"We'll all be murdered in our beds some night!" cried Mrs. Asprey, wringing her jeweled hands.

"Mother, dear!" protested Louise wearily.

"I don't mean by Mr.—ah—Geraldi. But by somebody else with jimmies and pass-keys——"

"But it isn't a key at all," said the girl.

"Then how did he get in?"

"One can learn locks," said the guest genially, as he smiled upon them all.

Cousin Edgar smiled richly back upon him.

"But what patience, what care, what constant thought and practice!" he suggested, admiringly.

"I had six months with a locksmith," said Geraldi.

He had an astonishing way of opening his mind and telling everything, or what seemed to be everything.

"Six months!" said Cousin Edgar.

"He was a genius," reflected Geraldi. "He made locks of all kinds. He could read the mind of a lock, I think."

"But what a long time to spend in that sort of a study! Six whole months?" commented Louise Asprey.

"We had nothing else to do," said Geraldi. "We were on a little island."

"A desert island!" gasped Mrs. Asprey. "How dreadful!"

"It wasn't a desert," replied Geraldi. "As a matter of fact, it was a lovely spot, with some high hills, and palms, and a few little rivulets."

"How did you live!" cried the hostess.

"On shellfish and roast birds, and eggs and fruit, raw or cooked. We really lived like kings."

"How extraordinary!" said Mrs. Asprey. "Isn't it extraordinary, Cousin Edgar? I mean, to live like kings on a desert island!"

"Of course," said Cousin Edgar deeply, "but then you see that your young friend is an extraordinary man!"

"But he isn't my——" began Mrs. Asprey, and checked herself just in time. She grew a little red, and urged: "Do go on!"

"I don't know what else I should say," said Geraldi. "I simply was explaining how I happened to study locks."

"But—gracious me!—you haven't told us how you happened to get to the island at all."

"The locksmith and I rowed to it in a gig."

"Rowed to it! Heavens above, Cousin Edgar, they rowed to it—clear out on the ocean!"

"It was in the South Seas," Geraldi instructed her patiently. "We didn't

have far to row, though. You see, we went most of the way in a sailing ship."

"How perfectly unusual, Edgar!" breathed Mrs. Asprey. "I mean, that they should have gone off to a desert island like that, just to study locks."

"But perhaps they had no choice, my dear?" said Cousin Edgar.

"That was it," said Geraldi. "The captain of the ship put us off. Marooned us, you know."

"Heavens, how dreadful!"

Louise cast an impatient glance at her mother.

"Do let him get on," she urged.

"He was very fair," said Geraldi. "He gave us some biscuits and a rifle and some ammunition. He let us take most of our things, too, including my friend's case, which had his locks in it. As a matter of fact, the ship's captain was dealing with us better than he knew. When he hove to, the island was only a blue smudge, and he was sure that it was a naked rock.

"The dreadful creature!" said Mrs. Asprey. "Oh, dear, think what people there are in the world?"

"Hove to, did you say? Was it a sailing vessel?"

"Yes, an Arab."

"Ah, and yet he wasted a boat and a gun and such matters on you?"

"It wasn't entirely his choice," admitted Geraldi. "We were occupying the cabin, and we'd made a fort of it, keeping watch and watch for eight days."

"Ah-ah-ah!" said Cousin Edgar. "That must have been very jolly, eh?"

Geraldi merely smiled.

"So you spent the six months studying locks?"

"Every day and even by firelight. It was fascinating work. Delightful! The locksmith was very old and very wise. He had made locks since he was a child. His mind was crowded with facts—all about locks. It was filled with stories, too. Perhaps you have no idea how many stories hinge on locks, their making and unmaking?"

His eye was bland and innocent as he regarded Mrs. Asprey, and she shook her head violently: "I don't see how there could be!" she declared. "There's simply iron—or steel—or some such thing, aren't they?"

"So is a sword, you know," said Geraldi, gently. "It's simply steel."

"Gracious me!" said Mrs. Asprey. How did we get to the subject of swords?"

She shivered a little.

"You learned to take them apart and put them together?"

This from the girl.

"And to listen to the tumblers fall—to listen to the tumblers fall!" said Geraldi, half closing his eyes, dreamily.

He held out his right hand, the finger tips close together as though they were surrounding a small knob. Those supple fingers seemed vibrating with an electric sensitiveness.

"Is it so hard to do?" asked Mrs. Asprey.

"It's half in the ear, and half in the touch," said Geraldi. "Or perhaps most in the touch, would you say, Mr. Asprey?"

"In the touch, of course," said Cousin Edgar instantly.

"Gracious, Edgar!" said Mrs. Asprey. "Do you know about these things, also?"

The glance of Cousin Edgar gleamed wildly at the too innocent face of Geraldi.

"I did not study on a desert island," he murmured.

Louise hastily put in: "But how did you get away from the island? Did you try a voyage in the little boat?"

"It was a rotten little boat," said Geraldi. "One could have punched one's fist through its bottom. We only got to shore in it by dint of much bailing."

"Then how in the world did you leave? Did the Arab captain repent and come back for you?"

"He never repented—not until a year or so later, when we happened to meet," said Geraldi, with its flashing smile. "But in the meantime, at the end of our six months of hard study and delightful practice, a big native boat arrived with a crew of half a dozen."

"And they saved you! How delightful!" murmured Mrs. Asprey. "Oh, it's civilization that corrupts the world, isn't it, Cousin Edgar?"

"A very good thought—a very deep thought, I dare to say," replied Cousin Edgar. "And a very new one," he added.

He looked full at Louise; and she looked steadily back at him. Geraldi could guess that they knew one another well. The detestation in which the girl held him was too apparent, and certainly he had no love for her.

"But the dear, kind natives?" said Louise dryly.

"They were very friendly for a while, but in the night they rushed us. And so the end of it was we had to sail off in their boat alone."

"Alone? But I don't understand!" said Mrs. Asprey.

"You forget," said Geraldi with that same flashing smile, "that we had a rifle and ammunition."

"I don't see that that explains," said Mrs. Asprey.

"I should have added, it was a moonlight night, and it was a repeating rifle," said Geraldi.

"And what became of the locksmith?" asked the girl suddenly.

"He has retired," said Geraldi, picking his words. "He no longer works at his trade. In fact, the State recognized his talents at last, and now it takes care of him."

"How really wonderful and beautiful!" breathed Mrs. Asprey. "You should write down that lovely story, Mr. Geraldi—I mean, about the dear, good, old locksmith."

"Dear Cousin Olivetta," said the fat man, "may I suggest that perhaps Mr. Geraldi means that the locksmith is now in prison?"

"Heavens!" she cried. "Is it possible?"

"He was very ambitious," said Geraldi, "but, after all, the Bank of London is the Bank of London! He will never have to worry again about his living. But what a genius was removed from the active world!"

Mrs. Asprey took her daughter into the library. Cousin Edgar lingered at the table for coffee with his guest. He seemed highly pleased.

"You have much understanding," he said. "That is a great thing. Understanding! And patience. One needs patience. I mean with women, particularly. Poor, dear Mrs. Asprey! An extraordinary person."

He rubbed his large, white hands together, but there was a cold gleam in his eye, and Geraldi could guess that the fat man had not quite expressed his full thought concerning his giddy cousin.

They finished their coffee; cigarettes were lighted. And then, as they rose, Cousin Edgar laid a hand on the arm of Geraldi.

"I have seen my poor friend again this afternoon," said he. "He is becoming desperate. Poor fellow! A really fine man—intelligent, educated, a cultured soul. And yet in danger of wreck by the machinations of a scoundrel and a fool! The criminal is armed doubly by his scorn of the law, Geraldi! But let me suggest to you again—ten thousand dollars as a price might be improved upon, eh? Advanced a little?"

Geraldi faced him.

"You'd trust me with an advance payment?"

"Exactly! Exactly! Of five thousand, say!"

"Then you think there is something honest in me?"

"My dear young man!"

"Then believe me," said Geraldi, "the honest taint in me never would let me kill for any price!"

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

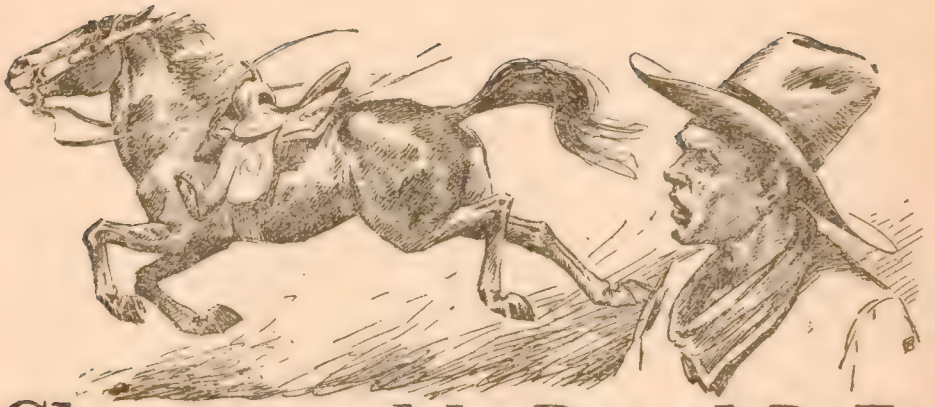
WILD HORSES DOOMED BY THE COLD

FOR many years hundreds of wild horses have been roaming the ranges of Alberta and eastern British Columbia, finding food and shelter amid the valley fastnesses of the Rockies when pursued by government rangers and ranchmen. But the intense cold of the recent winter has proved itself a more formidable enemy of these wild-horse bands than man. Snow fell to a great depth, was converted into slush by heavy rains, and then froze under the influence of arctic blasts. All this meant starvation for the horses.

No one was either eager or willing to go to the rescue of the animals, since the ranchers do not want them to live. In fact, the government, reflecting the mood of the settler, has put a price on their heads. And, during the past five years, many attempts have been made to exterminate the bandit bands. A large round-up was staged in 1923 for the purpose of driving the horses into corrals and selling them for five dollars a head to buyers who wished to domesticate them. The horses, however, were found to be unexpectedly fleet of foot, and many of them bore ancient brands so, under the Canadian laws, they could not be taken.

One reason for the ranchers' anxiety to rid themselves of the wild horses is that these bandit bands entice domestic animals to join them. They are horse thieves of a kind. A year or so ago, the Department of the Interior adopted the policy of appointing special gunmen on the ranges, paying them fixed salaries, and offering a bounty of two dollars for each wild-horse scalp. It is estimated that two thousand of them fell in this way.

During the past summer, two thousand of the horses were lassoed and sold to the Soviet Russian Government, which was in the market for horses of this size and willing to pay twenty dollars apiece for them.



Shorty and the Dumbbelle

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Shorty's Lynchin' Bee," etc.

IT wasn't Sheriff Joe Cook's fault in the first place, nor was it Deputy Sheriff "Shorty" McKay's doings, either. Eddie Owens, secretary of the Monte Vista Chamber of Commerce, just would loaf around the sheriff's office, craving and waiting for excitement. It was Owens who brought the subject up in the first place, and it was Owens who finally introduced Miss June Larimer, as pretty a girl as one might wish to see.

"Gosh knows I don't figger I needs a stenographer at all," protested Sheriff Cook as he shook hands with Miss Larimer, "but Mr. Owens insists that we ain't progressive enough around here! He's been pokin' around, loafin' here, an' nosin' inter our reports an' correspondence, an' he kain't read my writin' —or Shorty's scrawl—so he says we should try a stenographer—an' he mentioned yuhr name, Miss Larimer."

The black-eyed girl blushed prettily.

"I hope I can prove to you, sheriff, that you do need a stenographer," she said softly, "and I am so much obliged for the chance to make good here. When may I start?"

"How about her startin' to-morrow, sheriff?" asked Mr. Owens.

"Waal," said the sheriff resignedly, "to-morrow—then!"

And that was the way Miss Larimer joined the sheriff's office staff at Monte Vista. It all happened so quickly that Sheriff Joe Cook was dazed, but Shorty was pleased. It was rather nice to have a very pretty girl sitting at a typewriter in the dingy office. Her eyes and her smile brightened things up considerably. And in addition, her nimble fingers, racing over the typewriter keys saved Shorty much pencil licking and a lot of cramped fingers. Shorty hated to write reports. He'd rather go out and shoot a few rustlers than write three pages making a record of some office transaction that didn't particularly interest him.

"Waal, Shorty," exclaimed Sheriff Cook at noon the second day after Miss Larimer had started work, "I has here the fust report wrote by our new stenographer, as dictated to her at ten o'clock this mawnin' by myself, an' as handed in by her jus' a few seconds ago, afore she breezed out to lunch."

"Her eyes are the blackest eyes I ever saw," began Shorty enthusiasti-

cally. "Like two great, big, black shoe buttons."

"Uh-huh—yes!" said the sheriff without any warmth in his tone. "Her eyes may be O. K., but her spellin' is something awful—almost as bad as yuhr's, Shorty, an'——"

"That dimple in her chin," went on Shorty.

"Yes—yes, she has a dimple in her chin, right enough," went on the sheriff, waving the two sheets of the newly written report in the air, "but what's botherin' me most, brother, is what kind o' a dimple, or a kink, or a shoe button she has in her haid takin' the place o' brains."

"Bah!" interrupted Shorty, flicking the ashes from his cigarette to the floor. "It's a well-knowed geographical fact that no purty-lookin' gal has any too much sense. Now, I remember Winnie Hemmingdorf, that little blond waitress that usta——"

"Listen," cut in the sheriff rudely, "we ain't talkin' about no Winnie Dorfingham this mawnin', Shorty; we're talkin' about our new stenographer an' that report she has jus' writ. Readin' it over I sees she has drapped in such words as 'sweetest,' an' 'cute,' an' 'cunnin', an' 'oh, boy!' an' 'dearest'—none o' which words belong in no report on why we couldn't find Emil Schlenz to serve a subpoena on him to appear as a grand jury witness."

"Mebbe she misunderstood what yuh said, boss."

"No, she's got what I said down pat enough; but she's added and interspersed them unseemly words I mention. Her brain is either on strike or else it is away on a vacation."

"Shucks, boss—give her a chance; she's new!"

"I aim to give her a chance, Shorty, seeing that Eddie Owens talked me inter givin' her a job, but"—and the sheriff paused significantly—"I kain't hand in no report like this to the court an' that means that yuh're goin' to write it over fer me, leavin' out the words as don't belong."

"Let her write it over, boss."

"No, I kain't hurt her feelin's like that, Shorty, on the fust piece o' work she's done. Yuh write it over!"

And so Shorty wrote a new report—and put the blame for his extra work on the shoulders of Mr. Eddie Owens, whose idea it was, in the first place, to introduce a girl stenographer into the sheriff's office. But when Miss June Larimer came tripping back from lunch, just as Shorty had finished his revised report and destroyed her rejected one, he forgot all his animosity. My, Miss Larimer did have the most expressive black eyes! She smiled on him, and Shorty immediately grew ashamed of himself for blaming Eddie Owens for getting such a pretty girl a job! Shorty stole a glance at Sheriff Cook, who was reading the revised report, and then sauntered over to Miss Larimer's desk, intending to engage her in conversation, but——

"Ting-gg-g!" went the telephone bell.

"What's that?" bellowed Sheriff Cook into the telephone. "All shot, yuh say? All of them? Airly this mawnin', eh? Waal—just keep yuhr shirt on, Charley, I'll be right out in two jumps!"

Sheriff Cook hung up the receiver and looked at the hopeful face of Shorty and the startled face of the new stenographer.

"Charley Lewis says some crook has went an' shot all his herd o' prize-winnin' Hereford steers airly this mawnin'," said the sheriff excitedly, "probably fer revenge or somethin'. Shorty, yuh better git the hosses—we'll jog out to his place."

"Sure!" exclaimed Shorty, making for the door.

"Oh, Mister Sheriff!" cried Miss Larimer suddenly; will you let me go along with you, please? Oh, may I—please? I'm so anxious to see excite-

ment, and Mr. Owens said—he said—but may I go with you? I can ride a horse well an'——"

"What did Mr. Owens say?" asked the sheriff suspiciously.

"He said that—that if I got a job here in your office, Mr. Cook, that I could see so much excitement——"

"Waal," said the sheriff quickly, "he's a liar, and ef he thinks we takes a stenographer man huntin' with us he's just plain cracked!"

"Oh, Mister Cook—please!"

And then the black-eyed girl turned to Shorty at the door.

"Mr. Shorty—you ask him to let me go, please!"

And her smile dazzled the unhappy Shorty instantly.

"Why, boss," said Shorty, "what say we do let Miss Larimer go this time? This ain't no hot, gun-play case—no danger——"

The girl focused her pretty eyes on Sheriff Cook and he blinked.

"Waal," he conceded, "this time—jus' this time. Yuh—er—Shorty, don't stand thar like a blamed log—go fetch three hosses!"

It wasn't such a long ride out to Charley Lewis' ranch on the Lawrence Creek road. Miss Larimer proved herself a capable horsewoman. She kept up a running chatter with Shorty, and Shorty wasn't a bit mad about it, either. The sheriff rode ahead, deep in thought. Charley Lewis and Juan Montoya, his Mexican foreman, were waiting at the great arched gate to the Lewis ranch.

"Howdy, sheriff!" Charley called as they rode up.

"Howdy, Charley!"

"It's a danged outrage!" exploded Charley Lewis, without further preliminaries; "an' it's an expensive proposition. I had twenty extra-good steers in that field, an' every one o' them is shot in cold blood! I was fixin' to ship 'em to Denver next month fer the livestock exhibition thar——"

"Who yuh figger done it, Charley?" interrupted the sheriff.

"I dunno—frankly," said the rancher, "ef I did I would 'a' given him a taste o' his own lead poisonin' long before this; but it's got me stumped, sheriff. It might be a jealous feller from Denver. I won in the Hereford steer class at the Denver show las' year an' made plenty o' Hereford breeders jealous."

"Anybody around Monte sore at yuh, Charley?"

"Waal—mebbe; yuh know how hard it is to git help—an' I change a lot. I've had a lot o' discharged hands threaten to git even—but, I dunno——"

"Whar's the field?"

The rancher led Sheriff Cook, Shorty, and Miss Larimer to a wide field on the far end of his big ranch. It was a grain field, from which the grain had been cut, leaving the stubble. The field was entirely surrounded by a high, woven-wire fence. There was a straw stack in the field. Near the straw stack, and close to a pump and water tank, were strewn the bodies of twenty fine Hereford steers. A lump came in Lewis' throat, and Juan Montoya, the foreman, spoke in a hushed tone as he pointed out the telltale bullet marks. Most of the animals were shot through the head, but not all. Some were shot through the heart; others were simply riddled.

The sheriff looked at his watch.

"Charley, did yuh discharge any hand lately—say, yesterday?"

"Yes, I did," said the rancher, "I sure enough chased that lazy Ed Breene off the place."

"Shorty!" cried the sheriff; "git back on yuhr hoss. Yuh got a little less than forty minutes to git to Monte Vista and intercept Ed Breene ef he tries to git on that Denver train out at two thirty o'clock. Jug him—he's a good bet fer this job!"

Shorty was not anxious to leave.

"How about tracks?" he suggested hopefully.

"Yuh slope!" said the sheriff. "I'll mop up the details. Beat it! An' ef Breen don't ketch the train find out ef he caught the stage to Alamosa; an' ef he didn't, locate him in town an' hold him—this job looks like a revenge proposition to me!"

So Shorty left in a cloud of dust, and the sheriff set about searching for clews. But there were no clews, apparently. The ground was hard and thickly ridged with the stubble. The rancher and Montoya both said that they had looked for tracks and had found none. They had found the tracks of a horse in the dust outside the field gate, but that didn't mean so much. The tracks might have been there for days. There were no horse tracks in the field.

"I figger they was shot from the road," said Lewis sadly, "by a gent with a good eye an' a steady finger—an' a good rifle!"

"Yep!" agreed the sheriff, "Looks so to me."

Meanwhile, Miss June Larimer did pretty much as she pleased. One thing she did was to look for tracks, but if such a veteran sleuth as Sheriff Joe Cook couldn't find any such traces how could an inexperienced girl—even if she was pretty—be expected to find them? She didn't find them. But she was energetic. She walked clear around the big field, which must have contained some seventy-five or eighty acres, examining the fence. But Lewis himself had done that before he had called the sheriff. When Sheriff Cook was ready to leave he had to call to Miss Larimer, who was in a far section of the field, examining something she had in her hand.

"Oh—Miss Larimer!"

And when she came back she came with an apology.

"I got a splinter of straw in one finger," she began.

"Allow me to remove it fer yuh," said Mr. Lewis gallantly, drawing a heavy pocket knife from a pocket. "I kin git it."

"I kin git it without no knife," said the sheriff suddenly. "Miss Larimer, let me see whar that danged thing is."

"If the señorita permit——" began the foreman, Montoya, quickly.

"No use in fighting over that splinter—for it's out; I got it out myself," said the girl airily; "but that's what delayed me. I'm sorry I kept you waiting, sheriff."

On the way back to town the sheriff analyzed the whole mystery for his new stenographer's benefit. He was positive in his assertions.

"Lewis thinkin' that some Denver Hereford breeder did it out o' jealousy is all bunk," said Sheriff Cook. "Lewis is a hard feller to git along with. He's mean to his help. He fires this bird, Breene, yesterday, mebbe helpin' him off his place with the toe o' a boot, an' Breene jus' comes back soon as it's light this mawnin' an' brings a rifle along an' gits around thirty-five hundred dollars' worth o' quick revenge!"

The sheriff smiled grimly.

"Ef Shorty got back in time to intercept that train," he said, "I reckon we'll have Mr. Breene waitin' fer us at the cooler."

Mr. Breene was indeed waiting at the Monte Vista Jail, just as the sheriff had predicted. Shorty had obeyed orders promptly and efficiently, it appeared. But Mr. Breene was in no mood to welcome the sheriff. He exploded the minute he saw Cook.

"So yuh ordered me jugged, did yuh, sheriff?" he demanded. "Arrested fer shootin' Lewis' prize steers, eh? Waal, it's a lie! Yuh hick sheriffs make me sick! I was in a hurry to git to Denver——"

"One moment," said Sheriff Cook smoothly, "we ain't so hickified around here as yuh seem to think, Mr. Breene. I'll have my stenographer in here in a minnit an' yuh kin give yuhr statement

an' she'll take it down in black an' white fer"—the sheriff paused significantly—"fer use at the court trial later!"

Miss Larimer took the statement, putting down the sheriff's questions and the prisoner's answers just as rapidly as they were given. She could take shorthand better than she could type, it seemed. But the statement was practically worthless when she had it all. It was long and rambling and through it all the angry Mr. Breene maintained his innocence. He went into detail about his hatred for Lewis, but he denied that he had shot the cattle. He refused to say where he had spent the night, however, and that didn't look so good.

"It's a lot o' hooey," said Shorty to Miss Larimer as the pair left the cell on completion of the statement. "That bird Breene never did it—not in a thousand and one long years!"

"Oh, Mister Shorty!" breathed the girl excitedly. "I wonder if—you would think me foolish if I asked you——"

"Say," broke in the husky voice of Sheriff Cook as he overtook his subordinates, "don't ask that Shorty nuthin', Miss Larimer! He's off ef he thinks Breene never did it! Of course he did it. He admitted motive—an' he kain't tell whar he spent the night after he was fired from the ranch. Miss Larimer, yuh git out that statement quick, an I'll take it up to the district attorney this evenin', an' we'll wind this case up in a blamed hurry!"

Miss Larimer spent a lot of time on the statement, busily transcribing her shorthand notes while Shorty sat watching her, torn between admiration for her black eyes, her raven tresses, the dancing dimple in her firm little chin, her quick fingers—and the fear that he might have to go all over that statement, revising and correcting it if she dropped in any words that didn't belong there, as she had done in the previous work. But the girl went right on, never looking up. She seemed tremendously interested. It was after six o'clock and dusk when she finished with a sigh and handed the typewritten sheets to the drowsy sheriff. As she put on her tight-fitting little hat she favored Shorty with a strange look—as much as to say would he see her home? or something like that.

Shorty immediately got to his feet—but in vain.

"Shorty," drawled the sheriff gloomily, "stick around—I may need yuh. I got things to talk over."

So Shorty sighed and sat down and the door banged behind the little stenographer. The echoes of the bang had no sooner died away than Sheriff Cook exploded. He waved the sheaf of typewritten sheets in the air as he bellowed at the startled Shorty.

"Jus' as I feared—she's done it ag'in!" he whooped angrily. "What Breene said, she's got down here, sure enough, but a lot he didn't say, too! He never said—as she'd got it right here on the fust page—that 'Eddie will be proud'—an' he didn't say 'it'll take plenty o' spunk,' an' he never said 'sink or swim.' I ain't gone beyond the middle o' the second page, Shorty, but I kin see what she's did ag'in—she's drapped in a lot o' words ag'in—her own words."

And the sheriff flung the statement at Shorty.

"But boss——"

"Fix it up!"

"But, wait——"

"Fix it up, I said!"

"But——"

The sheriff slammed the office door as he went out, leaving Shorty protesting to the empty room. That didn't bother Shorty. He completed his protest, making it much stronger than if the sheriff had been there to hear it. The result was the same, in either case. Shorty still had the statement and still had it to fix. He bent over it for a second but straightened up suddenly.

"What's the use o' havin' her around here ef I got to do all her work after her?" he demanded of the bare wall in front of him. "I know she's purty—an' I think she's fallin' fer me, the way she kinda looked at me as she left, askin' like fer me to escort her home—but, but fixin' up all this stuff!"

Shorty groaned miserably. He leaned back in his chair and thought of Miss June Larimer with mingled emotions. One moment he was sure he would gladly sacrifice his life for her, and the next second he was angry because her blunders with the statement were costing him his supper time. However, he decided, she was pretty. She had wonderful hair. She had amazingly fine eyes and a cute dimple in her chin. Perhaps he had better not judge her too harshly yet. Why not make the revision of the statement a labor of love, anyway? All he had to do, as a matter of fact, was to run a pencil through the words that didn't belong there. That wouldn't be so hard. Then she could retype the thing the next day.

"Bless her little heart!" exclaimed Shorty after some forty minutes of day dreaming. "I'll do it—what's a few errors between a beautiful girl like her an' —an' "—he smiled modestly—"an' a good-lookin' feller like me?"

So he bent over the statement again. He carefully crossed out the "dropped in words" the sheriff had noted on the first sheet—such words and remarks as "Eddie will be proud," "it'll take plenty o' spunk," "sink or swim," "now or never," "plenty of excitement," one chance in a thousand," and many other peculiar expressions that Shorty knew that poor Breene, the prisoner had not made in his statement. Shorty scowled as his pencil raced through the first sheet, on through the second, then down—partway—through the third sheet. The pencil hesitated then, and Shorty's scowl deepened. Finally the pencil scratched out some offending remarks and continued down the sheet, but only slowly. At the top of the fourth sheet of paper the pencil hesitated again—and the next minute dropped out of Shorty's fingers.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, jumping up quickly; "I'll bet——"

The blank wall opposite him never learned just what Shorty was offering to bet. He jumped away from the desk so fast that he overturned his chair in his haste. He crammed the statement into a pocket; he clasped a hand to his holster, as if to make sure his six-gun was there. Then he slapped his hat on his head, whirled around on one heel, and fairly flew out the door. He was muttering to himself as he departed—and it was well that it was fairly dark as he raced up the street, still muttering, still with one hand clasped to the holster, for if folks had seen him they might have concluded that he was aglow with too much tequila, despite his reputation for sobriety.

Shorty was out of breath when he turned into Pecos Street. Another block to go! He made it in fast time. Then he paused before a pretentious house. Lights gleamed from windows on the lower floor, windows that were heavily curtained with great red handings. Shorty knew, because he had been in that house once at a reception. The house was the home of Señor Alfredo Albino, the most prominent Mexican in all southwestern Colorado. Shorty mounted the steps to the porch hesitantly—what if he was wrong, after all? But it was no time now to linger. He did not knock, nor ring the doorbell. He tried the knob and it was responsive to his hand. He swung the heavy door open—and stepped into a dimly lighted hallway.

A servant, who had been crouched close to a door halfway down the hall, straightened up at Shorty's abrupt entrance. The man came forward gingerly as Shorty beckoned, and Shorty covered him with a six-gun. The man

smiled and shrugged. He was a Mexican.

"Is the señor in?" whispered Shorty softly.

The man jerked his head back toward the closed door where he had been eavesdropping when Shorty surprised him.

"*Si,*" he admitted softly.

"Alone?"

"The señorita is here!"

A grim smile played over Shorty's tense face for a second. Then he motioned to the servant with his gun.

"Stand there, hombre—an' no noise—or I will make a greater noise with this gun and yuh won't hear it!"

"*Si!*" agreed the man obediently. He was trembling.

Shorty tiptoed down the hall. No need to ask where Señor Albino was—for loud voices were raised behind the door where the servant had been listening. Bending over, and keeping one eye on the man, Shorty listened. Yes, there was the angry voice of Señor Albino, raised and pouring out a torrent of hot words; and occasionally, too, came the milder voice of a woman. June Larimer's musical voice! Shorty crouched closer to the door. He heard the man laugh defiantly and launch into a long explanation. Then the girl's voice broke in—there was a pistol shot—and a thud!

Shorty went in then, one shoulder first, his six-gun pointing the way. A cheap revolver glistened on an expensive rug. A chair was overturned, accounting for the crash, and there stood the great Señor Albino, his hair disarranged, struggling with Miss Larimer, the sheriff's stenographer.

"Stick 'em up—Albino!" whooped Shorty.

Albino dropped June and she sat sobbing on the floor.

"This girl—she crazy!" cried Albino angrily. "She try to keel me—shoot off the gun—before I knock it out o' her hand! I bring charges—plenty of charges——"

"Keep yuhr mitts up, Albino," roared Shorty, and his grim smile returned, "I ain't takin' no chances, an' none o' yuhr lies, either! I heard how she threatened to kill yuh—she told yuh that yuh were under arrest for killing stock and said that she would shoot if yuh resisted. I guess yuh resisted!"

"It is a lie!"

"I heard it through the door," smiled Shorty, "an' Miss Larimer is sure right. I'm repeatin' her warnin'; yuh're under arrest, Albino, fer killin' stock; an' ef yuh try any resistance with me I'll sure plug two times fer sure an' once jus' fer devilment."

June Larimer struggled to her feet. She came forward.

"Oh, Shorty," she cried, her face white, "I know now I made a mistake! I wanted to tell you—to ask you—but—but I thought maybe I could put it over myself for the glory and the excitement, and so I—I—came up here——"

"Plucky!" grunted Shorty, smiling at the girl, and held out his hand to her. She took it. What might have happened after that never happened. There was a commotion at the front door and up the hall came Sheriff Joe Cook and Eddie Owens. They came into the parlor without hesitation. Their eyes popped at the sight there.

"Yuh—yuh folks got him?" gasped the sheriff.

"Miss Larimer got him," corrected Shorty gallantly. "She arrested him single-handed and wrung a confession outta the big four-flusher——"

"Shorty arrived just in time," cut in the girl truthfully. "I never would have got by with it unless Shorty had saved me."

"Waal," said the sheriff mildly, "I went back to the office after supper to git the statement I figgered Shorty would have revised—er—kinda looked over—an' when I couldn't find it I got

scared thinkin' mebbe the prisoner, Breene, had got loose in the buildin' an' destroyed it; but he was in his cell an' he said he had a change o' heart an' would tell me whar he spent the night. He said Lewis, the rancher, had ordered him off the place at once, but that Juan Montoya, the foreman, was really a good feller an' offered to let him sleep in the bunk house that night ef he got out early. He said he got out early, an' started to walk to town at dawn next mawnin', an' on his way in a riderless pinto, which he recognized as Señor Albino's pet hoss, passed him, goin' to town itself. So I come up to ask Albino about that—an' met Eddie Owens jus' comin' in the office to escort Miss Larimer home, an'——"

The girl threw up her head proudly.

"I left early to—to do this," she said smiling, "and I put it over—almost! You see, I always craved excitement! I—I don't any more, though. I—I found a silver spur in the stubble field at the Lewis ranch when we were out there; it had the name of a jeweler in Monte Vista stamped on it. I took it to him and he said it belonged to Señor Albino here; so I came up to see him, but he wasn't here and I had to wait. After dark he came in with a rifle and with straw on his clothing; so I accused him of hiding in the straw stack in the field and shooting the cattle and he admitted it."

Señor Albino shrugged his shoulders.

"I said I would make that Juan Montoya cringe!" exclaimed Albino. "It is an old score. When he gets a fine position doing nothing but looking after Lewis' show cattle—I keel the cattle! And I let my hoss go home alone and I wait in the stack to see the fun when the trouble is discovered. I see this girl here with the sheriff and Shorty—then she come here——"

Sheriff Cook leaned forward and shook hands with June.

"Miss," he said, "congratulations; but yuh should have told the rest o' us—he might have hurt yuh!"

"He boasted he would kill me after he bragged of his crime," said June, "and he was choking me when Shorty broke in."

The old sheriff turned to stare at Shorty.

"How did yuh figger out she was here?" he asked.

"Waal," said Shorty, looking hard at Eddie Owens, who was now holding June's hands in his and whispering to her, "yuh see, boss, I put two an' two together. The first report she writes she draps in a lot o' love words, so I figgered she was thinkin' then o'—o' Eddie here, I'm sorry to say. Then she writes out this statement this afternoon an' she thinks ag'in o' Eddie an' draps in some more lovin' words, but she has found that silver spur an' is even then plannin' on showin' us up fer slowpokes. So she accidentally draps in hints as to what she is goin' to do, an' on page four o' the statement I reads such words as 'silver spurs,' 'Señor Albino,' 'his home,' an' 'accuse him point-blank.' I put that all together an' figgered she had come here, so I run up——"

Eddie Owens crossed over and shook hands with Shorty.

"Yuh was jus' in time, Shorty, an' thanks," he said, "fer we might have had a funeral instead o' a weddin', June says, ef yuh hadn't come along when yuh did! I guess I'm to blame fer June kinda makin' errors as a stenographer—I'm crazy about her—an' waal, she's resignin' as Sheriff Cook's secretary fer she's had enough excitement an'—an', besides, we've decided to git married tomorrow!"

"Congratulations!" boomed the sheriff earnestly.

"Lucky bird!" said Shorty sadly.

Señor Albino just laughed—mirthlessly.

But after the door closed on Miss June Larimer and her attentive escort,

Mr. Owens, the sheriff turned on Shorty.

"I know from the tone o' yuhr voice, Shorty," he cried, "that yuh are sure disappointed that she didn't pick yuh fer double harness. Waal, that gal is purty, an' plucky, too; but she's a dumb-bell, Shorty—like a lot o' purty gals—a dumb-bell!"

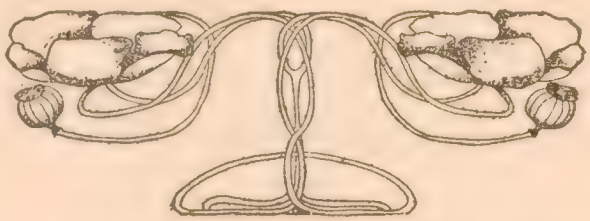
Shorty shook his head. He had a woebegone expression. Obviously he did not agree with the sheriff.

"Jus' change the 'd' in 'dumb' to 's,' an' drap off the 'b,'" said Shorty, "an' then add another 'e' to 'bell' an' yuh'll be a lot nearer the truth——"

"S-u-m b-e-l-l-e," nodded the sheriff, following Shorty's direction. "Waal, mebbe yuh're right, Shorty, exceptin'—exceptin'——"

"Exceptin' what?"

"I think yuhr spellin' is a little off, as usual; but outside o' that mebbe I agrees with yuh perfectly!"



MAKING THE NORTH SAFE FOR OUR FUR BEARERS

IN this day of the fur coat, when those who can are buying them outright, and those who can not are buying them on the installment plan, it is natural that the question should arise; how much longer will we be able to get pelts? Many predict the speedy extermination of fur-bearing animals, but there are others who think differently.

These last cite, for example, the case of the buffalo. Not so many years ago, there was much agitation about the scarcity of buffalo. As a consequence, small herds of these animals were segregated in national parks. Now, the few hundred buffalo have multiplied into many thousands.

At other times, because of the same fear of extermination, beavers were placed under the protection of game laws, a closed period was declared on the sea otter, and an international protectorate safeguarded the fur seal of the northern Pacific. The result, in each case, was the enormous increase of each species.

Pelt farms have also proved highly successful in efforts for the perpetuation of the fur-bearing animals. There are some six hundred such in the United States, and almost as many more in Canada, while over three hundred islands off the coast of Alaska are stocked with blue foxes, minks, martens, and muskrats.

Food is fully as important as protection to the fur-bearing animal, and Nature does pretty well at the job—even developing several kinds of rabbits, field mice, lemmings, and marmots as food for the mink, lynx, marten, and ermine. Man, too, has done his share by destroying wolves and coyotes, the enemies of rabbits and mice, as well as of the fur-bearing animals themselves.

In fact, in view of the combined efforts of Nature and man, those who really know the North seem to think that there is little danger of a fur shortage—not only in the near future, but ever. Their optimism goes even further; they say that the quality of the pelts is improving constantly, as trappers are learning to set their traps later in the season.

Red Raiders

(Roman Nose *and the* Charge *of the* Cheyennes)

By A. B. Searles

Author of "Victoria, the King Philip of the Southwest," etc.

THE path of progress is inevitably a stony roadway, paved with bleaching bones and hedged with thorns. Nowhere, perhaps, is this more clearly exemplified than in the history of our own country; and though we honor the simple, rugged bravery of the pioneer, we should not forget the red warriors who were sacrificed that America might become—America. It is with this thought that we recall the tale of Roman Nose, the noblest Cheyenne.

The period that succeeded the Civil War was a period of construction. Civilization was advancing with astounding rapidity; the East and the West were uniting, and the steel rails of the Union Pacific Railway formed the ring that wedded the two. The nuptials, however, were celebrated not in joy and merrymaking, but in sorrow and anguish.

To the Cheyenne Indians the coming of the railway spelled disaster. That the fire-breathing monsters should thunder across their land, ruin their hunting grounds, drive away the buffalo on which they depended for food was an unbearable outrage, an unjust infringement upon all their rights. Accordingly, the great chiefs of the tribe journeyed together to Fort Ellsworth, Kansas, to make protest against the invasion. In solemn council these princes of the wild parleyed with General Palmer, commander of the post.

Among the red men stood one who towered far above the rest, not only because of his splendid physique, but also because of his compelling personality and nobility of mien. Roman Nose, hereditary chief of the Cheyennes, and war lord of the tribe, dominated the assembly. He was indeed a striking figure. Well over six feet in height, he was built in the noble proportions of a superman of his race. His massive head, crowned by straight black hair, was carried with lofty dignity. In the depths of the flashing, passionate dark eyes burned a fierce and indomitable spirit. Thin-lipped, with nostrils as delicate as those of a

blueblooded race horse, he was the embodiment of savage majesty.

Roman Nose finally voiced the attitude of his people. Clad in buckskin leggings and moccasins, richly embroidered with beads, a rare robe of white buffalo over his bronzed shoulders, a single feather in his scalp lock, he pronounced the decision of his tribe.

"We will not have the wagons which make a noise in the hunting grounds of the buffalo," he said in stern tones. "If the palefaces come farther into our land, there will be scalps of your brethren in the wigwams of the Cheyennes. I have spoken."

This ultimatum was no idle threat, as was proved to the sorrow of those white settlers who, despite the warning, continued to push into the land of the Cheyennes. The Indians at once took the warpath, and under the leadership of Roman Nose and another sachem, Black Kettle, they began a period of devastating activity in western Kansas. No one was safe from their vindictive fury. The workmen who laid the track of the Kansas Pacific Railway, the pitiful, isolated homes of the squatters, lumbering stagecoaches, and slow-moving wagon trains suffered alike at the hands of the avengers. Between June and December, 1868, one hundred and fifty-four white settlers were murdered; forty women and children were captured, and twenty-four farm houses were pillaged and burned. Excitement held sway in the land. Repeated appeals were made to the government for protection—or, at least, for permission to take the law into their own hands and punish the redskins. Finally, General Sheridan, to whom these appeals were referred, took action.

The general had not at his command the troops necessary to punish the bloodthirsty Cheyennes, but Congress had authorized him to employ frontier scouts, whom he might recruit from the daring spirits of the border. It was from among these that he summoned his force. Under Major George A. Forsyth, he sent out a scouting party of fifty. These scouts were paid one dollar a day for their services and thirty-five cents a day for the use of their horses. Outfitted and rationed by the government, the little band fared forth. Many among them were Civil War veterans in search of adventure; for the rest, there were not a few plainsmen eager to retaliate for losses sustained and wrongs endured at the hands of the savages.

Meanwhile, Roman Nose and his tribe were engaged somewhere near the Republican River, northwest of Fort Hayes. As the whites rode on their heels, the redskins, getting wind of their approach, moved on, impudently leaving a plain trail for the palefaces. As a final impertinence, they attacked a wagon train near Sheridan, a tiny railroad town eighty miles beyond Fort Wallace. The savages murdered two teamsters. The cattle they drove away. But the Cheyennes thus overstepped the narrow line of safety. The whites began to press them close.

It is remarkable that, realizing the size of the band of Indians, Forsyth did not turn back for reinforcements. But he and his men alike were built of stern stuff. They had come to fight, not to retreat—and they pursued their course, undeterred by the overwhelming numbers of the foe they trailed.

When, on the evening of the eighth day out from Fort Wallace, the white men made camp, the Indians were prepared for a coup. The site chosen by the unfortunate scouts was on the banks of the river, near a little island. This really was nothing more than a sand shoal in the center of a stream only about eight feet wide and not more than three inches deep. There was no possible shelter anywhere about. Moreover, the soldiers were almost

without provisions, as the redskins had driven off all game in furtherance of their plans. But Forsyth, who was nicknamed "Sandy," did not bear the title without reason. He determined to fight if need be, even though certain of a beating. The Cheyennes must feel the wrath of an outraged government.

Dawn was tinting the eastern sky when the Indians attacked. At first, the whites, straining their eyes in the slowly lightening dusk, could discern only a few of the skulking figures on a near-by hillside. Suddenly the terrain was alive with warriors. Feathered scalp locks nodded behind every bush, and the thud of galloping hoofs gave the alarm of approaching hordes.

With wild cries a dozen red men came pounding down the slope in an effort to stampede the horses of the palefaces. To the sharp cracking of rifles, the Indians sheered off, driving with them three pack mules, but leaving behind one of their number writhing in death agony. The fight was on in earnest.

The very earth sprouted Indians, who seemed to spring miraculously from the ground. Every clump of sod yielded a painted, shouting brave. And these fierce savages rushed down in fury upon the intrepid fifty.

Over the din rose the voice of Forsyth, marshaling his tiny force.

"Lead your horses to the little island," he shouted. "Form a circle fronting outward! Throw yourselves on the ground and entrench yourselves as rapidly as you can!"

The scouts at once pressed back, dodging as best they could the furious fire of the redskins. Many of the horses fell to earth. One man was killed, several wounded.

Infuriated at their stupidity in not cutting off the retreat to the island, the petty chiefs rode hither and thither, urging their infantry to close in. The crack of the rifles sounded on every side. The groans of the wounded mingled with the wild whoops of the savages. It was a fierce and fatal hour.

Alone upon a hillock Roman Nose watched the struggle below. His stern visage was painted in stripes of black and red. Naked but for a crimson scarf about his loins, he sat proudly a magnificent chestnut pony that pawed and snuffed with ill-suppressed excitement. To the ears of the chieftain came the din of the fray, and with the noise of fury now was blended the wailing of women. The squaws who lined the bluffs above the scene of battle were crying for their braves who fell.

For days Roman Nose had watched from ambush the maneuvers of Forsyth and his band. Now, with nearly one thousand warriors at his command, the war chief had forced the issue.

Slowly, on his splendid mount, the sachem descended to the field. Fury froze his heart at the blunder that had left one avenue open to the island. But there was still one way to annihilate the white foe.

The clear September morning gave ample light for accurate rifle fire. Bullets riddled the little mounds of sand thrown up as breastworks by the scouts. Nor were the latter powerless. Many a leaden messenger found the heart of a red man—and not a few badly wounded braves could be seen making a last attempt to crawl to safety out of range of the grim hail.

The horses were groaning in the agonies of death. As a chance shot ended the life of the last of these noble animals a voice from the ranks of the reds cried out in English: "There goes the last horse, anyhow!" It is bitter to think any white man could fall so low, yet we must believe that in the Cheyenne forces were numbered several renegades, traitors alike to race and country.

Roman Nose had formed a plan to dislodge the palefaces from their stronghold. Now he ordered a charge. Up the bed of the river came his wild cavalry, eight ranks of sixty front led by Roman Nose himself.

They were an awesome sight, these warriors. Resplendent in red and black war paint, naked all, save for moccasins and cartridge belt, feathered scalp locks waving in the breeze, they were a band to terrorize the stoutest heart! Five paces in front, in the center of the line, rode Roman Nose, and at his left came the medicine man of the tribe.

Major Forsyth, wounded severely by this time, was still in command. As the reds surged forward they were greeted by a volley of lead.

From the bluffs came the shrill encouragement of the women, and Roman Nose turned and waved a reassurance to them. Then he shook his clenched fist defiantly in the faces of his enemies. From his lips rose the blood-curdling war whoop, to be taken up alike by the men who rode behind the sachem and those ambushed along the river banks.

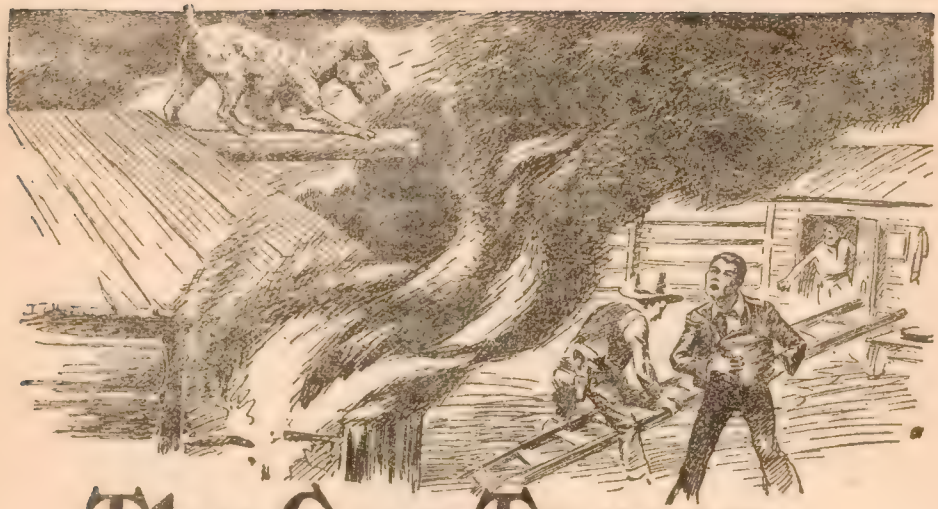
But the fire of the whites was taking deadly effect. The red men were mowed down in swathes. Then suddenly a speeding bullet found the medicine man. He plunged to death from the back of his pony. Still the riders came on. Great gaps showed in the ranks. Roman Nose, in a last excess of fury, galloped, rifle held aloft, to the very edge of the island entrenchment. A bullet sang—and the leader, the pride, the chief of the Cheyennes staggered, reeled, and with one last shout of defiance went down amid the thunder of guns and the beat of unshod hoofs.

The battle raged on, but the charge was ended. The broken ranks turned, separated, fled. Leaderless, the Cheyennes wavered, unknowing what course to follow. Twice an attempt was made to charge the island, and each time the result was failure. Meanwhile, two scouts managed to crawl through the lines and go for aid. On the ninth day the gallant band, exhausted and sorely depleted, were rescued by seventy men of the Tenth Cavalry under Colonel Carpenter.

And Roman Nose? When the troopers were searching for the besieged party they came upon a beautiful wigwam of freshly tanned white buffalo hide. Upon a brushwood bier, deserted and alone in this desolate place, garbed in rich raiment and surrounded by all the trappings of his royalty, lay the body of the sachem. A gaping wound showed where a bullet had entered his courageous heart.

"It is Roman Nose," said one of the scouts. "See the face! It is that of a hero!"

Though the ornamented weapons and accoutrements were taken as spoils of war, some instinct of reverence prompted the rough troopers to leave the body in peace. Alone he lay there, majestic in the dignity of death, and only the vulture that hung motionless in the blue sky, and the dusty gray coyote that whined in the sagebrush guarded the last sleep of the fallen chieftain.



The Gun Tamer

By George Owen Baxter

Author of "Tragedy Trail," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

COLONEL MACKAY invites Felipe Consalvo, Mexican fortune hunter, to his ranch. Mrs. Mackay and her daughter, Mary, react differently to the charming youth. Sheriff Rankin arrives, ostensibly to investigate a rustling. He suggests a race between Mackay's horse and Consalvo's. "Budge" Lakin, killer, resents Elizabeth Kane's admiration of Consalvo.

Consalvo's Conquistador wins the race. Lakin is shot, accidentally he claims, and the Mexican says fate has protected him. Mary now despises the latter. Consalvo's Indian servant, Pedro, is found eavesdropping.

Rankin, riding to town, is overtaken by Consalvo. He recovers, to find the latter binding his injured forehead. With much delicacy Consalvo asks Rankin to promise him immunity for five days. Rankin declines. Consalvo returns to the ranch for dinner. A note from the sheriff says he is detained. Mrs. Mackay is pleased. By accident a puncher sets fire to the bunk house.

CHAPTER XV.

TAG.

OUTSIDE the bunk house, discussion increased, helped on or almost inspired by the yelping of Tag from the roof. He had heard the voice of his mistress, and he wanted to go to her. It was high time he had his dinner, to be duly followed by the chewing of a bone and the ceremonial burial thereof in the back yard. What treasure of those bones had been stowed away, Tag alone could tell, and he, like one of riches beyond counting, was himself a trifle uncertain, except that now and then, as he wandered about, up from the earth came a reassuring fragrance which was not all of the soil. Now and again, a stray dog would venture to unearth a bone, and Tag invariably fell upon the intruder with a fury that made him a giant. He was a valiant dog, was Tag, with a soul so great that often it seemed to be bursting from his body. Yet even great souls sometimes descend to lesser matters, and Tag knew that, having chewed and buried his bone, he could scratch on the back door until he was admitted, after which he might wander upstairs and go to the room of his mis-

tress and there curl up on the little bed specially appointed for his use. Or indeed, on cold winter nights, he would be welcome if he sprang onto her bed, and lay at her feet.

Such thoughts as these now disturbed the warlike soul of Tag, and therefore he yelped higher and louder with every moment.

"Well, we gotta get him down," said Zeke, the sage.

"Go on, Jerry, don't be no quitter. Get the ladder and snake him down, will you?"

The voice of Jerry rose at last to a fury.

"Why, darn you all!" cried he. "I tell you that I unhooked the ladder, but I didn't take it. It was 'Booze' Hammond that took it, I think."

"That's a lie," said Booze, who was stretched in comfort on his back. "I never touched no ladder."

"Quit your yapping, Jerry, and fetch the dog down."

"I'll be darned if I do."

"You'll be worse if you don't! The old colonel'll fire the lot of us if the girl gets sore. And where'll you get a softer lie than this job, Jerry?"

"You'll beat us all out of our jobs, Jerry, unless you try to be a white man, for once!"

"I tell you," shouted the badgered Jerry, "I didn't have the ladder! I dropped it to the ground. Somebody else can get it. I'll be darned if I won't *fight* before I touch it!"

After this, a bit of a silence followed. Not that there were not many men there quite willing to fight with Jerry about smaller matters than this, but this passion amused them in part, and in part it awed them, to see so big a man frantic with the sting of so small a gadfly.

"Well," said old Zeke, "some way we gotta get the dog! That seems clear."

"Get him yourself, then!"

"All right," said Zeke. "I ain't as young and spry as some of you, but I don't mind doing an extra turn for the sake of the rest of you lazy loafers, and—oh, look!" gasped Zeke, as he rose to his feet.

Attention had been focused on Jerry up to this point, but now, turning toward the bunk house, they saw through the open door, and far in the interior of the long lower room, a standing ghost of fire, a red, wavering figure.

Horror kept them still for an instant, then they pitched to their feet and broke for the entrance in a wave so solid that it caught and jammed in the doorway.

It was fortunate for some of them that they stuck there a vital instant, for the low-hanging lantern by the light of which Jerry had been reading had been bathed in an increasing tide of fire all these moments, and now it burst with a loud crash and hurled burning oil over the entire hall.

Instantly a thousand patches of fire were weltering on the floor, on the ceiling, on the walls, and on the bedding; curls and then clouds of smoke sprang up. The whole place was seething with white mist, made choking by the oil fumes.

Those who had bunks near the door made an instant and valiant effort and dragged their belongings to the outdoors, where they were busily engaged in beating out the sparks and the fumes.

In the meantime, two or three ran to the big house for help, others rushed to get water, and not a soul thought of the dog.

He had fallen silent on the roof.

It was well enough to yowl and yelp because he happened to realize that his supper time had come, or because he began to dream about the soft bed which was waiting for him in the room of his mistress. But it was another matter when an important mystery be-

gan to unfold, literally, beneath his nose.

There are only two sorts of fires worth considering, Tag knew: Those which sweep across stubble fields in the autumn, and those which are connected with the smell of cooking food. But this fire which was rising in the house beneath him and sending up choking mists of smoke had nothing to do with either of the above categories. It was something very special and different.

Therefore, it would be distinctly undoglike to make noises which might be interpreted as fear.

Tag was never afraid!

He sat down at the end of the roof peak and watched the confusion and the the bustle of the men until his tail began to twitch from side to side, and he yearned mightily to be down among them, leaping at their heels in this odd game of theirs. He had not been named for nothing!

In the meantime, that fire was increasing with bewildering speed, and great, thick waves of heat rolled trembling up through the air and clung about him, until he sneezed and coughed and shook his head.

He went to the other end of the roof and sat down there.

Here was less smoke and certainly far less heat, so that Tag could sit in reasonable peace and observe the growing commotion beneath him. In the distance, of course, there were growing sounds of men shouting sharply and wildly, just as they shouted at a round-up, except that there was a different note in their voices. There was, in short, no fun in the sounds they made. When he heard men talk like this, Tag always got out of the way discreetly and lay down in a dark corner. It always was wiser. The most thoughtful boots in the world sometimes were capable of trampling upon one in a brutal haste.

There was another noise, however, which was far more exciting than even the calls of his human friends. That was a dull roaring sound which, after it began, increased with great rapidity. Underlying it, at first, was a slight crackling, but this element grew with speed until it began to lead; it turned into a series of explosions; and now and again, there was a rapid booming of guns.

The fire had reached loaded weapons which were scattered here and there through the shack.

And now the roof was growing so extremely hot that Tag, like a cat walking on wet ground, began to pick up one foot after the other, hastily, for fear lest they might blister.

Now, too, he saw that he was standing in terrible peril, and with all his soul he wanted to cry out for help. And as his dog mind cleared in this emergency, his memory stretched stretched straight back to puppyhood, when his wail had been sufficient to bring his dear young mistress running at any moment of the day or the night.

If he were to send up one cry like this, she would, of course, appear before him and stretch out her arms, and he would leap down into them. How happy he would be!

However, a time comes when a boy no longer cries, even in agony, and on that day he is a man. And a time comes when a good dog no longer whimpers; on that day he has come to his own.

So the old cry formed a dozen times in the back of Tag's throat, but it would not break forth. He set his teeth over it, and grinned, as it were, at his own terror.

Now other voices had approached from the house, deeply familiar, and running into the very heart of Tag. Above all the rest was the shrill and trembling note of his mistress, calling his name.

He turned to rush closer to her, but

all that farther end of the roof was now a wall of fumes which drove him back, and as he shrank to the verge of the roof, again, a tall arm of crimson ripped through the shingles, and towered high into the air—instantly withdrawn, but thrust forth again with double brilliance, with double might!

"Tag!" screamed Mary Mackay from the ground. "Tag—darling!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A HERO TO THE RESCUE.

THAT voice brought the light of hope to Tag; it was, in truth, the rift in the storm; and for the first time he definitely felt that those rising fires dared not eat him. Not while Mary Mackay was trying to get at him. And trying she was, beyond doubt.

Tag, on the roof crest, saw her standing with both arms thrown up to him, with the flames that shot from the windows and the fire-worn gaps in the first story billowing almost in her face. She looked to Tag like a glorious divinity. So, as a matter of fact, she always had appeared to him, not only for beauty, but also for power, for, cowering in her lap, even in his puppyhood she had been a shelter to him and a harbor and haven of refuge against the very wrath of the colonel himself.

Now, at her cry, men came swirling around her. And the consuming interior of the house was forgotten. All was forgotten except that a little Irish terrier stood upon the roof above the fire and looked bravely down at them, wagging his stubby tail as a sign that he knew it all was a game, and that, when it pleased these magnificent but just creatures who had put him upon that roof, they would, of course, take him down before peril devoured him.

"I want Tag!" cried Mary Mackay. "And if he's lost—you're murderers! You're murderers!"

Mrs. Mackay and the colonel were hurrying up. The colonel gasped and struck his hands together.

"Who has done this thing?" cried the colonel, like Macbeth in the third act.

"It doesn't really matter who has done it," said Mrs. Mackay. "But how can it be undone?"

The colonel could think of one way only.

"Get ladders, instantly," said the colonel, "and let some of you climb to the roof and bring the dog down!"

It was explained that the long ladders from the barn had been sent for, but that the roof was likely to crash before they arrived.

The colonel stamped.

He raised one arm in a Roman attitude and shouted: "A thousand dollars to the man who brings down that dog!"

But it did not seem that the offer increased the efforts or the intelligence of any one. The flames were mounting, and tearing momently a wider hole in the roof; so that poor Tag was set off in a crimson flood.

Near by, two excited men were holding ladders, rearing up their heads as though to measure them against the hopeless height of the roof.

Mrs. Mackay caught them and drew them close.

"Tie those ladders together!" she urged.

They shouted with joy, and instantly the lashing was under way.

"Good!" shouted the colonel. "Five hundred dollars for the rescue of Tag. Come, boys! Show yourselves to be what you are. For the sake of my daughter and for me! Four hundred dollars," went on the colonel, seeing that the two ladders, now they were united, promised actually to span the height. "Three hundred dollars to the man who brings down Tag!"

He paused.

The ladder was reared, wabbling just a little in midair, and then its

head was set down close to the rim where Tag stood.

Instantly, up ran one of the cowpunchers, and, no doubt, all would have been well had not old Zeke, the wise man, urged on by the frantic cheers, and, doubtless, wishing in some way to thrust himself forward into some prominence in this work, now run up the ladder behind his mate. The result was that as the latter came to the point of junction, suddenly the hastily laid wrappings began to give way; the ladders sagged at the joint, and then collapsed.

The pair tumbled to the ground, unhurt by a happy chance. And immediately afterward the entire forward portion of the roof sagged and then pitched downward with a mighty crashing. Up boiled myriads of sparks and small fragments of flaming wood on the rebound and, whirled aloft in the draft of the conflagration, scattered widely in their fall.

"Look to the barns!" shouted the colonel. "Look to the sheds! Look to the house! Never mind the dog. He's lost!"

Lost, indeed, he seemed to be, for all the end of the house on which poor Tag stood was sagging inward and shuddering. But as the riot of sparks died out of the sky, and only the mighty red arm of the flames soared upward, there was Tag still, now driven from the roof rim onto the stout pole which projected outward a little from the main beam end of the roof.

Perched there, precariously, once or twice he turned his head and glanced behind him at the roar of the fire, but these were only temporary weaknesses, and the rest of the time he continued to look down to the crowd, still with his head canted on one side, and his tail wagging in ceaseless good humor, as much as to say that he understood it was still a game—a grand and great game, but nevertheless one which he would try to comprehend. Only—they really would be kind if they snatched him away from this danger with the magic of their hands!

"The house!" shouted the colonel, seeing a wave of sparks wafted in that direction. But neither wife nor daughter nor hired man stirred, but held their looks upward, stricken still, except Mary Mackay, who had fallen on her knees and buried her face against her mother, weeping.

Then old Zeke, recovered from his fall, lurched out of the crowd, blubbering foolishly, and moving with clumsily useless hands here and there.

Mrs. Mackay, her face a little pinched, but her eyes cold and steady, fondled the golden head with both her hands and neither stirred nor spoke, as one who knows that hope is gone.

All this while Don Felipe had fluttered, so to speak, hither and thither upon the rearward rim of the crowd, offering softvoiced suggestions which were lost in the roar of the fire, or, if they were heard, were received and paid for with deepthroated maledictions. And heavy arms knocked him out of the way.

But when he saw Mary fall on her knees, in tears, he ceased his butterfly actions and cast one stern glance at the dog on the roof beam.

Then he picked up one of those buckets of water which had been hurried toward the fire and left standing when it was seen that they were of no use. This he raised in both hands, and, with a little shudder of distaste, poured it deliberately over his head, so that it soaked him and all his finery. After that, he caught up a lariat from the pile of salvaged material from the house, and ran swiftly forward, skirting the edge of the watchers.

Just beneath the roof beam and the dog he went, shaking out the noose of the lariat as he ran—shaking it out

with gracefully expert hands. Then he whirled it over his head, and hurled it up. Straight and true it sped, faltered at the top of its rise, and then settled on the beam. One jerk made it fast.

And then what a shout rose from the spectators!

A sharp cry from her mother—and Mary started to her feet, to watch also.

And yet there was surely no hope, for now that end of the building was mightily warped inward, and Tag stood aslant upon the roof-tree. All across the blackening side of the wall tongues of flames were eating through, and now and again the structure shuddered, with a groan of creaking timbers.

Moreover, to climb a rope hand over hand to such a height was a trick which even a powerful sailor would hardly have cared to attempt. And there were no sailors present!

Don Felipe, however, seemed to have no doubt about the matter, but, giving the rope one loose twist around his leg, to secure himself in case of his hands breaking loose, he raised himself rapidly, reaching upward with his long arms and sweeping himself along without a pause.

He was almost to the goal when the whole wall sagged and staggered, and a long tongue of fire shot out directly at the rescuer, bathing his entire body below the arms. It was as though personal malice had directed that shaft of crimson. But while a groan of apprehension burst from the little crowd, Don Felipe swiftly worked his way upward and through the flames until, with one hand, he clutched the beam.

It was a part of the game which Tag recognized instantly. He hesitated just long enough to kiss the brow of his deliverer, and then he leaped lightly and fearlessly upon the shoulders of the man.

The descent was made in one swift drop, the rope curling with a hiss around the leg of Don Felipe. And now he stood upon the ground, and watched the wall sway slowly inward, as though it had maintained itself for a merciful purpose just this long, and now willingly gave way to ruin. It fell. The sparks leaped in a hurried throng for the last time. And now they looked across a small, low heap of ruins, covered with welterings of fire.

As for Tag, he jumped to the ground and made with arrowy speed for his mistress. Into her arms he sprang, one convulsive wriggle of delight. For he knew that he had played the game, and he was tremendously proud of himself. Moreover, he knew that it was her voice, her cry that had directed help toward him.

For, of course, there was no one else in this universe so wise, so just, so merciful, so all-powerful!

Don Felipe, among the cow-punchers, had been "the Mex" or "the greaser," up to this moment, but now old Zeke was heard asking: "Where's Señor Consalvo! I want to tell him he's dead game!"

Señor Consalvo was not to be found. He had slipped skillfully away into the darkness and was gone.

CHAPTER XVII.

PEDRO SPEAKS.

WHEN they searched for Don Felipe, they had to persuade him to leave his room, and then he confronted the inner circle of the Mackay family.

The colonel, of course, made a speech. He held the hand of Don Felipe and said:

"My dear Consalvo, when you first came among us"—it was very like the dictation of a letter—"we knew that we were fortunate to have you. And during your stay you have—ah-hem!—become a very pleasant—er—may I say

member of our family? I must say it, Felipe! And—in fact——"

The colonel paused a little, dragging his words till a new thought came to him. But then the dog furnished him with a theme, and he concluded: "As I see Tag run to you, my dear fellow, I want you to know that he's only expressing our entire affection for you, Felipe!"

He released Consalvo with a final warm pressure of the hand, only adding: "Though where you found the strength to do such a Herculean thing—well, I can't tell!"

"Of course," said Don Felipe modestly, "any of the vaqueros would have done it, if they had happened to think. It was nothing. My great pleasure to take Tag down from that fire. Be my very good friends, and forget all about it!"

He leaned to pat Tag, said good night, and extricated himself without haste, and very gracefully, only aware, as he retired, of Mary Mackay watching him with eyes like two stars.

In his room, Don Felipe saw that Pedro was hard at work, seated cross-legged with a board across his knees, and on the board was one of his master's richest jackets. It was covered as by a jeweler's craft with gold and silver thread, curiously applied, and Pedro leaned above it with ardent attention. He had by him spools of silver and of gold thread of the costliest nature, and there was an assortment of needles which from time to time he threaded with a sparkling filament and then repaired some frayed spot on the jacket. That work required the hand of a fairy and a genius for minute attion, but the uncouth Indian seemed to possess both.

Or, advancing in his careful examination, he found a tiny spot which had to be eradicated, a button to be affixed more firmly, or another which needed polishing, and every portion of the work was done with the same meticulous honesty of labor.

Don Felipe stood by the door, smoking at leisure, and watching with infinite interest the handiwork of his servant, and the great, ugly shadow which squatted on the floor in front of Felipe.

He began to undress. Pedro, abandoning his other work, stood up and took the articles which his master threw to him one by one, folded them, and put them away. He brought forth pajamas, slippers, silken dressing-gown. At length Don Felipe sat by the window, lighting another cigarette from the end of the first. Pedro went back to his work, and for some time he continued in this fashion, bending closely to his task with a loving exactness, but now and again raising his great, ugly head, and looking at his master, and then past him at the night sky beyond, and the faint glimmer of the stars above. There was an odd combination of awe, wonder, fear, respect, and amusement in this look of Pedro's. The head of Don Felipe constantly was turned away from him, and yet he was not surprised when the voice of his master said: "Why do you stare, Pedro?"

The Indian no longer spoke Spanlish, but lapsed into his harsh, natural tongue.

"The lizard on the stone, and the eagle in the air—they both have eyes and see with them," replied he.

Don Felipe puffed, blew smoke forth, and spoke again.

"Sometimes I understand you, Pedro," said he. "Sometimes what you say goes by me like an arrow and misses my mind. For you continually are talking around a corner."

He had answered in the Indian's own tongue, and the sound of it made Pedro bend his ear, as though he listened to the most delicate and delicious music.

"Father," said he, "I hear you, but I

do not understand you. Unless it is that I speak as my father taught me to speak."

"Every man's way may be a good way," said his master, "but when you speak Spanish, I understand you more clearly. That is all."

"In Spanish," said the Indian, "I can ask for bread and meat. In Spanish I can tell a horse to go on, or a dog to stop. In Spanish I can ask for my money or I can pay a bill. But I cannot speak!"

Don Felipe considered, and then he nodded.

"Speak to me in your father's tongue, then, Pedro. There is something that you wish to say. You have been staring at me. What is it?"

"I?" said the Indian, and then he added: "It is true. As I sat here at my work—if a pleasure like this can be called work, spinning pleasant things like a spider making a web—then I said to myself that Pedro labors with his hands. But his father sits with his head against the stars, and he is working, also, although his hands are still."

The white man turned his head, a sign that his full attention had been caught.

"When a cat," said he, "wishes to catch a mouse, first it pretends to sleep; and then it comes softly on the mouse. Now, Pedro, you have something more to say to me."

"I?" said the Indian.

"Yes."

"What could I have to say?"

"To-day and yesterday," said the master, "I have seen you putting away things in the pack."

"That is the part of a wise man," said the Indian. "For he constantly prepares for the march when he is sitting still."

"I have told you," said the master, "that this is likely to be a summer's camp."

"That is true," said the Indian. "But the wolf starts on a long trail and changes with the wind at midnight."

"I am not a wolf," said the master sharply.

Pedro was silent.

"I am not a wolf," said Don Felipe sharply.

"No, señor," said the servant submissively, and in Spanish.

"Speak your own tongue! Speak your own tongue and your own thoughts," commanded Don Felipe.

Again Pedro was silent.

At last, Consalvo took a more conciliatory tone and added very gently: "For, Pedro, without your thoughts spoken freely I should be half blind, and all that came before me would be seen dimly; but, with you, I see with two eyes. What has your eye seen, Pedro?"

The Indian paused for a moment, inhaling this compliment with an expanding chest and a brightened eye.

At last he said: "Is it true that my father has need of his son?"

"By night," answered Don Felipe, "and by day, I have need of you, Pedro! I should not sleep, except that I know you are watching."

Pedro breathed again, and then he raised his head a little.

"There are some among my nation," said he, "who have two sights."

"I have heard that."

"One sight is outward; and one is inward."

"It is true."

"Does my father believe in such things?"

"In a way, yes. There never was a thought that did not have some reason behind it. Go on, Pedro."

"My grandfather was possessed of both sights, the outward and the inner."

"I have heard you talk about the old man. And I saw him, as you may remember."

"I remember," said Pedro, his voice touched with emotion, "and I remember that he said a strong prayer for you to the sun father in the sky, who is the parent of all living things. You will not remember, for then you did not know our tongue."

"He was a kind old man," said Felipe Consalvo. "I remember his face, at least, perfectly well."

"And I, too, father, inherited from him a little of his gift. I also see with the outward and with the inward eye, but never so clearly as he could see; for he discerned the actual form of things, and all that appears to me is a shadow or a brightness."

"That is possible, and that I could understand."

"Ah, señor, then if you believe me, let me make the pack up to-night! I shall saddle the three mules. Long before dawn we shall have reached the mountains, and lost our trail behind us!"

"There is danger, then, before us, Pedro?"

"There is danger, señor! I felt it here when we first came in sight of the place. It is as clear to me as the shadow that slept beside the house!"

"So? Tell me, then, what sort of danger it will be?"

"That I cannot say. But I know from my heart that before we leave we are in danger of a great trouble either to me and my life, or to the life of the man who is more to me than my dead father when he lived."

And his eyes, for a moment, softened and lightened as he looked at Felipe.

The latter returned no answer for a time, though finally he said: "Have you seen or heard anything here to make you feel that your dream is true?"

"Nothing, señor."

Again Consalvo was silent, but finally he said:

"I shall sleep, Pedro."

The Indian stood up with a sigh.

"You will not listen, my father?"

There was silence for an answer.

"Then," said Pedro gently, "I pray that the danger shall fall on my own head! I shall pray to the sun and make a sacrifice."

Here again he had no reply, and he went to the door which opened into his own small chamber. There he paused, as though wrestling with a great idea that struggled to break from his lips; but as though the words failed him, or his mind changed, suddenly he passed on.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SCALES BY STARLIGHT.

PEDRO was in bed in darkness when his door opened. He knew it, not by the noise, but by a softly whispering draft that passed over his face, and, clutching a gun beneath his pillow, he turned himself as if to face a danger. For what comes upon one with such softness that is not dangerous?

Then, though there had been no sound of an approach, he heard a voice speaking softly and distinctly just above him. He shuddered. He who owned that voice could have reached out and stabbed him as he lay in his bed, for all his wakefulness, and it made small difference that the voice came from his own dear master.

"Pedro, you are not sleeping yet?" said Don Felipe.

"No, father."

"All that comes and goes in my mind, you should be free to hear. There is no distrust in me for you, Pedro. But as if you were my son and I were your father, as you call me, I have perfect faith in you."

"It is the will of the sky people," said the Indian, "that you should be served by me and accept my service.

That has been revealed to me; it cannot be false!"

"I have wished to say this much to you, Pedro. That now in this house we are opening the door of danger, and on the other side of that door, we may find riches and happiness forever."

"The rich man cannot be unhappy unless he has children," said the wise Pedro.

"That should be true," resumed the master. "However, it is, as I said, the door of danger. Tell me, then, where the danger may lie?"

"In the large señor?"

Don Felipe chuckled softly.

"The danger is not in him, but in his squaw!"

"In a woman?" echoed the Indian with wonder.

"In a woman, Pedro. In that woman there is all the wisdom of a wolf and all the secrecy of a serpent. No man is wiser than she, and no cat is more secretive. All that I do she has guessed at before I have done it. In all my life, though I have known many people, never have I known people like her. She is the greatest of all. She is to them like a moon among the stars, and she puts them out with her brightness."

The Indian murmured: "I hear you, father, and I believe you."

"Believe me entirely," said Consalvo. "This is what I have come to say to you: Day and night, when you are awake, think of her, stay close to her. Listen to her words."

"She speaks little Spanish except to you," said the Indian.

"You yourself understand English, a little," said the master. "Never forget what little you know, and use it when you are near to her. Wear a strong mask on your face, but let your ears be like the ears of a fox."

"I shall!" said the Indian.

"That is all. Sleep well. In the morning, begin to watch. She is often in her garden. Remember!"

"I shall not forget!"

There was no sound, but presently the draft ceased to cross Pedro's face and he knew that the door had been closed. And he knew that his master once more sat at his window, watching the stars; and so, with folded hands, minute by minute, hour by hour, sinking deeper and deeper into his own reflections, where success and failure and all their causes would be weighed in a scale far nicer than the most delicate balance that a chemist uses for weights unthinkable.

However, there was in the house another person as wakeful as Don Felipe. And that person was Mrs. Mackay.

She had been in the room of her daughter and sat on the edge of her bed. Tag, clasped in the arm of his mistress, his nose on her bare shoulder, was fast asleep, and giving way in his dreams to the weakness which he would not show when in danger, for now and again he whimpered and shrugged his singed coat. Then a whisper and touch would make him wag his stubby tail, and he slept soundly again.

In the meantime, the hushed voice of his mistress flowed on. She was full of the great event of that evening. Her voice trembled, and her mother could feel the girl's body tremble, also, as she spoke.

Never, never, in all this world of men, had there been a deed so matchless, so heroic, so unthinkably swift and manly! And she had scorned this hero as a coward! She had scorned and slighted him! She had spoken to him rudely. How, indeed, could she face him again? How could she make her peace with him? How could she tell him of the splendor that she saw in him?

Mrs. Mackay held her daughter's hand.

And all that she said from time to time was: "Dear child! Dear Mary!"

And then, at length, the girl murmured: "But you make everything seem so small, so unimportant! One would think that this whole world were hardly a pin point, mother!"

"In a way, it's hardly that," said Mrs. Mackay.

"And in a way, it's a vast thing!" cried the girl passionately. "And even Tag—even Tag's a vast thing. A tremendous thing, mother. Poor darling puppy! Do you remember how he waggled his tail and looked down at us? He—he thought—he thought it was only a game—the blessed—hush, Tag! Sweet puppy! You're safe now. I'll never let him out of my sight again so long as I live! The scoundrels! I hope father discharges every one. I won't rest till he does!"

"Would you send poor old Zeke away?"

"Not Zeke, of course. Where would he go? Nobody else would have the slow old thing."

"And Charlie, then?"

"Charlie's exceptional, of course. And it wasn't his fault."

"We'll let Jerry go, at least," said the mother. "He caused the fire, you know!"

"Poor Jerry! How frightfully he took it! One would have thought that he had put a human being in danger of burning! Oh, no, we couldn't discharge Jerry! You wouldn't think of that! Did you ever see anything so strong?"

"As Jerry?"

"Mother, silly! As Felipe, climbing the rope, I mean!"

"It was very strong, of course."

"It makes my shoulders ache, just to think."

"He may have been a sailor, and learned at sea, you know."

"Felipe? You mean Señor Consalvo? Mother!"

"Why not?"

"Think of him as a common sailor!"

"But, my dear, why not?"

"It couldn't be possible!"

"He's a—what shall I say?—a prospector, now."

"A prospector! What an idea! Imagine Felipe finding gold!"

"Well, he must have some occupation."

"I don't see why."

"Most men have a business, haven't they?"

"He's different."

"He's a very brave young man. And very polite."

"Mother, you reduce things so!"

"But, dear, he's flesh and blood. Like us. Like old Zeke, even!"

"Like Zeke!"

"In a word, he's human, Mary."

"He's like himself, and no one else."

"But even that self of his must have bread and butter. And how will he earn it?"

"I don't like even to think of that."

"Is it a disgrace to work?"

"I suppose not."

"You see, dear, we don't know a great deal about Felipe, as you call him."

"Do you mean that I shouldn't call him that?"

"You are a bit hostile, Mary. Of course, you have a right to call him what you please. Only—we haven't known him very long."

"But you see, he's different, isn't he?"

"Different, dear?"

"Of course! You must feel that. He's not like others. To talk to Felipe—it's opening a new book—a sort you've never read before!"

"At least, it must be either prose or verse."

"Oh——" began Mary, and then she was silent.

Her mother waited for the completion of that sentence, and finally she

laid her hand on the brow of her girl, and she found it hot.

Still there was no new word, and Mrs. Mackay stood up.

"Good night, Mary."

"Good night, mother."

So Mrs. Mackay stole from the room and went to her own chamber.

"Lydia!" called her husband.

She went into her husband's room.

"I want you to hear this. It's about Newton. He's marrying again, old ass! Listen!"

She listened, her eyes on the floor. Her husband, finishing, roared with laughter.

"Gad, Lydia, you really have no sense of humor!"

"My head is aching a little to-night."

"Ah, well—run along, then."

She went back to her room, and passed the mirror like a ghost, in the dim light. On her balcony she drew up her chair near the railing and sat down with hands folded in her lap and watched the stars, minute by minute, and hour by hour, never moving.

And as she watched them, she was weighing the chances of success and of failure in scales so nice that, compared with them, how gross were the scales of the chemist, balancing imponderable matter!

So the night wore away over Mackay House, and in all the place only two people were wakeful.

CHAPTER XIX.

STEPS BY DAYLIGHT.

"IT'S an ill wind," said the colonel, "that blows nobody good, and as for the wind that took the bunk house up in smoke, it will blow good to the ranch in several ways. The old building was an eyesore. It stood up like a sore thumb near Mackay House"—he was fond of referring to his residence in this formal fashion—"and now we have a chance to rebuild in a proper way. Now, Lydia, what would you suggest?"

"Something over the hill in the hollow, where we won't hear the boys quite so plainly."

"Wrong!" said the colonel triumphantly. "You've missed, my dear!" he continued, as though he had been asking a riddle, and not merely for advice. "The thing to do is to have the new bunk house a decorative feature and a member of the whole group of buildings. Something quietly beautiful—Spanish type—patio—garden—a touch of color—a red roof, I should say. What do you think of that, Mary?"

"Nice," said Mary. "But what would the boys do with anything nice?"

"I don't understand you," said the colonel.

"Well," explained Mary, "they want a house where they can carve their initials on the walls. 'Sunshine Bill, Oklahoma;' 'Mississippi Slim, bound north,' and things like that. What fun would they have in a neat house?"

The colonel cleared his throat.

"In all men," he announced, "there are elements which respond to the stimulus of a higher life—whether it be in mental food, or physical food; whether it be in pleasures of the spirit or pleasures of the senses. I shall have better and finer cow-punchers if I give them better quarters. The ruffians will be out of place. The more intelligent, sensitive souls will remain, and find their home here."

"I never saw a cow-puncher so sensitive," said Mary, "that he wouldn't want to dump his saddle on the floor rather than hang it on a peg. I never saw one that didn't want to shy his boots into a corner and scratch a match on the wall and drop it on the floor. I tell you, dad, you won't get a crowd of young poets and such to ride herd for you. And you've got to give a cowman what a cowman wants!

I'd do what mother says. Build them another shack just like the old one, over the hill where we hear them whooping it so often on Saturday nights. And I'd build them their own lane to the main road, so's when they wanted to go into town after pay day, they could go sober and come back drunk and not bother us."

"Good heavens!" said the colonel, much moved. "This from you, Mary! Is it my own daughter who makes such speeches as this? Is it possible? Mary, Mary, are you becoming hard as young as this?"

"Well," said Mary, "there's a bit of a difference between hardness and common sense."

"To crowd our hired men into a detestable shack and——"

"I'm not trying to save money," said Mary. "I'm just trying to make them happy. You want to give them truffles. But I know that they'd rather have ham and eggs. Believe me, they would! And if you want to make them happier, give them *more* ham and eggs, and then some more of the same. You want to give them wine; they'd prefer whisky. You're right for yourself, but they're right for themselves."

The colonel threw up his hands.

"This is," he said, "the twentieth century! Heaven help it! This is the type of our best young womanhood! Consider such ideas, Felipe," he went on, turning to his guest. "And from a girl—a child! Where are the higher and tenderer sentiments to find a shelter and place to take root if they are excluded from the minds of our women? By heavens, Felipe, I tell you that the world is rapidly traveling down hill!"

"I should think," said Felipe, "that the easiest solution would be to ask the men what they'd prefer to have."

"Ha!" cried the colonel, turning pink. "Ask them? Let them once step into the saddle—let them once feel that their opinions count, and there'd be no holding them. No, Felipe, a stern hand, and arm's length away. That's the only system, I assure you!"

Felipe lighted a cigarette and said nothing, and the colonel straightway settled down to the drawing of plans for the new bunk house along his own ideas, with a delightful garden in front, and a patio framed with arches. Neatly and lightly the colonel drew it. He might have made a living by his pencil, had he chosen.

Mary Mackay went off with Tag at her heels, and Tag barked at the feet of Don Felipe.

"Tag wants you to come along, too," said Mary. "I'm going to walk up the ridge, if that interests you."

So Don Felipe went along, and Mrs. Mackay followed them with her eyes. She glanced at her husband. He was absorbed in his work, and Mrs. Mackay went slowly into the house.

In her room, she took a strong pair of field glasses, and with it she climbed into the tower; from that post of vantage, shamelessly she scanned the ridge until she made out the two strolling up it, from one patch of trees and brush to another, and crossing the intervening meadows.

Once or twice they paused, and each time Mrs. Mackay fixed the glasses closer to her eyes, with a little shudder of apprehension. But first it was only that they had halted to watch Tag dig at a gopher hole. And again it was to watch a low-circling hawk. They walked on again.

And, as they walked, they talked idly of many idle things until Mary stopped short and thrust her walking stick firmly into the ground.

"Felipe!" she said.

Felipe straightened a little, and his eyes widened.

"Good heavens!" said Mary Mackay. "You act as if you're afraid of me!"

"I suppose I am," said he.

At this, she bent her brows upon him, after a fashion which she had inherited from her father when he was in an imperious humor.

"Something is going to happen," said Mary.

Don Felipe retreated a little farther—a withdrawal hardly to be measured even in inches.

"I'm going to be rude!" said Mary.

"Señorita!" murmured Don Felipe, surprised.

"But why?" cried Mary. "Last night—oh, I thought that last night you could—and now you're—I don't know what to make of you, Felipe Consalvo! *Fire* didn't bother you!"

"But what is fire?" said he gently. "It is something that can be known. But every human being is a mystery. Their joy is beautiful, and their anger is terrible. And yours above all."

"Mine?" said Mary Mackay.

He was silent for a moment, his eyes on the ground, and then he said quietly: "Yes—to me!"

That was all, and how much remained unsaid she might guess at, if she chose, but she felt that she never could draw the words from him.

Yet she felt that he had given her a clew to the weakness which she felt she had seen in him. Men he could fear, but not other dangers, and therefore he had been willing, with the frankness of a child, to admit his terror of such men as the young gun fighter who now lay wounded in the house. There was not a cow-puncher on the place, she firmly believed, who would have declared such weakness as this; but, on the other hand, what one of them had dared to venture himself for the life of poor Tag?

She looked down at the terrier, and found that he had lain down for a rest—and chosen as a pillow for his head one of the feet of Don Felipe. Then, raising her eyes, she looked into the face of the Mexican and found that he was smiling faintly.

"Felipe!" she said.

"Señorita?"

"There's a lot about you that I don't understand; and there must be a lot about me that you don't understand; but I want to like you; I do like you; let's promise to be good friends!"

With that, she held out her hand, but instead of shaking it to clench this amiable agreement, Don Felipe bowed above it and touched it with his lips.

It was very odd to Mary, for never before had her hand been kissed, and the grave and gentle reverence of Don Felipe touched her to the heart. There would have been more confirmation, she felt, in a handshake, but, after all, the ingrown ways of a man could not be changed, even if she wished.

She was rather bewildered, too, because after all these advances she had made she remained, in some odd manner, as distant from him as ever. If she had been half so free with any youngster of the range, she knew that he would have felt that almost the last barrier was cast down, but Don Felipe continued to regard her, so it seemed, as though there were something inherently queenly in her nature, so that no action could lower her beneath herself.

They walked slowly through the woods, and across the pasture lands; and when she fell thoughtfully silent, Don Felipe made conversation about little things around them—about a blackbird that flashed across a thicket, and a red squirrel that ran up a tree trunk. He seemed to know all about the wilderness and its people; and yet she listened to him only with half her attention.

She decided, at last, that she must go back, and as they turned they saw the low, square tower of the house far off above the treetops.

"I have made you unhappy," said Don Felipe anxiously. "I have seen

that I make you ashamed because I am not a man who loves battle as your people love it; still, it makes you unhappy to be with me!"

He stood a little behind her, but with an alert eye he watched every stir of head and shoulder and throat, reading her swiftly and skillfully.

She spoke toward the distant house, rather than to the man so close to her.

"You see, Felipe, I've wanted to open my heart and talk, sort of. I never have a chance to do that. Mother is so quiet and so different. Father never understands. But you——"

Don Felipe sighed.

"I remember," said he, "when I was little, and my father was even then quite poor, that I stood in front of a jeweler's window in Mexico City and looked in at the treasures, green, and red, and crystal. One blow would break the glass, and one grasp of the hand would make me rich forever, and make my father rich, also. But, although I was not very old at that time, still I was old enough to understand that there would be terrible things to follow, if I did what I wished. And now, you see, I am again near a treasure. There is not even a pane of glass between me and what I wish—I would speak, but I know that I dare not!"

"I don't understand you," said Mary in such an unsteady voice that it was plain she understood perfectly well. "I don't know what you mean, Felipe."

"If I should speak to you, carelessly and freely, and use your name as you use mine, do you think that I could check myself so easily? No, but a wild torrent would break out, and I should fall on my knees and tell you, Mary, that I love you, that I adore you—and I dare not do it! For even if your kindness should listen to me, I should know that I am a fool to speak in that manner, and a coward to take such an advantage of your gentleness!"

To this Mary said not a word, but she began to tremble violently. She was frightened, too, but she cast not a single glance over her shoulder at Don Felipe, so that she could not see the flash of triumph that gleamed in his eye and was gone again.

"Tag!" she whispered.

And Tag, willing to help if he knew how, stood up and put a forepaw on her knee, and so stared up toward her face to ask what he could do.

CHAPTER XX.

FORGERY.

THE length of this walk had not overtired the patience of Mrs. Mackay. On the contrary, the glasses never left her eyes, and she strained them willingly, except that now and then a slight tremor disturbed the focus and made her hunt again, rather wildly, until she found the pair.

And every time they passed through the shade of a grove she lowered the glasses and leaned like a very weary woman against the side of the window, and every time they appeared she studied them with an anxious patience again until, at last, she saw them turn back, and come to that stand.

Mrs. Mackay's excitement grew so intense that, in spite of herself, the glass wabbled this way and that, and picked out a hawk, hanging high in the pale-blue heaven, and then made a distant treetop jump up to her so close that she could see in the boughs the bird which had taken refuge there from the hawk which towered above.

Then, fixing her glass upon the mark at last, she saw Don Felipe make one stride closer, saw his arms surround Mary, and saw the head of Mary fall back upon his shoulder.

Mrs. Mackay dropped the glass. It was a priceless one with the finest lens that could be ground, and that lens now crashed with an ugly, tinkling sound.

She heeded it not, but hurrying down from the tower, she ran into her husband's study, crying: "My dear, my dear!"

The colonel looked up from a large sketch which he was completing.

"I have it!" said he. "I have the grand idea at last! We'll put the new bunk house on the top of the hill south of the house, and in the center of it a little blunt tower, like one of those old Norman remains, with perhaps a telescope mounted on top—you understand?—a little touch—something aspiring—to lead the thoughts of our men——"

"Yes," said Mrs. Mackay.

"But I haven't explained——"

"I thought I left my needlepoint bag in here," said Mrs. Mackay. "Have you seen it?"

"Needlepoint! Needlepoint indeed!" cried the colonel. "And when I'm working out such a thought as this —good heavens, Lydia, how can you have the soul to think of such a thing? No, I haven't seen the confounded needlepoint!"

Mrs. Mackay retired softly to her own chamber, but there she turned confusedly from one thing to another —picked up a book and set it down again, and moved a chair, and leaned an instant at the window with an unseeing eye.

At length she hurried down and out to the stable, where she had a horse saddled, and once more rode straight across country for the town.

There was white lather on the shoulders of her mount when she came to the office of Sheriff Rankin. Tilted back in a chair on the little veranda of that small office she found the sheriff's old retainer who acted as messenger boy and random deputy.

"Where can I find Sheriff Rankin?" she asked.

"Where can you find the sheriff?" repeated the old fellow in a daze, and he pushed his hat far back on his bald head. "Where? Why, ma'am, I would've said that you can find him on your own ranch!"

"But," she said impatiently, "he left the ranch the other day, you know! He must have come here."

"Not a sight or sound of him, ma'am."

"He's been to his office, and you haven't seen him," she insisted.

"I sleep in the back room," replied the other, "and if a mouse could come through the front door without me hearin', I'm a liar!"

Mrs. Mackay, overcome, stared helplessly at him; and he stared back, equally puzzled, but foolishly anxious to help.

"Tell me," she went on at length. "He carries a great deal of criminal information in his office, doesn't he?"

"In the big desk," said the other with a smile of pleasure to be able to say something definite. "Stacks and stacks, ma'am. Photographs, and writing on the backs of 'em, and letters and papers of all kinds, till you wouldn't think that that many bad men ever was in the world!"

Mrs. Mackay felt her brain reeling.

For, with this whole reference library at hand to consult, where else would the sheriff have gone to work up what leading clews he might have concerning the identity of Don Felipe?

And yet he had not come home!

She turned her horse and journeyed more slowly back to the ranch, turning and returning the problem in her mind. Something had to be done! Something had to be done! It rang in her brain like a bell; but what could she accomplish by herself.

Of course, she could tell the colonel what she had seen, but she knew perfectly well what that would lead to—a scene between her husband and the Mexican; a violent outburst, in which the colonel with military precision

would confront the girl with her lover; the frank admission of Mary; the furious denunciation of the colonel; the polite coolness of Don Felipe; his retirement from the house; the flight of Mary to her room——

And, after that, may the kind Fortune who sometimes has mercy upon mortals come to her help in this mystery and maze of woe, for beyond a doubt Mary could not be kept from a man she had chosen for a husband, and least of all from such a husband as Señor Consalvo!

She thought, then, of striving in some way to make Mary see that the man had been living a lie—that he was as desperate a warrior as ever rode out of Mexico, in paint and feathers or in civilized garb. But she knew that the joy of Mary in such a revelation would far pass her suspicion and her bewilderment. For, if the girl had loved such a man, believing him a coward in the face of his fellow men, what could break his hold upon her?

In short, there was only one possible way to answer, and that was by placing Señor Consalvo securely behind prison bars where Mary might vow eternal fidelity, of course, but Mrs. Mackay was wisely willing to trust to this twentieth century of the colonel's detestation, and the swiftness with which it dissolved all ties.

So she reached the ranch.

To find the sheriff! That was the grand purpose, of course, and first of all to solve the mystery of his disappearance. For, though it was possible that he might have gone straightway toward the State capital, say, to consult the criminal archives deposited there with the head of the police, yet it was a strange thing that he had not, first, touched at the home town and all the information which he had pooled there for just such emergencies as this.

Feeling as she did, it was only natural that Mrs. Mackay should pick up the sheriff at the last step she knew of him—namely, she went to her room and took from her desk the scrawled note which had been dropped in the mail box and so come back to her.

Taking it up now, resolved and critical, she studied it with the most minute care, trying to read some extra meanings into the words; but it struck her as a perfectly straightforward note, sent back to cover his departure so that he might appear excused in the eyes of the colonel, while, secretly, he went froward with his mission.

Yet there was something about it that was not quite like the sheriff. Something in the phraseology, perhaps. So she picked out from the same desk a note which he had written long ago, in the days of the cattle-rustling affair. She laid that note beside the second, and the instant that she did so, her heart leaped with fear and excitement.

She felt, at first, that it was merely a dizzy optical illusion, and therefore she resolutely covered her eyes with one hand and counted twenty before she looked again.

Now, however, clear-eyed and clear-minded, there could be no doubt at all. For, indeed, long ago she had had a passing fancy for the study of the gentle art of deciphering character by handwriting, so that she was quite intimately familiar with such matters. And she knew, with positive knowledge, that the scrawl on the rough sheet of note paper varied not only because it might have been done in haste, but because it was a manifest, though rather skillful forgery of the sheriff's handwriting!

CHAPTER XXI.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

NEVER had there been an evening so wretchedly strained for Mrs. Mackay. For she had to be what her

rôle demanded, the child-wife of the colonel. And, on the other hand, she had to watch Don Felipe and Mary.

They had decided, doubtless, at the importunity of the Mexican, not to speak of their grand event for the time being, at least. Don Felipe carried off his part of the deception with the most consummate skill, but Mary was very excited. Even the colonel, absorbing all conversation with his plans for the new bunk house, had to exclaim at last: "Good heavens, Mary, what makes you so jumpy? Can't you be still? And if you're going to play the piano, at least finish the pieces you start. What's the matter with you?"

"You never could guess," said Mary, and laughed with such a swelling note of joy in her voice that the heart of the mother ached.

A single quiet glance from Don Felipe sufficed to draw Mary part way down from her seventh heaven and place her again in touch with the facts of life.

But still she played her part badly, and she could not help referring constantly to the wishes of Don Felipe. What music did he wish to hear? Did he think it was too cool for them all to go out into the patio? And so she ran on, and Don Felipe's name was in almost every sentence.

Two things were instantly apparent to Mrs. Mackay. One was that Don Felipe knew she suspected something. The other was that this knowledge worried him greatly. So much so, indeed, that he fell into sparkling conversation and strove to carry the talk back to Mexico, and the wild, gay days among the mountains, where his father's rancheria had stood.

For her own part, Mrs. Mackay would have preferred to let her knowledge remain unsuspected, but since it was well guessed at, to say the least, she decided that it was better to talk with apparent frankness to Consalvo. For, if she kept her peace, certainly he would begin to suspect her.

With all her might she desired some sage brain on which she could depend for council. But there was none at hand. The colonel early retired to his study to complete his plans; and then Mary, after many nervous glances at her mother and the eternal needlepoint, said good night.

Don Felipe rose immediately after; it was plain that he did not wish to be alone with his hostess, but she called him back, and motioned him to a seat facing her. She was in a corner nook, much shadowed, and the light which struck over her needlepoint illumined nothing else but the yellow of her dress and the gilded toe of her shoe. It left her face in such a shadow that one had to peer really to see her; and the gray of her hair seemed, now, a faint shimmer of solid silver. But Don Felipe, taking his place opposite her, was in the full tide of the light, which glittered back from the silver-and-gold work of his tight jacket.

"There's something which I think we ought to talk over," said Mrs. Mackay.

"Whatever you will, dear señora," said he.

And he smiled, and sat forward, attentively polite, in his chair. Nevertheless, she felt that this was not the sort of attention which even so well-trained and courteous a youth as Don Felipe would ordinarily pay to such a woman as herself, old to the point of grayness of hair, no matter how young her face might be. There was a keen awareness in Don Felipe, a restrained watchfulness like that of a fencer; so that she knew she had lost her first trick before the game began; this was a man who did not undervalue her, and therefore he would give nothing away.

She cast about for the best means of beginning, for there were many things

which she might attempt. To play her usual ingénue part, she felt, would be a bit foolish against such a fellow as this, if he were half what she suspected. So she decided to try the effect of shock tactics, and said instantly, but quietly: "I want to know about you and Mary."

She had a fierce but subdued pleasure in seeing his color change and his smile freeze; certainly she had shocked him to the quick. But almost instantly he was rising to the part.

"Ah," said Don Felipe, "of course, you see and notice everything! Of course, you understand!"

And he made a little gesture of surrender, so to speak, still faintly smiling as though in apology, or in despair; but at the same time he shot a glance which, she knew, found her face in spite of the shadow and read every feature. Talking to this young man, she felt as though he had the power to cast a strong ray that revealed her very soul; and she was deeply thankful that there was not the light of day around them.

He had given her an answer, however, which might be taken as revealing everything, though as a matter of fact he had been adroitly unspecific. No doubt, he wondered just what she knew, and what she merely suspected.

She replied in kind: "One couldn't watch the pair of you to-night without understanding that there's something between you. You could have done very well, Don Felipe. But not Mary. She wears her heart on her sleeve, poor dear child!"

Don Felipe might have been tempted to say many things. Instead, he merely sighed and looked down to the floor.

But Mrs. Mackay had no intention of helping him over clumsy places, and with a beating heart she allowed the silence to endure until the pressure of it forced him to speak.

"I don't know what to say," said Don Felipe, lifting saddened eyes toward her. "I don't know where to begin!"

Of course, this was an excellent bid for some sort of talk from her, but Mrs. Mackay cruelly saw her advantage and took it. She said not a word, but, laying down her needlepoint for the moment, she raised her head and waited, as one who expects some confession of importance.

She could see that the test was trying Don Felipe terribly, for even his professional calm, as she felt it to be, was giving way a little. His eyes, his smile, his posture remained perfect, but one hand, which perhaps he thought she could not see, was knotted into a hard fist!

"Well," said he at last, "I have done a terrible thing. I have done the most terrible thing. I have done the thing for which you never will forgive me!"

She said, then: "I won't believe that, Don Felipe."

"Heaven knows," said Don Felipe, with apparent passion, "that I've tried to keep it back! But—I should have left long ago. I should have escaped and fled away. I could feel this rising in me like an irresistible tide, señora, and I thought, like a fool, that I could keep the words from breaking through. But I could not!"

He paused and bowed his head a little, breathing audibly.

"Poor Don Felipe!" said she, making her tone as gentle as the rage in her heart permitted.

"For every day," he went on, as though carried away, "I tell myself that I am a poor wanderer, an outcast of fortune, little better than a beggar."

He paused, as though choked by emotion, and she was forced to say in the interlude: "You must not speak in this way of a Consalvo!"

"But then I would see her," said he, raising his head and looking far past the shadowy face which watched him.

"And she was—like the beauty of the morning—to one who has wandered all through the dark of the night, señora!"

"She's a pretty child," said Mrs. Mackay. "Of course, she's not grown up."

Don Felipe bit his lip. This placing of Mary, as it were, in the cradle, took half the sting from the remarks which he was about to make, but, having committed himself to this strain, he was forced to go on.

"And so, at last," said he, "I could not keep the barrier up. I had a dreadful sense of guilt and impertinence. I felt that I would be stared at and then laughed at. But this morning—I told your daughter that I loved her!"

There was, of course, a pause.

Then Mrs. Mackay made her voice cheerful and answered: "And Mary, of course, was a very happy girl! After the affair of Tag, the other night, she hardly could be anything else."

It was a cruel thrust, but she was not in a humor for mercy.

Don Felipe murmured: "I did not think that a dog, señora, would influence your daughter in such a thing as this."

Then he waited. It had been a hard passage at arms, but now it was the turn of Mrs. Mackay to speak, and she knew beforehand what she must say. Opposition, such as swelled and stormed in her throat, was of no use.

For, if she resisted, she felt she knew exactly the mode of procedure which Consalvo would follow. And what could be easier than to persuade a romantic girl like Mary to elope? Somehow this marriage might be prevented. The colonel would be of no use. The whole burden lay upon her slender shoulders, and she knew that she must have time—time and some one like the wise sheriff to help her.

And as she paused, watching the composed face of Consalvo, she wondered if that delicate young man had had something to do with the disappearance of Rankin, so extraordinarily opportune for him!

But, in the meantime, how was she to gain a safe margin of time?

She had thought out the way, and she said gravely: "Of course, it's a shock to think of one's girl marrying—so very young as our Mary is! But, after all, I was her age when I married Colonel Mackay. And there's no use making a disturbance. Besides, you know, we all like you very well—Felipe!"

The name burned her lips!

"The colonel may be difficult. But I'll try to handle him. And then, of course, the thing to do is to have a little party and let your engagement be announced."

Engagement?

Ah, of course, that was a matter which did not enter into Don Felipe's plans at all! Engagements? They might last six months, a year, two years! And a whole eternity of events might take place in the meantime.

But what could he do? Only what he did, which was to spring from his chair, and bow before her, and press her pale, cold hand to his lips.

CHAPTER XXII.

A MATCH.

THE next point was to secure the colonel.

For, of course, if he put down his foot and resisted, it would be even more fatal than resistance on her own part; the Mexican simply would steal Mary from under their eyes and take her away forever.

The securing of the colonel on the safe side—that is to say, on the side of the marriage—promised to be a difficult matter, and long and deeply Mrs. Mackay pondered the subject that night, and wakened again and again from a brief drowse.

Persuasion might be tried, but the colonel preferred to persuade rather than to be persuaded. Won over, he must be, or the elopement would follow the fiercely insulting speech which he would make to Don Felipe. So she delved in her mind and searched for inspiration, and found none!

But in the morning, cold water dashed in her face and a resolute plunge in a cold bath brought a new thought.

She put on a soft negligee; she rubbed her eyes until they were red; she rubbed her cheeks until they were redder; she sprinkled water liberally on her face; and then she went to her husband.

He was in slippers and a bathrobe, finishing his coffee and sketching a gate for the patio of the bunk house. He did not even look up, but when she had entered and he heard the rustle of her dress, he said: "What for the gate of the bunk-house patio, my dear?"

He did not wait, but answered himself: "There have to be trail breakers and pathfinders! And I have it! A delicate wrought-iron tracery, against the green of the garden inside, a rare and arabesqued design facing the west. The men will sit in the patio and see the sunset with this beautiful design patterned against it! That will be something, my dear! That will touch them! Beauty cannot be wasted," he went on, adding a touch to his drawing, "like the mechanical law that force cannot be wasted, and that matter is indestructible. Plant beauty in human soil, and the plant must grow! I'm going to write out that idea. It ought to have a page in an art publication. Page with flower design around the margin. I'm going to let the world have some of my thoughts, Lydia. Confound it! Why should a man keep what's best in him to himself?"

Mrs. Mackay threw herself on a couch and buried her face in the silken pillows. She began to weep, hysterically, wonderfully.

"Hello!" said the colonel. "What's up?"

He waited, then he laid aside his drawing with a sigh.

"What's wrong, Lydia?"

A few stammered, obscured words, more sobbing were his answer.

The colonel finished his coffee and rose. He knotted the cord of his robe around his waist and then, approaching his wife, he leaned above her.

"My poor child," said he, "what's wrong?"

"Oh, terrible!" moaned Mrs. Mackay in her choked voice.

"Of course," said the genial colonel. "It's a terrible world. Now tell me what's wrong? What's upset you, my dear? Tell me all about it?"

"It's ruin!" gasped Mrs. Mackay.

"Indeed it is," chuckled the colonel. "Let me hear what's in your silly little head. Not one chance in a hundred that it's terrible at all!"

"How—how—how——"

"How what?" said the colonel.

"How can you say such a thing?"

"Because I can guess. Now, what's up?"

"Mary!"

"Eh? What about Mary?"

"Don Felipe!"

"What about the two of 'em, eh?"

Tremendous sobbings resulted. The colonel yawned and patted her shoulder.

"They're going to be married!" choked Mrs. Mackay into the pillow.

The colonel caught her by the shoulder and raised her until he could look at the swollen, red, wet face.

"Good heavens!" said he.

Mrs. Mackay sat up, her handkerchief to her face. Above the rim of the lace she could watch him.

"I knew you'd see it was terrible! Oh, oh, what's to be done? *What* can we do?"

The colonel was pale and puzzled.

"An ignorant, low Mexican!" cried Mrs. Mackay.

"Ignorant?" said the colonel, instinctively arguing. "On the contrary, a well-informed young fellow. But if the puppy dares to think that he——"

"A low-bred creature!" sobbed Mrs. Mackay.

"Low-bred? The Consalvos are an excellent family, I have every reason to believe! But does he dream that he is on a par with us so as to——"

"You, you!" cried Mrs. Mackay.

"I what?" cried the colonel, growing more angry. "Stop blubbering, Lydia, and talk sense, will you?"

"*You* brought him into our house!"

"By heavens," said the colonel, "are you going to throw the blame on me?"

"Mary's future is ruined! *You* did it!"

"Lydia, you talk like an absolute idiot! Why not invite him? What's wrong with him? Did we ever have a more pleasant guest?"

"A—a—*greaser!*" sobbed Mrs. Mackay.

"Lydia, what under heaven are you talking about?" exclaimed her husband. "Greaser? A high-bred gentleman of pure Castilian blood——"

"*He* says so!" she wept.

"Do you think that I can't use my eyes? Do you know the world better than I do? I tell you—a gentleman of an old stock and flawless descent."

"He's stolen her under your eyes!" sobbed the wife.

"Under my eyes?" shouted the colonel, defending himself desperately. "Confound it—I—I—I've seen it all along!"

"No!" cried Mrs. Mackay. "You don't approve! Oh, oh, oh, what shall I do!"

"Lydia, you're letting yourself go. Take yourself in hand. Is Consalvo poison? I introduced him into this household. That ought to be sufficient for you. Besides—Mary Mackay has to marry some time!"

"She's only a baby—my poor little darling Mary!"

"She's taller than you are—and a great deal stronger. How old were you when you married?"

"A penniless wretch!" cried Mrs. Mackay.

"I have, thank heaven, enough money for two."

"Not even a title!" sobbed she.

"Lydia," cried her infuriated spouse, "do you think that I'd let my girl go title-hunting through Europe? No, I thank my stars that the name of Mackay doesn't need a title! Title? What nonsense you have in your precious brain!"

"It will kill me!" wept Mrs. Mackay. She fell back on the couch.

"Who told you about this?"

"He—he—had the effrontery to ask my—permission—to—to—speak to you about——"

"Exactly as he should have done," said the colonel, wiping his brow. "What else would a gentleman do? I—I'm not surprised. In fact, I'm glad—that Mary has showed such good taste! I prefer Felipe to one of the bridge-playing, cocktail-drinking young puppies who idle around nowadays!"

"My heart is broken!" sobbed Mrs. Mackay.

"A little time will heal it," said the colonel heartlessly. "But if you're going to keep on crying like this—I'll leave the room, Lydia. I can't stand it!"

And he left the room.

No sooner was he gone than Mrs. Mackay rose and went quietly to her own room. There she reclined in an easy-chair and began to comb her hair, for there was nothing that soothed her so much as to brush the long and silken mass and watch the light go shivering across it.

After that, she made her toilette by

careful degrees, and when she was dressed she looked at herself in the mirror. "Oh, Lydia," she said, "what a golden chance you missed in life!"

Then Mary came bursting in.

She was wild with excitement. She was as foolish and frantic as Tag, who danced around her.

She embraced her mother. She danced from one end of the room to the other and danced back again. She stood at last beside her mother.

"Dear mother, mother darling!" cried Mary. "And you both approve! And you see what a wonderful man Felipe is! And you don't care if he's poor! And—I never heard of two such wonderful people as you and dad. So that Felipe and I can be happy to the end of the world! And I'm going to burst. I want to hug every one!"

"There's Felipe now," said Mrs. Mackay. "I think he may be waiting for you!"

Felipe, indeed, sat the saddle on Conquistador, dressed in his gayest; and the most splendid of saddles was on the stallion, and the bridle and the reins were a tangle of gleaming rays of silver light.

Mary shrank back against her mother.

"I'm afraid to go down," she said. "Suppose that it was all a sort of joke —or a dream! And—and how could such a wonderful man even look *twice* at me, mother dear!"

"Men are very strange creatures, Mary," said the mother. "I long ago gave up trying to explain them; and you'd better stop, too! Run along, dear. Felipe will be frightfully impatient!"

And Mary flew and left Mrs. Mackay standing deep in the shadows of the room and staring out with narrowed eyes at that glorious and flashing horseman.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

THE BUFFALO'S RETURN

IT has not seldom happened that a ghost of the past has returned to bring discomfiture to the dweller in the present, and if Uncle Sam has taken as good care of his furs in storage as he does of those still on four legs the omnipresent raccoon may have to give precedence to brother buffalo in the matter of the latest thing in winter overcoats. What raccoon coat, even the furriest, could hope for admiration when a youth in buffalo robe comes buffling along!

At Fort Lincoln, North Dakota, the coldest army post in the United States, a cache of buffalo overcoats, comfortable relics of pioneer days, has been discovered and are being issued to the infantry to the unconcealed envy of the civilians. On the records of the quartermaster, these coats are valued at less than a hundred dollars each, but their rarity alone should make them worth more than that. The fur is long, shaggy, and very warm and if, as has been said, Uncle Sam has displayed his customary care for his property, the young men who go in buffalo clad may rejoice at their good fortune even if a possible odor of camphor provokes malicious comments from those not so well protected from the weather. The buffalo is a stranger in the fur world to-day, but he in his turn might find much to wonder at in the furs that populate our streets and keep the people who call things names up late at night thinking of names to call them. Imitation buffalo coats may be all the fashion next season.

Hot Dogs!

By *Roland Krebs*

Author of "Tell's Five," etc.

GOLLY, I sure feel awfully sorry for old Mr. Rockwood!" As he said that, "Hungry" Hosford licked some mustard off one finger and took another bite of the frankfurter sandwich he was devouring.

I grinned because, while the whole outfit felt sorry for the owner of the R Bar R, who was suffering from some kind of a stomach ailment, I knew that Hungry was sorriest. Why? Because Hungry is so everlasting fond of his groceries that his heart goes right out to a fellow man who's being kissed out of his coffee and cakes.

"Yeah, the big boss sure looked paler than a fresh country egg the other day when I saw him," I remarked, watching Hungry start on a second hot dog.

"Of course he's pale," Hungry said, "and he's getting skinnier than a casting rod on account of the way Doctor Hesselmann's treating him. That fool doctor is starving Mr. Rockwood to death, if you ask me. Know what he gives him to eat?"

"Oh, just milk toast and eggs or something like that, I reckon," I answered, watching Hungry get a pot of mustard out of a pocket and give his frankfurter a good smearing.

"Hot cakes! He ain't giving him even that," the lanky puncher exploded. "I happened to be toting some firewood into the house the day the big boss was took down with indigestion and I heard Doc Hesselmann having a blow-off. 'D' tr-rr-rouble vit you iss dot you shtuff too mutch,' I heard the doc tell the boss. 'Like efferybody else in dis countr-rr-ry, you eadt tvice as mutch as iss goodt for you. Fum now on you going to diet.'

"I like to fell dead, Al, when I heard him tell Mr. Rockwood that for a long time now he's got to eat mostly raw vegetables. Raw carrots, raw turnips, raw cabbage, lettuce with nothing on it but salt, raw spinach, the water that spinach has been boiled in—that's to drink on account of the iron it's got in it—apples, oranges, grapefruit, and so on, none of them with sugar though."

"How did Mr. Rockwood take that—by breaking out into cheers?" I asked Hungry.

"He let loose a awful roar. He got right into a steam-heated argument with

Doctor Hesselmann, asking the old veterinary how he expected anybody to survive on such vittles. He claimed a man would die without once in a while he had a big steak or a roast. 'Iss dot so?' the doc snapped back at him. 'Haf you effer seen r-rr-rabbits eating shteaks *oder* r-rr-roasts? No! Dey eat rr-raw vechetables, und look at d' pep vat dey got! Dey run und chump und desh around.'

"'Well, who wants to be like a rabbit?' Mr. Rockwood busted out, and then Mrs. Durbin cut in with, 'Now, now, daddy! Are you a physician? Doctor Hesselmann knows what's best for you, and you do just what he tells you to do.'"

"And I guess that settled that," I remarked, because I know what a drag our foreman's wife has got with her paw. The old croaker has been 'tending to her since she was a baby.

"Sure, that settled it!" Hungry said. "Not only that, but Mr. Rockwood seems now to actually believe that the Dutchman is going to put him on his feet with that rabbit grub. You know, Al, what I believe? All doctors are swabs. Every one of them has some kind of a hobby. Some are nature fakers like this dude, Hesselmann. Others want to pull your teeth out as soon as you get a headache. Some tell you that sun baths will cure your hangnails, and a lot of them are always taking X-ray portraits of your inside plumbing and then whittling out some of your most prominent innards."

"When a man's been used all his life to cooked grub and meat," I said, "I don't see how it's going to be good for him to suddenly switch to raw fodder. I should think it would chew him up inside."

"Exactly!" Hungry put in. "Take them frankfurters, for instance. Say! Excuse me a minute. I want to get me another one. It'll be a good hour yet before we chow. Want one?"

"No, thanks," I said.

Hungry disappeared into the cook shack and came out a minute later with his third hot dog.

"How do you rate all these franks?" I inquired. "Have you got the Loan Wolf in your pay, or what?"

It didn't seem possible, because I knew that our cook, Wolfgang G. Schaeperkoetter, had given Hungry Hosford to understand a long time ago that there would be no dishouts between meals for anybody.

"He made a little concession," Hungry explained between bites. "I'm wild about hot dogs and every time I go to town I bring a kennel of them home with me. Wolf lets me roast them at the draft door of his cook stove in exchange for me packing in a little wood now and then and taking out some ashes once in a while."

He chewed for a minute with a faraway look in his eyes. "I don't care much for roasted dogs," he told me, forgetting that this was his third. "They're best when boiled.

"He raised Cain when I asked him to let me boil 'em. Wolf's just an old crab sometimes. As though it would hurt him any or I'd be in his way! He keeps a pot filled with boiling water—for dishwashing and cleaning and such—on the stove all day long, anyways.

"Well, what I was going to say, Al, about these frankfurters is this: They'd do Mr. Rockwood a great sight more good than all that rabbit and guinea-pig diet. Now, if I was treating him, just as soon as he started to complain about his breakfast nook aching him, I'd have given him a big shot of castor oil, made him fast a day, and then started him off on a good meal that would build him up, give him some nourishment—like a nice, thick beefsteak, well done, with about three inches of crisp onions on top, some boiled potatoes, some buttered cauliflower, a stack of toast, two or three glasses of milk and let's see—and some——"

"Bicarbonate of soda," I suggested, stifling a laugh.

"No, not soda," Hungry contradicted me. He's such a conservative guy! "The milk would be enough to drink without mixing in soda pop. I guess that would be about enough for the first meal."

"Why don't you suggest it to him," I asked.

"I don't think he's quite ready for that yet," Hungry told me. "I did sound him out, sort of, yesterday by asking him if he didn't think a steak would help him along.

"The old man stared out of the window for a minute. Gee! He looked hungry! 'Sometimes I think it would, Hosford,' he answered me. 'I have the feeling at times that this raw vegetable diet doesn't give me much nourishment. And yet, I guess Doctor Hesselmann knows best. He tells me that the physician under whom he studied in Austria used to cure rheumatism by having the patient walk barefoot through the dew in meadows before daylight.' Ain't that rich, Al? I guess that guy could cure dandruff, too, by having you rub moonbeams into your scalp after sundown.

" 'All doctors have some fool hobby, Mr. Rockwood,' I reminded the big boss. 'Yes, but Doctor Hesselmann is a very smart man, Hosford,' he differed with me. 'At first I thought this raw vegetable diet stupid, but now I actually believe I can feel myself getting better.' Next day he was so crabby he hardly spoke to me when I stacked some logs up at his fireplace. That's how a lot of sick people are, Al—they think one day they're getting better and they believe the next day they're about to shuffle off for keeps. I think I'll eat one more Airedale, Al."

The big appetite-and-nourishment man from the West paid another visit to the kitchen shack and I saw no more of him until forty-five minutes later, when the Loan Wolf called the bunk house mob to come and get it.

The Wolf had fixed us "darky chicken," which is dressing sandwiched between two spiced pork chops and roasted. Although Hungry Hosford had polished off four hot-dog sandwiches just an hour before, he ate darky chicken like he hadn't tasted food for a week.

While I watched him, I thought he had Mr. Rockwood's case sized up about right. Hungry ought to know about stomachs. If eating wholesome food was bad for you, why, that guy would have worn out three stomachs before he was twenty-one years old.

Old Roger Rockwood was as hale and hearty a man of sixty as I've ever seen. He wasn't chronically out of order in the pantry department. He'd just had a spell of indigestion and, if you want my idea, old Doc Hesselmann, like most enthusiastic faddists, figured here was a swell chance to try out his notions.

You can't feed a canary hay when it's used to birdseed, and you can't feed a cow birdseed when it craves hay, I think. I believe Hungry Hosford was perfectly right about it when he said that what the boss needed most was good wholesome food again.

But was I going to tell the boss about it? Don't be simple! Trying to advise sick people has made as many enemies as forgotten loans have, if you ask me.

About three days later, I was just going to ride into town for the mail when Hungry stopped me.

"Would you mind, Al," he asked, "stopping off at Spradley's meat market and getting me a dozen frankfurters I got ordered? You won't have to wait. They'll be already wrapped and all."

I told him I'd do that for him.

"Say," he remarked as we parted, "I was just up to the house and the big boss is in a fine humor! He had his daughter get Doc Hesselmann on the phone and make a squawk about his

rabbit diet. He was complaining that it was about time he had something else for a change. 'I bet that Dutchman don't eat that stuff himself,' Mr. Rockwood was saying to his daughter. 'But, daddy; he told us he did,' Mrs. Durbin reminded him. Anyway, the doc said he was coming over shortly and he was going to fix the boss a soup—a herb soup. I guess it'll have nasturtiums and lilies of the valley and green onion tops in it. Honest, Al, that croaker ought to give his patients souvenir spades to bury theirselves with after his treatments."

In town I almost played Hungry dirty by forgetting his frankfurter sausages. I had to ride back. Like Hungry Hosford had said, they were all wrapped up and piled up with other bundles for delivery, so all Mr. Spradley had to do was pass them over the counter and say, "They're all paid for."

When I got back to the R Bar R, I noticed Doctor Hesselmann's flivver parked near the ranch house and I wished I could have been present to hear the doc and Mr. Rockwood having their little chat.

Hungry came out of the bunk house to meet me and his eyes lighted up when I gave him his package.

"Looks more like two dozen franks than a dozen to me," I remarked.

"Oh, I ain't any hog," Hungry answered. "I just ordered a dozen. Hey, Al, The Wolf's cooking spareribs and sauerkraut for dinner. Smell it?"

You could smell it fifty feet from the cook shack. Cooking spareribs and sauerkraut always smells to me like a prosperous glue factory operating full blast, but it tastes like something altogether different, um yum!

Hungry took his sausages into the bunk house and I went into the cook shack to give Wolfgang the pack of cigarettes he'd asked me to bring him from town.

While I was there, Doctor Hesselmann, looking wiser than an orchard full of owls, came in with some paper bags in his arms. Before he even said hello, he sniffed and remarked, "Ah hah! I see ve haf here quvite a few mempers of the shtuffers club! Shpareribs und sauerkraut, hey? Pure poison for d' syshtem!"

It turned out that the doc wanted to make his herb soup there for his patient and The Wolf suggested he use the pot that was always filled with boiling water on the stove.

I stuck around and watched the soup get under way. Doc Hesselmann took a bunch of roots out of his paper bags and some funny-smelling leaves and stalks and ground up vegetable compounds and measured them into the boiling water. Then he added some salt and some awful, brown-looking liquids from a couple of bottles.

"Natchure's foods!" he told me and The Wolf, looking over his spectacles while he stirred.

After a lot of stirring, he set the pot to simmer, put a lid on it, and said to see that after a half a hour Mr. Rockwood got it, piping hot. He had to hurry down the road to see one of Tompkins' kids, who was down with bronchitis.

"Ain't there any meat goes in it?" The Wolf asked. "I never heard tell of anybody making a good soup without a speck of meat."

"Nothing goes in it!" doc shouted. "Not even bread does he get. Just this fine natchure soup."

The smell of that mucilage cooking, plus the aroma of the sauerkraut, was more than I could stand, so I went over to the harness shed to mend a bridle.

After a while, through the shed window, I saw Wolfgang come out of his kitchen with a pipe in his mouth and a small clock in his hand and set himself down on a bench in the shade behind the cook shack to wait for the herb soup and the 'kraut to get done.

When I finished my work and came out again, The Wolf was back in his shack and from the door he called and asked me if I'd mind taking the nature soup into Mr. Rockwood. This I did and, from the sour way the old fellow glared at the pot and the tray with a clean plate, spoon, and napkin I brought him, I didn't think it such a swell time to be conversational.

A few minutes later, I was standing chinning with Wolfgang when Hungry came along, whistling. He stepped inside the shack and a moment later came out with his eyes popping.

"Hey, Wolf!" he said. "Where's that pot you usually keep boiling on the stove?"

"Mr. Rockwood's got it," the cook told him. "It's got some of that old clown, Doc Hesselmann's, nature-faker soup in it. Why?"

"Ye gods!" Hungry Hosford yelled and streaked for the ranch house.

Me and Wolf, our own eyes a-popping by then, watched him disappear into the inside.

Ten minutes later he came back, walking with a swagger, one of Mr. Rockwood's two-bit cigars in his map.

"Doctor Hosford speaking, Wolf," he announced, pretending to be very grave and owly. "The big boss says to as soon as possible send him up three fried eggs, sunny side up, and six slices of bacon. Also some toast with lots of butter and coffee with plenty of rich cream in it."

"Yeah, but Doctor Hesselmann said he——"

Hungry didn't let The Wolf finish. "Forget Doc Hesselmann," he laughed. "The boss is listening to Doctor Hosford now."

"How come?" I demanded.

Hungry had a loud, long laugh before he could tell it.

"You remember me telling you I didn't care for roasted frankfurters half as much as boiled ones?" he asked me. "Well, with the cook shack all smelled up with that spareribs and 'kraut odor I knew The Wolf here would never smell my franks boiling. So, while he was outside taking a smoke, I sneaked inside and dropped me four franks in that kettle he always keeps a-boiling. I didn't know that the doc's nature-faking soup was in there. And you, I guess, didn't know there was hot dogs in the herb soup when you took it up to the old man."

"Great Cæsar! Neither did I!" The Wolf gasped. "Was he mad?"

"He was at first," Hungry told us, "but Doctor Hosford fixed everything up.

"I busted right in on Mr. Rockwood, who was all alone at the time, He must have thought it was his daughter, because he tried to hide a cigar under his blanket till he saw who it was. He was in a very good humor. There wasn't any need for me to yell, 'Stop! Don't eat that!' because he was all through eating.

"So, I decided to take the bull by the horns and get it all off my chest. 'I hope you'll forgive me if I seem to butt in, Mr. Rockwood,' I said, 'but my intentions are the best in the world. I think it's my duty to tell you that that Dutchman, Doc Hesselmann, isn't giving you the right kind of treatment.' "

"And he agreed with you on the spot?" I suggested.

"No sir!" Hungry said. "He hit the ceiling. He told me to mind my own business. 'Doctor Hesselmann has the right method,' he told me. 'He builds a sick man up gradually. He gives the diet a little more strength from time to time. Take the soup he made me with his own hands to-day. It was—uh—delicious. Four frankfurters he had put in it. I expect he'll give me a snack of meat every day now.'

"Well, fellows, I made a clean breast of it and told the boss how them hot dogs got there. Believe me, he started

to look sheepish. Finally he busted out laughing. 'Hosford,' he said, 'one good confession deserves another. I didn't eat the soup—but I did fish out and eat the frankfurters. And, Hosford, I feel fine. If Doctor Hesselmann eats nothing but those raw vegetables, I don't understand how he survives.'"

"I wonder if the doc actually eats that rabbit stuff," I said.

At that Hungry Hosford had another fit of laughing. Then he asked me, "Remember when you gave me my franks this morning you said it looked more like two dozen sausages than a dozen? Well, it was two dozen. Inside that package was another surprise—a charge-account slip made out to Doctor Ewald D. Hesselmann for two dozen frankfurters. I gave it to Mr. Rockwood for a souvenir. Hey, Wolf, get a move on you! I think the boss craves his bacon and eggs, and he can't wait to get 'em."

Wolfgang G. Schaeperkoetter made a dive for the kitchen. At the door he stopped to yell to Hungry, "Oh, doctor! Tell Mr. Rockwood the grub's on the fire—and tell him I'm making it four eggs and eight slices of bacon, just in case."

All there's left to tell—and then I'll let you tell one—is that while Mr. Rockwood ain't running and jumping like a rabbit these days, he looks the picture of health—and this after plenty of steaks and roasts and bacon and eggs and what all not.

Also, that he thinks Doc Hesselmann one of the best doctors in the world as long as you don't take the doc's advice.

Also, that the doc indignantly claimed, when the big boss sprang the meat-market slip on him, that those frankfurters were for his dachshund, Prince.

Also, that yesterday on my way home from town, with some frankfurters under my arm for Hungry, I met the doc's sausage dog, Prince, on the road with a starved expression on his funny pan. Also, that I tossed him one of Hungry's franks and the dog sniffed at it contemptuously, threw me a dirty look over his shoulder and trotted away leaving it untasted, like he'd like to ask me, "What? Me a sausage dog eat sausages! Am I a cannibal?"

And that's enough!

WHAT PART OF THE REINDEER DO YOU LIKE?

ROAMING the great tundra of Alaska are vast herds of reindeer owned by the United States government. In fact, these herds are so large that the government has practically given up the task of numbering them, and merely guesses at their approximate number, which is anywhere from two million to two million and a half in only one of the great Alaskan districts.

Herdsmen brought from Lapland are in charge of the government-owned herds. Lapland is the country from which came the original herd of reindeer, when the government took a chance and experimented with transplanting the hardy animal.

One of the chief reasons for the experiment was to provide a dependable meat food supply for the future, and that supply is now beginning to reach the public. In various large cities one can buy reindeer roasts, cutlets, and chops from numerous local markets at prices that compare very favorably with those of the standard meats.

Most people profess to find the flavor of reindeer very agreeable. And since the meat is still something of an innovation, many hostesses take pride in asking, "What part of the reindeer do you like?"

A Man Afraid

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "Dogged," etc.

MOST men thought Henry Martin queer. Some even thought him mad. Still others, more charitably inclined, called him sick. He was not mad. Neither was he sick. But he *was* queer, and the real reason therefor, if known, would have confounded his few friends and amazed even his many enemies. For Martin was a thief and a murderer, and although the scene of his ten-year-old crime was thousands of miles distant, he was in constant fear of discovery—a man afraid.

An habitually morose, silent man, he was afraid even of himself, forever dreading that something he might say or do would result in his betrayal. In every stranger who entered the White Owl Saloon, of which he was proprietor, he saw fancied resemblances to men who had known him in those far-away days before he had become a criminal.

Luckily for Martin, the little cattle town of Prairie City was far removed from the main routes of travel. Strangers were few and far between. His patrons were made up practically altogether of the employees of two near-by ranches. The carefree cow-punchers who most frequently visited the White Owl were a stable lot, no more given to wandering than were most of their ilk, despite their reputation to the contrary. None of them knew Martin well; but he knew them, from the latest freckle-faced recruit to the bandy-legged old foremen, who had served their present employers for better than a quarter of a century.

When Marad Jewkes arrived at Prairie City, and paid a month's rent in advance for a cheap room at the White Owl, Martin was disturbed. In the first place the man's name was a queer one, had a sort of foreign flavor; and, too, there was something about his walk that was vaguely familiar.

When Jewkes, after lounging about Prairie City for a week or so shaved his beard, Martin found new cause for wörry. He had seen that deep-lined, hawklike face somewhere before, he was sure. But it was the name that bothered him most—Marad Jewkes. The man who was doing time in some Australian jail for the crime Henry Martin had committed was named Jacob

Marx. Marad Jewkes. Jacob Marx. There was, actually, no similarity between the names, but with constant repetition Martin found a resemblance. Just by twisting them around a bit on his tongue, the similarity became noticeable—to him. Jewkes was a hard customer, no doubt of that. He seemed to have no definite business in Prairie City. At least half his time was spent in the bar of the White Owl Saloon.

Surreptitiously at first, then more openly, Martin watched Jewkes. It was inevitable that sooner or later the stranger should become conscious of this silent surveillance. Soon, he in turn took to watching Henry Martin. This was the last move necessary to convert Martin's first vague suspicions into conviction. He felt sure Jewkes knew him. He was, perhaps, a relative of Jacob Marx. Jewkes had come to take him away, but not being altogether sure of his ground, he was taking his time.

Martin's suspicious nature found an answer to each and every doubtful circumstance. At the end of the second week he was considering ways and means of killing Marad Jewkes.

In those brief intervals when his thoughts were distracted from Jewkes, Martin's better judgment sought to dissuade him from his murderous project. How could Jewkes, or any man, have traced him from Australia to this tiny cattle town in Arizona? But, assuming that this were possible, why should Jewkes or any other man seek him out? He was not wanted for those crimes he had committed. He was all in the clear.

Edwin Chardenal—by which name Henry Martin had formerly been known—was dead. It had been a perfect crime. The authorities had accepted things just as they had appeared on the surface. Jacob Marx had been convicted of the theft of some thirty thousand pounds of the bank's money, and Chardenal, the victim of an unfortunate accident, had been buried, and had received many laudatory comments in the Australian papers. As always when his thoughts reverted to the crime itself, Martin was temporarily convinced of the impregnability of his position. The only time he ever smiled was when rehearsing the details of that profitable tragedy—profitable that is, to Henry Martin. It had all been so simple, and yet involved, too; like a well-conceived play, he told himself, each bit fitting dramatically into its own particular groove.

The Cattleman's Exchange Bank at Montroy, Queensland, had been a prosperous institution until Henry Martin, née Chardenal, had got his grasping fingers into the gold-filled pie. He had liked Australia, too. From the day he stepped off the American cattleboat onto Australian soil, he had liked the place; the people, the country itself, everything about it.

For a youngster without education his rise had been rapid. At the end of three years he and Jacob Marx shared honors as head cashiers of the Cattleman's Exchange Bank.

Banking in those old days was not the foolproof business it has now become. The entire business of the bank was in the hands of those two capable young men, Edwin Chardenal and Jacob Marx. Deep in his own heart Martin knew that he had planned from the first to rob his employers and place the blame upon that trustworthy simpleton, Jacob Marx. The problem had proved to be scarcely a problem at all. It had all been so simple that even now it made him laugh. He had taken the money a little at a time and deposited it by mail in an American bank, under an assumed name. The books, such as they were, had been under his immediate supervision. These books had been cleverly manipulated to point definitely to Jacob Marx as the guilty party. Not until the last moment had Chardenal anticipated murder. As a matter of fact, the killing had been un-

necessary, anyhow. It was while on the way to take passage on the boat which would eventually land him, a rich man, at his destination on American soil, that temptation had been literally thrown in his way.

Proceeding leisurely astride his favorite horse through the fragrant fields the night before his projected departure, he had intercepted a runaway. The runaway had been caused by a faulty saddle cinch. The saddle had apparently slipped, frightened the horse, and, in attempting to free himself, the horseman had caught a spurred heel in a stirrup. When Martin came upon the scene, the rider's unconscious body, one foot still caught, was bumping along dangerously close to the frightened horse's hind feet. After an exciting chase, Martin had succeeded in stopping the frantic animal. The rider was not seriously injured, but his face had been hideously disfigured.

And then, on the spur of the moment, the final link to his perfect crime had slipped into place. The injured horseman was almost exactly the same build as himself, with hair of the same color, and such features of his battered face as were still distinguishable of the same general contour.

Martin's subsequent actions were almost automatic in their leisurely thoroughness. It seemed as though this accident had occurred for his especial benefit. He had crushed the dazed rider's head with a rock. Then, although the task was a distasteful one, he had changed clothes with the dead man. Then, leaving his own horse at the murdered man's side, he had mounted his victim's steed and ridden away.

Three months later, with close to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in American gold, he had settled at Prairie City. On a trip to Phoenix he had unearthed old copies of newspapers in the public library and had learned of the successful outcome of his coup. Jacob Marx had been convicted of embezzlement and had been sentenced to a long term in prison. Edwin Chardenal's dead body had been found and given decent burial by his unsuspecting friends. Surely a perfect crime if ever there was one!

And yet Henry Martin was afraid. That man whose mutilated body had been buried for his own: who was he? There had been no mention of this in the newspapers he had seen, which was in itself queer. Montroy had not been so thickly populated in those old days but that the sudden disappearance of any citizen would cause comment by the press. And Jacob Marx? At his trial Marx had, of course, professed entire ignorance of everything. When practically assured that he faced a long term in prison, the young Dutchman had fought hard for his liberty. Finally, he had openly accused Edwin Chardenal of the crime. This accusation, directed against a dead man and one who was known to have been the suspected man's friend, had reacted most unfavorably against Marx. A righteous lot were those stolid citizens. They resented having any one speak ill of a dead man. Without doubt the sentence finally imposed by the judge was harsher than might have been the case had Marx kept his suspicions to himself. But Marx had had many friends; he was not at all the morose, secretive individual that Edwin Chardenal was. Certainly, some of Marx's friends or relations had listened sympathetically to his protestations. Perhaps some of these had investigated? Perhaps Marad Jewkes——

As Martin thought, there was only one certain method of disposing of any threat that might exist in this quarter. This was by killing Marad Jewkes.

Martin's two bartenders, a bleary-eyed dipsomaniac named Kelly, and a half-caste Mexican called Juan, had their own ideas in regard to Marad Jewkes. He was a bad hombre, they said, a gun-

man; he had got into a scrape somewhere and was hiding out in Prairie City until the interest of the authorities in his whereabouts might diminish somewhat.

Martin scouted these suppositions. There was no doubt, however, that Jewkes was a skill performer with the two long-barreled six-guns which he carried in low-hung holsters at his sides. The fact that Jewkes was amazingly handy with these guns did not for a moment deter Martin in his designs upon the mysterious stranger's life. He had no intention of getting in the way of a bullet from one of those guns. His plans, when perfected, would insure Marad Jewkes' demise without danger to Henry Martin. Of course, he himself intended putting these plans into effect. He trusted no man.

The scheme he finally decided upon was a simple one, and, he was assured, foolproof.

For years he had carried a small supply of concentrated strychnine concealed in the barrel of a tiny gold pencil attached to his watch chain. In the event of his actually being apprehended, he had intended taking this poison himself. Now, he had found a use for those innocent-looking white grains of strychnine. Jewkes was not a heavy drinker, but he *was* a consistent one. Every day, at certain regular intervals, he slouched up to the bar in the White Owl and had a drink of whisky. His last drink was almost invariably taken at eleven o'clock at night, just before he retired to his little room on the second floor.

This particular night, Martin made it a point to himself officiate behind the bar. When Jewkes finally slouched up he found the little glass ready for him, even the whisky poured to exactly the height which he usually demanded.

Far an hour he had been watching Martin and wondering why the proprietor of the White Owl was so interested in his movements. When he had finally got to his feet, he had seen Martin produce what was apparently a clean glass, and, grinning slightly, pour whisky from the usual bottle into that glass. Observing Martin's actions, he had himself assumed a twisted grin. Perhaps the shifty-eyed proprietor of the White Owl wasn't such a bad sort after all.

Although Martin was not a drinking man, this night he poured himself a drink and spoke pleasantly to Jewkes:

"Have this one on me," he invited, "you're a good customer;" and he grinned again.

They raised their glasses together, and drank together. Martin watched Jewkes, closely. The man's face grew suddenly red. The veins about his temple throbbed rapidly. He gasped for breath. Then, instead of collapsing, as Martin confidently expected to see him do, Jewkes' talonlike right hand snatched at the gun in his belt. There was a deafening explosion. Martin was conscious of a numbing blow in his left breast, accompanied by an audible tearing and rending as though he were being literally torn apart. The impact of the heavy leaden slug at such short range thrust his body against the flimsy shelves behind the bar. His last conscious impression was of many bottles falling with tinkling clatter about his head and crashing noisily on the floor. Then, the flickering yellow oil light turned red, then black.

When he awoke, he was lying between white sheets on what he immediately knew was his own bed. Prairie City's only doctor, a placid, capable man named Wetherbee, stood peering out through the curtained window. Sensing that his patient was conscious, the doctor turned, drew a chair up to the bed, and sat down. Martin's lips framed a question, but he only mumbled inarticulately.

"Don't try to talk, Mr. Martin," the doctor cautioned in a low voice, "you're a very sick man."

Martin nodded. Even so, he did not quite understand. It hardly seemed possible. Somehow, he had never expected to go out like this. And Jewkes ——? He whispered the name.

The old doctor watching, nodded understandingly.

"Jewkes got away," he said, "but they'll get him, don't you doubt that. The yellow coyote! Don't you worry about him. You—you—you're a very sick man."

Martin's erratic heart, which Jewkes' bullet had missed by only the fraction of an inch, took to pounding dangerously. Jewkes, then, was alive! Another impossibility. Why, there had been enough poison in that glass of whisky to have killed a dozen men. Why had it not worked? And immediately several good reasons occurred to the sick man. Perhaps he had used too big a dose? Perhaps the stuff had lost its strength? He had carried it for years in that little gold pencil.

The whys and wherefores did not matter, however. The fact remained that Marad Jewkes was alive, still at large, and——

The stark reality of his own condition really did not come home to Martin until that night, as he lay, eyes closed, apparently asleep. He heard Doctor Wetherbee and Kelly talking in the hallway.

"There ain't a chance in the world for him," Wetherbee was saying. "He'll pass out before morning, sure."

"But—but——" the old bartender stammered.

"There ain't no buts to it, Kelly," the doctor repeated positively, "he's a gone goose, I tell you."

"But I sent for the doctor at Las Vegas, and to Blue Butte, too. One or both of 'em will be here to-morrow afternoon. Figured we ought to do everything we could to save him."

Doctor Wetherbee grunted. "All right," he said, "but we'll be nailin' him in a wooden box before they ever get here."

And Martin, listening, abruptly became afraid, more afraid than he had ever been before. He was not a religious man, but he believed in many things that are part of most religions. For instance, he believed implicitly in a hereafter. Never before had he given much thought to the matter, but now, faced with certain death, he knew fear, a more immediate and terrible fear than he had ever experienced before in all his fear-haunted life.

The cool hours of the night, as he lay there, alone, staring up at the ceiling, were hours of heart-crushing, terrible torment.

As dawn breathed upon him through the screened windows, he reached a decision. He would prepare a confession. Perhaps this would render his punishment in the hereafter less severe. Jacob Marx had been a religious fellow. His panacea for all mental worries was a confession of his sins. Martin was, somehow, afraid of verbal disclosures, a written confession appealed more to him. He was, and always had been, definitely afraid of all representatives of the religion which he respected but feared. A confession, he had assured himself, times without number during that black night, was a confession, no matter through what channels it was made. It was characteristic of him that he looked at the matter from a business standpoint. Any document, to be legal, should pass through the hands of a lawyer. Hence, if his confession was made before his lawyer, duly signed before witnesses, it should serve its purpose in the hereafter, as surely as though he had stammered out the words to the representative of any religious order. In arriving at this decision, it had not once occurred to him that his confession would serve to free Jacob Marx, an innocent man. He thought only of himself, of improving his lot in that vague

future life, which he was assured was a place of torment for all evildoers.

When Doctor Wetherbee appeared, Martin was able to speak in a husky whisper. After much painful effort, he made his wishes known. Half an hour later, Martin's lawyer, a thin-faced drab man named McGregor, a living, breathing model of rectitude, appeared. Martin motioned the doctor away, and, as the lawyer bent over him, began to talk.

Not by the slightest sign did Lawyer McGregor's leathery face indicate the amazement with which he placed words upon a sheet of lined paper as Henry Martin dictated them.

Martin was exhausted by the time his confession, written by Amos McGregor, was finished. He affixed a scrawling signature, "Edwin Chardenal," at the bottom of the sheet, then he closed his eyes, and with something very like a sigh of contentment, went to sleep.

Some time later, he was vaguely aware of hands exploring his person, inspecting the wound in his breast, and of voices, strange to him, mumbling and muttering.

He went to sleep again, finally, and this time dreamed pleasant dreams. He dreamed of green fields, of sweet-scented thickets, vibrant with soft breezes. He saw a white house nestling cozily at the edge of this thicket. Just below the house there was a spring, and beside this spring, several barefooted youngsters rolled and tumbled in the grass. There was a dog there, too, a dog which mischievously chased several sleek-bodied horses in a rock-walled pasture near by. On a porch before the little house, a sweet-faced, elderly woman and a gray-haired man sat, side by side. These two smiled and called encouragingly to the children beside the spring. All was pleasant here. It was of these things, scenes from his boyhood, that Martin dreamed. Happy dreams.

It was morning when he awoke. For a moment he was unable to reconcile the dreamer of those pleasant dreams with Henry Martin, the man who was about to die. For a time he did not try to think; he merely lay very still, thinking back upon those far-away, pleasant days. The cool breath from the hills, trickling in through his bedroom window, was invigorating, pleasantly scented with sage, and an aromatic, earthy smell which he liked. Although his dreamy thoughts had not yet reverted to the present, he was vaguely aware that the pain in his breast had lessened. He could breathe more freely now. Perhaps, after all, he was not going to die.

As this thought came to him, full consciousness returned. His drowsy eyes opened wide and his lean face, which had been in calm repose, twisted back into a semblance of the unscrupulous, fear-haunted human animal that was Henry Martin. There were people just outside his door. He recognized Amos McGregor, and called. Much to his surprise, his voice was strong. Followed by two strange men, McGregor entered.

"How—how—what has happened, McGregor?" Martin stammered.

The old lawyer's stern eyes seemed to look through and through the sick man. "You will live," he said simply.

"That document—the—the confession?"

"I sent it out immediately, as you directed me to do."

"But—but you must stop it! You must get it back! You—you—I—I——"

Amos McGregor shook his head. "It is too late," he said tonelessly, "they will be here by the time you are well enough to travel—to take you back."

FAMOUS WESTERN STORY WRITERS

(SETH RANGER)

By D. C. HUBBARD

ZEDEKIAH RANGER was born to rove. Never could his restless spirit be calmed. He firmly believed that only death would stay his swinging stride. In those days the West was still a wilderness fraught with danger and uncertainty. Railroads were only beginning to be built, and boats were a negligible factor in human progress. Men of Zedekiah Ranger's propensities resorted to nature's unfailing two props to carry them from one part of the country to another.

But there was one thing this man, so afflicted with the wanderlust, had not considered that yet would prevent him from continuing his roaming life. His health was good, and his energy unflagging; his luck in any kind of a fight remarkable; what then was there to hinder? It came quite suddenly at noontime on a very hot July day, in New England. Ranger sat idly watching a party of picnickers walk up a plank from the dock to a small steamer which was to take them to a spot a few miles up the river and bring them back at nightfall. Zedekiah was eighteen, and girls had played no part in his life. He had never even known a mother's care. With many a giggle and half scream the girls and women swayed dizzily up the plank, while a few men looked complacently on, wearing superior smiles.

If the plank had not slipped as the last bit of femininity was about to step into the boat, Zedekiah might have gone on roaming, and the author who gives you so many delightful and interesting tales of the great outdoors might never have been born. It was the roving Ranger lad who was first to dive into the water and rescue the girl who later became his wife. Marriage automatically stayed the drifter's feet as no other agent had ever succeeded in doing.

So, it was with a smile of determination that Zedekiah listened to the report of a physician in the small New England town, a few years later, that the only hope of recovery for his little son was life in the West. With great alacrity he made arrangements for the change.

SETH RANGER

In a town near the Mexican border, Seth Ranger played and fought with Mexican boys, Indians, white boys, and varying shades of colored boys. He quite properly inherited his father's tendency to range. From the Arctic Circle to Mexico and from Puget Sound to Atlantic City, he has found his way, by steamer, train, canoe, dogs, automobile, burro, or motor cycle, and

when any of these were unavailable, his sturdy two feet carried his six-foot frame wherever his adventurous spirit beckoned.

Luckily, Seth early had a desire to write. With a brain stored to capacity with experiences, he found entertainment in jotting down in a notebook comments about people and places he visited. It was not long before he began to enlarge upon these lines, expressing his opinions and philosophizing about them to some extent.

Sitting against a great stone boulder, centuries old, late one afternoon, Seth Ranger looked with satisfied eyes across the Mojave desert, drinking in the beauty of the sunset whose brilliant colors were softening and merging with the slowly deepening shadows. It was still light enough to read, and the boy, now grown to man size, drew out a notebook and began to set down some of his thoughts. His partner lay sprawled on the sand at his feet, looking alternately at the sky and Seth. "Read me some of that stuff, Seth," he asked. The lad shifted uneasily, plainly embarrassed by the request.

"You wouldn't like it, Bud. It's just stuff that I've been thinking about places I've seen," he parried. But his partner prevailed upon him. At the end of a few pages Bud interrupted with: "You're a first-class fool, kid, if you don't go on with that stuff."

Seth only laughed, but he took his friend's words to heart. Bud had had more education than he had ever been able to get, and knew cities better than he. Another thing, Bud talked little and when he said anything it was sure to be sincere and to the point. No one just knew what his early life had been. He was ten years older than Seth, but the understanding between them was of a nature that is seldom equaled between men of the range.

Wherever he roamed, Seth kept his notebooks tied together, adding a new one more and more often. To him, the approach to a town did not mean a game at the roulette tables or drinks at the bar, but a place where he might borrow a book or two which he read avidly until gradually a style of writing developed in his mind. He tried a story. It was pretty poor. His partner, who never divulged his mysterious past, seemed to know much of the ways of writing, the pitfalls and the rules, if there can be said to be any hard and fast rules for writing. Seth believed that this man who was such a help to him had at one time been a writer himself. Perhaps in some brawl he had shot a man and so gave up his career to roam at leisure and be lost to the world and the police forever. Another deduction was that he had been a rich man's son who had turned his back upon society and convention. Seth never found out. Bud disappeared as suddenly as he had come into the boy's life, but he left behind a working foundation that Seth could never have acquired except by bitter experience.

Mr. Ranger, now a successful writer, still breathes the restless spirit of his boyhood, and his father's boyhood before him. He is an indefatigable worker and turns out his stories with remarkable speed. His favorite sports are hunting and fishing, which he indulges in with his usual gusto and enthusiasm.

Seth Ranger told us that "Hardrock Shipley" and "Poke Tupper" have invited him to go down behind the ice in a small boat up in the Yukon country, and he thinks he will accept the invitation. Their mule, "Tabasco," will not be there on that trip, or Ranger wouldn't go. He said he had been kicked too many times by that ornery mule to think much of it. This is the manner in which Seth gets his material for yarns, and it accounts for their ring of truth and knowledge of the West.

Tongue-Tied Bandits

By Austin Hall

THE sheriff of Calamouse County, "Old Tom" Tibbitts, a gun fighter of the old school, banged his Stetson upon the table and ran his fingers through his mop of iron-gray hair; which action, to the knowledge of his friends, was a challenge for all the world to take notice.

"Boys," said the big man to the assembled deputies, "I'm a-sayin' it, and I'm a-sayin' it now. Don't any of you young sprouts ever get married and have children—leastways a son, because, take it from me, it's too much of an experience. Yeh! That son of mine! Dog-gone! He is and he ain't. He's so big he kin hold a wild bull by the tail, and he's so durned lazy he won't do nothin' but play pool and smoke. But, dog-gone it, he allus get's by somehow! They ain't nothin' he can't talk yuh out of, and he kin do it in seven different languages."

Something was coming; every deputy knew it, and listened accordingly.

"Yeh!" the sheriff went on. "Once I thought I was ridin' herd on that kid; but now—dog-gone it!—it looks like it was him that was doin' the ridin'. Talk about yer educations! Why, say, that kid's schooling has caused me more trouble than all the gold shipments in the county. They ain't a bandit that ain't heard of him, and every danged one has swore that they will show him up, because he's a sheriff's son and a sort of genius. They used tuh come in ones and twos; but now they're hitting old Calamouse in droves. We don't get an hour's rest no more at all. And they keep a-gettin' tougher and tougher. I heard just now that 'Montana Jack'—the biggest bad man and gun toter in the county—is headin' out our way. The warnin' came to me this morning from a sheriff friend. As if we ain't got enough trouble with our own bandits without importing new ones!"

Old Sheriff Tibbitts blinked and reached out to recover his Stetson, his six-guns bulging large and his face setting in grim lines. Any one who thought that the old man was not a fighter had a guess coming. Tom Tibbitts could fight and shoot with any crook under the moon; which is to say that he was of the fast-riding clan—almost defunct—that dies with its boots

on. At the door he stopped to eye a figure limping in from the main street —none other than "Gimpy" Adams, the postmaster—bearing a long envelope in his right hand.

"I was just a-going home, sheriff," he said, "and I thought this might be important. Sheriff's business allus is. So I brought it over."

Tom Tibbitts, sheriff of Calamouse County, ripped open the end of the envelope and squinted at the contents, He pulled out the inclosure, read it twice, and then went up in the air again.

"Yeh," he said between his teeth. "Didn't I tell yuh?" he asked, turning toward the deputies. "Read that. No, lissen. I'll read it." He read:

SHERIFF TIBBITS, Calmouze County.

I hear yer some sheriff and that you've got a catamount son w'at eats bandits alive. Well, yer just our size of meat. We ain't a-goin' tuh stand fer no monkey doodle bizzness from no collige dude, and wat's more, yuh got one of my pals and I aim tuh get even. But I ain't no cheap bandit wat sneaks in like a skunk. I kin beat yuh at any kind o' game yuh want tuh name. I'm sendin' yuh warning; and I'm a-going tuh teach yuh a lesson yuh won't ferget. So yuh better dig down in yer jeans fer ten thousand iron ponies, because I'm a-goin' tuh kidnap that two-hundred-pound baby elephant of yourn and hole him fer ransome. Get me. And I'm startin' on my way right now.

Yours MONTANA JACK.

Post S. I'm bringing the whole gang with me and w'en we hit ole Calmouze we'll split her wide open.

"Yeh," Tom exploded, waving the letter. "It's a great note when bandits stoops tuh kidnappin'. "Dog-gone it! I never seen anything like it before! And it's my son w'at did it—him and his newfangled ways and that college education! And right now he's up to the pool room smoking gold-tip cigarettes and practicin' it on a Mexican greaser. I seen him w'en I came by. Talkin' French er somethin' like that tuh him, he was. All summer he's been oiling up on them foreign languages, he has. Yuh'd think his old dad didn't know nothin'. Says I'm old-fashioned and don't know the game, eh? But—and that's the heck of it—everything's changing. He's like a sickness; he spreads. They ain't a bandit w'at breathes the air that ain't corrupted; and now they're goin' in fer kidnapin'! But"—and right there Sheriff Tibbitts popped off again—"they ain't no crook wat's a-goin' tuh touch my son. Dog-gone!" His voice broke. "He—he's my boy—my only son, he is. By gosh!" —and his fist came down—"not by a crock of mush they ain't! That boy! Dog-gone! I'd like tuh see 'em touch him!"

But that was not all; not half of it. Out in front a pony was sliding to a full-speed stop with the travel-stained rider waving a sombrero and yelling of trouble over on Slate Mountain. Sheriff Tibbitts answered by running to the hitching rack, hitting the saddle, calling to his wild-eyed deputies. In less time than it takes to bat an eye, he and a posse were racing out into the main street. But at the pool hall he stopped, yelled to the pool player, and handed out the letter. His old gray eyes had a look of scorn.

"Here!" he shouted. "Read that! Look at the kind of trouble you're bringing on your old father! You and your falurious airs! I used to hope that yuh would grow up tuh be a fighter like the rest of us; but it seems you can't do nothin' but play pool and talk French. Ten thousand dollars fer you! Read that! Nice, ain't it?"

But there are always several ways of looking at things. Ray Tibbitts, handsome and broad-shouldered, shifted his dinky cap and perused the letter.

"Phew!" he cried, blowing a ring of smoke. "For me? Didn't know I was worth that much. Eh? What do you know about your son, now? Looks like the market price of education has gone up. Ten thousand bones, eh?" He

stuck out his chest. "Well, dad, I told you I would make you proud of me some day. Ten thousand!"

"Ten thousand!" Sheriff Tibbitts stood up in his stirrups. "Do you think——"

But Ray Tibbitts waved his hand.

"Now, now, papa!" he said, "please, don't get angry. And while you're talking about thinking, you ought to do a little of it yourself. You know well enough, dad, that I'm worth ten thousand any day, and that you'd pay it. But, say, listen! Haven't you got any eyes? What's the reward on this Montana Jack? Must be something like ten thousand itself, eh? And he's bringing the whole gang, and that will be ten thousand more. Aren't you good on figures no more, dad? All that money hanging on a tree for you to pick off! That's real money. And it wouldn't be there if it wasn't fer me, would it? Looks pretty easy to me. Supposing now——"

But Sheriff Tibbitts had a one-track mind; he was not guessing anything.

"They ain't no supposin' about it," he shouted, swinging his pony around. "If you didn't look so easy and wasn't so worthless, they wouldn't be after you. Why don't yuh get a gun and help me, like a real deputy, and quit playin' pool and——"

Away he went.

"Au revoir!" called Ray Tibbitts in his best French. And, from the horse's back, came the answer:

"Say it in English, young man. And, remember, if yuh get kidnaped, it won't be my fault. I'll let 'em hang yuh tuh a sagebrush, see if I don't!"

A wisp of dust and a posse disappeared into the desert as Ray Tibbitts, the touch-me-not son of an old-time sheriff, returned languidly to the pool hall and picked up his cue.

"Ten thousand simoleons!" he called to his Mexican companion. "Do you get who you are playing with? Hey? What would you do now, my friend and hombre, if I should get kidnaped?"

And as Santos Morenos afterwards said to the postmaster, Gimpy Adams, "Dat boy now, he mucha beeg tinker. You bet. He play da fina game o' pool. Si, si, señor. But all da time he tink. Tinks lots mebbe. I see heem getta paper and write sometings and put her in da envelope. And den he go over to da railroad and talk to da agent. Sure. Dat's all I know."

But something must have happened.

Late that afternoon, Sheriff Tibbitts, riding alone from Lost Shoe Canyon, drew up his horse to watch a weary form bobbling across the face of the desert. A man! And as he knew no reason for a human being to be at that particular spot, the sheriff rode out to investigate. The shape rose and fell in the shimmer of the mirage, wabbling into grotesque proportions; but always retaining its semblance of weariness. Some one lost! A man—as sure as life! Not only that but a man who was mighty frightened. As the sheriff approached, the fellow broke into a run, headed for a barranca, and leaped in. Whereupon, Tom Tibbitts pulled out his shooting iron and guided his pony along the banks, riding slowly, until he perceived the creature cringing against the earth walls of the chasm.

"Well, I'll be goldarned!" called Sheriff Tibbitts. "If it ain't Tom Bocker, the pool-room keeper! Hey, you! This ain't no place tuh run a pool hall. What are yuh doing here? What are yuh afraid of? What's happened?"

From the depths of the barranca a pitiful figure looked up at the old officer, straightened, and then gave a shout of joy.

"Sheriff Tibbitts!" called the terrified man. "I thought yuh was that Montana Jack. Gosh, I'm glad it's you!"

"Montana Jack? What are yuh talkin' about?"

"Yeah," whispered the man in the

chasm. "He tried tuh kill me, he did. Honest! And say—they ain't no bad man ever hit these parts half as bad as him. Look at my hat! How'd yuh like to have a wild-eyed hombre a-ridin' behind yuh and pluggin' holes through yer bonnet? They got me out here with Ray, they did, and——"

Things were moving too rapidly for even Sheriff Tom Tibbitts. He had read the letter only a few hours before and, while he had not entertained a doubt but what the fellow would turn up, he had relegated the event to some future date.

"Ray?" he asked, still a bit doubtful. "Montana Jack? Say, yuh! What are yuh talkin' about? And where's Ray—my boy? Do yuh suppose I'm a-goin' tuh sit up here all day and wait fer yuh? Out with it. Here. I'll give yuh a hand. Now, up yuh come! Where'd yuh git that black eye?"

The other dusted his clothes off; he was looking at Tom Tibbitts' water sack.

"From Montana Jack," came the answer. "They got me out here and w'en they discovered that I wasn't good fer any ransom, they socked me in the eye and turned me loose. I'm pretty near dead with thirst. I was ready tuh drop w'en yuh saw me. But thank my stars, you did! Say, sheriff, yuh got any water?"

During the next few moments the sheriff of Calamouse received an earful.

Bocker spoke when he had satisfied his thirst. "It all came just like that," he said, snapping his fingers. "Your son Ray was a-playing pool with that greaser, Santos Morenos, when this bunch of riders, eight of 'em, dropped off their ponies and come intuh the hall fer a friendly drink, as they said. And, being as they was strangers, I figgered they would spend some money. One of them lays down a ten-spot and calls fer drinks.

"'So this is the town of Calamouse," he says, looking around. 'Famous old Calamouse! We're from Montana, brother, and we come all the way out here to see her. We understand yuh got some sheriff—a fellow named Tibbitts—and he's got a son, Ray, I think his name is, a young elephant. Hey, how about it?'

"And when he says that, Ray, your son, who was still a-playin' pool for all the world as though there was no one else but him in the room, walks over and begins to chalk his cue, calmlike!

"'Yeh,'" says Ray Tibbitts. 'Sheriff Tibbitts is my dad, and take a tip from me, tough baby, he's a pretty good old father. And, fer your further information, Ray Tibbitts is me. And I'll have yuh tuh understand that I hain't a elephant.'"

"And then what?" asked the sheriff eagerly.

"Well, things moved awful fast just about then. This here fellow, Montana Jack, whips out a .45 so quick yuh couldn't see it, and shoves it under Ray's nose. Yessir! And I guess Ray was about frightened half to death, because he didn't hesitate at all. Just shoved his hands right up into the air and said something in French."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed the sheriff. "And didn't he do a thing? What was the matter with that newfangled pea shooter of his? And right in the town of Calamouse, too! And you? What was yuh a-doing?"

"Wh-what!" The fellow grimaced. "S-say, sheriff, if you knew how fast those fellows pulled iron, yuh'd guess what I was a-doin'. I was picking flies off the ceiling. They was four of 'em, yuh understand, and every one of 'em was sprouting a cannon. It ain't all exactly clear in my head, because I was afraid some one might get quick on the trigger; but the next thing I knew this here fellow called Montana Jack was a-poking your boy Ray in the stomach with his six-shooter.

"'So you're this catamount son with the college education," he was a-sayin'. 'Well, if yuh ask me, yuh look more like a big hunk of cheese. Yeah! And I'm a-goin' tuh take yuh up tuh the mountains and feed yuh on frog meat. A little higher with them hands. Now then, turn around and head for that pinto horse out in front.'

"It was all done slick, sheriff, and didn't take more'n a minute. They took Ray and Santos and me and rode straight out of town about six miles, and then they kicked Santos off and told him if he ever told a word of what happened or returned to town they'd kill him. And after that they got it in fer me and started abusin'. When they reached the hills six other fellows joined 'em, and they had a talk. I guess they didn't think I was good for much because this here Montana Jack yanked me off'n the horse and socked me in the eye like he did Santos. But they didn't let Ray go. They seemed tickled to death over what they'd done and Montana Jack was braggin' that yuh was a-goin' tuh learn a lesson. I was a-hoping they would run across you and the posse."

"Well, they didn't," said the sheriff. "I sent the boys in some time back. I was lookin' over a little stuff of my own up in Lost Shoe Canyon. Funny the deputies didn't meet 'em! Montana Jack sure must be a slick one tuh come intuh Calamouse and make a get-away like that. But I ain't a-goin' tuh let him have Ray. If Ray don't get 'em, I will. You take this here water sack and leg it into town as fast as you can. Put every last man on the trail. I'm heading out alone. Which way did they go?"

And so, just at sunset, two dots were working in different directions across the face of the desert—the sheriff riding toward the hills and the other man plodding in the direction of Calamouse. Tom Tibbitts was never madder in his life, but, wise sheriff that he was, he refused to allow his anger to get the better of his judgment. At the first hill, he stopped to look back at the desert below, basin shaped, with Calamouse in the center, and a range of mountains entirely surrounding it. Blue in the distance arose the heights, each one familiar and some of them marking the passes that led to the outer country. The trail that he was following led straight to the mountains and the divide most commonly used.

"Dog-gone it!" Tibbitts was mumbling. "They ain't no plucking roses in this job of being a sheriff. If you're a bum officer, everybody picks on yuh because you're easy; and if you're a durn good man, all the hard nuts herd our way just fer the fun of trying tuh beat yuh. Ten thousand dollars fer Ray! But mebbe the boy was right; it might work two ways. Yeah!"

The fact that he was pursuing a dozen bandits all by his lonesome did not perturb the sheriff in the least. He knew the country well enough to realize that they would have to travel a certain trail until it split up among the various pass routes that lay beyond. His main concern was to keep going until he could beat them to the break-off, where he hoped to head them back. And if it came to a matter of shooting, he could hold his own with Montana Jack or anybody else.

But, as it happened, he was not dealing with an ordinary lawbreaker. The moon came up and shone along the chasm, silver white, bathing everything with a soft light. Shadows lay along the lee side of the rocks and overhanging banks. No sound was heard but the yipping of coyotes and the tripping feet of the sheriff's horse; hour after hour they continued until Tom Tibbitts grew drowsy with the monotony of the sound. Then—something happened—so quickly and so perfectly timed that he didn't have a chance. Like

a huge cat it came off a high bank, striking him from his horse—a black shape that entwined him with arms and legs and flying fists. Immediately, he was in the midst of a swarming cloud of bandits; and before he knew what it was all about, he was looking straight into the six-gun of Montana Jack.

"Well, well." The words came from behind the gun. "If it ain't the notorious Sheriff Tom Tibbitts hisself! Durned if it ain't! And he was a-hunting Montana Jack all by his lonesome! Ain't he the brave one, though? Who'd 'a' thought it? Well, well, well! This is the luckiest thing we ever had happen. We was aiming on keeping the son fer a wad of money; but a sheriff hisself is some prize. We'll just hold 'em both and send down word to ole Calamouse that it will cost her twenty thousand dollars to have her pets back. Yeh. We're in luck!"

Anger was no name for the sheriff's sentiments at that moment; but it welled still stronger when he saw his son Ray sitting calmly on a horse ahead of him. And Ray was mumbling and calling to his father—half in English and half in French.

"It's no use, dad," he was saying in English. "They've got us. Sure have. And I guess the only way we can save ourselves is to do as they say. I've got two thousand dollars of my own, and you've got more; besides, there isn't a man in Calamouse who wouldn't be willing to dig down in order to save our lives."

But the French lingo that followed was way above the old man's head; it made him mad.

"Yeh!" he called back. "Well, they ain't no one a-goin' tuh be asked tuh dig down fer your carcass, ner mine neither. Do yuh get me? We got intuh this, and we gotta get out!"

But he could not understand the French.

"Dog-gone," he mumbled to himself. "It was all right practicin' that stuff down home, but when he airs his education tuh a gang of bandits, it's pretty near the limit. I reckoned that he had some sense once, but now I don't know. No, sir, I don't!"

But it was worse still when the outlaws made ready to get under way. Tom Tibbitts found himself ignominiously bound, second from the end of the line, with his valuable son immediately in front. Ray had evidently set himself on the idea of being ransomed; and his voice went on and on, with constant lapses into the foreign lingo, until the old man could stand it no longer.

"Say!" he shouted, "if you say another word in that language, I'll murder yuh! Honest. Ain't it bad enough, yuh young ramscallion, without making it an insult? Not another word, I say. Not a word!"

Evidently the others were of the same opinion. From the head of the line came a laugh. Then some one began talking in a low voice; which was followed by a series of chuckles. Finally, at a wide point in the road, Montana Jack—who had been their private guard—rode ahead and singled out some of his confederates for a consultation. The moon hung over the tip of the mountains and then silently disappeared, leaving them in shadow; but the sheriff realized that they had come to the parting in the trail. Five minutes—ten, they waited, and then the big bandit came back. Tom Tibbitts was wondering just how they would leave the circle of the Calamouse—whether they would take the easy passes that lay beyond or make the more difficult ones that led into the Shadow Mountains. But there was no fooling the bandits. When the leader came to the big rock that marked the forks in the trail, he turned to the right and headed along the narrow path running south. That meant Black Pass and the terrible heights beyond. No doubt of the kidnaping now! Once in a place

like that, Montana Jack would be able to hold off an army. The sheriff became glum and silent. And Ray Tibbitts, catching the contagion, did not say a word. A bandit chuckled and thrust a six-gun in the boy's ribs.

"Eh?" he cried exultingly. "Smart boy, eh? Why don't yuh laugh now?"

To which Montana Jack was forced to contribute his ten-cents' worth. "Well," he chuckled, "he's a pretty wise baby, that young elephant! But—well, that's what I wants tuh know. Why don't he laugh now?"

Not a doubt of it! They were headed for Black Canyon—a terrible pass where they would have to do some doubtful climbing, which, in the darkness, might easily be fatal. For two more hours they went along the ridges and then up between the flanks of the mighty mountains. The caravan moved in single file, with no sound but the clipping of the horses' hoofs along the rocky ledge or a loose stone falling over the bank. Up, up, until they reached the turn around the shoulder of the Devil's Horn, where they would be compelled, one by one, to pass through to the safety of the other side. From his position in the rear and immediately in front of Montana Jack, the glum sheriff could see the shadowy horseman coming to the bend, each one shifting and simultaneously disappearing. Finally, there was only Ray in front of him; and then it was his own turn. He felt his horse moving about the massive shoulder of rock. And then—— He saw a moving shadow—heard Ray's voice speaking.

"This is me, boys! And dad's right behind."

In fact there were several shadows—rough ones—and everything seemed to be happening all at once. Something struck the sheriff in the face and he went off his horse, kicking and doing his best to break loose. Down the hillside! Shouts and cries! And then at last a voice from the bottom of the gully:

"I got him! Some one strike a match! Where's the chief? No, this fellow ain't a-goin' tuh draw no gun. Don't worry. He's cold. They stay that way when I plug 'em. Besides, I got his cannon in my hand. Those other fellows didn't make a sound, eh?"

It was all a puzzle to the sheriff; and it remained such until, by the light of a fire he counted the gang—every last Jack tied and trussed and ready for delivery in the morning—and heard Ray's story.

"Sorry, dad," the boy was saying, "that you didn't appreciate my French. You see, when you came and handed me that letter yesterday morning, I got to thinking. So, after you were gone, I went over to the agent and wired this town in Montana, asking the sheriff to give me the details of Montana Jack's gang, their number, and, as nearly as possible, a description of the members. I even sent the money for an answer. Yes, sir! And I got it. It just happened that one of the fellows was a man named Frenchy Lavaire. He's that hombre over near the end of the line. That set me to thinking again—sure did—and my line of thought was something like this: if they were going to kidnap me, why not let them do it? The idea caught me of practicing my French in some way for the express edification of my frog-eating friend. Fine! But, what for? Well, a little more study convinced me that they would aim for these mountains over here and that they would go out by one of the several passes. Fine again! If I could get them to try Black Canyon, they would be compelled to go through this trap single file. And then—the rest would be easy!

"I wrote you a note telling you to be at the turn of the Devil's Horn and to keep a lookout. How was I going to do it? Why, just by telling them a

lot of matter-of-fact stuff in English and muttering in French that you had every pass guarded but the Devil's Horn. And with that Frenchy to listen to my chatter I was certain that they would pick it up and walk right into the trap.

"Only—it didn't turn out just as I expected! I was clean flabbergasted when they stopped and Montana got you with that flying leap from the rock. But it wasn't too late, yet. That note was sure to be delivered, and the deputies, when they heard that you had gone ahead, would read it. And they ain't a bad bunch of deputies at that, dad. So I just went along with my French as though nothing had happened. Not a thing. It made you mad; and your actions convinced them, all the more, that we were trying to put something across. You noticed that when we came to the top of the divide, they stopped and held a consultation. Eh? It tickled them stiff to think that they had a Frenchman with them and that they were going to outwit me at my own game. And as long as they felt that way about it, why not let them go on? Naturally I became morose and silent—until we came to the Devil's Horn! And then—I could almost feel the boys getting in their work. And, of course, there was no noise because that would have upset everything. I had asked them to use blankets and smother the riders as they came, one by one, around the bend. The ledge above the trail was just one thing. Had one of the bandits squawked, it would have been all off. You see——"

But right there one of the deputies, "Red" Touser by name, broke in: "Huh!" he said, "we didn't have tuh use no blankets; we had a better way. We had it all figgered out by ourselves. We just stood above the trail and as fast as they came along we plugged 'em with a butt end of a six-gun. One, two, three—and I didn't miss a shot! Say, my arm's sore even now. I sure dropped that thing hard when I saw a head. One of them fellers ain't come to yet. And say, it's a good thing yuh yelled just when yuh did, Ray. I come near pluggin' yuh, too. And your father, the chief! I had tuh miss him and get the big bandit. He was dead wise by that time and almost got me. Only—I was too fast. Just straddled him and made one of your college flying tackles that you tell about. That was me you heard speaking from the bottom of the gully."

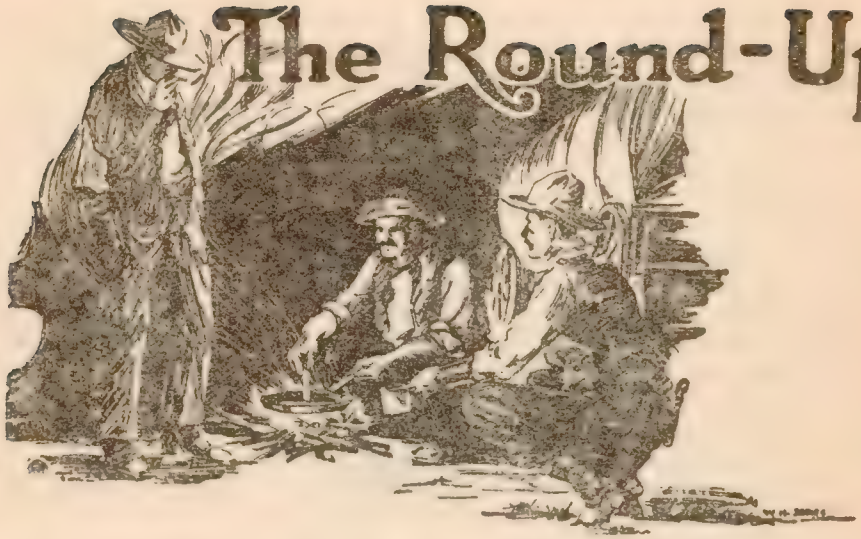
Sheriff Tibbitts, happy but incredulous, was rubbing his chin.

"Dog-gone it, Ray," he was saying, "what was it you said about a reward, eh? I guess now it's us that gets the money, instead of this here Montana Jack. But, say, listen, Ray—how come you didn't set up a howl and bring the deputies tuh catch 'em in the pool room down in Calamouse? You could 'a' done it, you know."

Ray Tibbitts had stepped over to pick up a coffeepot by the fire.

"Yes, dad, I know," he answered. "But, you see, I had read that telegram. There were ten of them in the gang and I wanted them all. What was the use of taking just four—and even then only at the expense of a lot of shooting? Some one might have been hurt—and it might have been myself. Why take a chance when you've got a college education? What's an education for, if it doesn't make you think?"

The Round-Up



ALL folks must die, but there are some who are never forgotten. One of these latter seems to be "Calamity Jane." See, here comes ye old-timer, E. P. Cronen, now "rolling strong" in Los Angeles, California. Speak up, old-timer:

"Boss of the Round-up and Folks: After a year's absence, I am compelled to take up the gage, thrown down by L. G. Pierce, of Portland, Oregon, and J. C. F., of Jacksonville, Florida, as printed in the Western Story Magazine of February, 1927.

"J. C. F. states that 'Wild Bill' Hickok was the husband of Calamity Jane. I knew Hickok in May '76, while camped on Mountain Meadow, six miles east of Deadwood, and not on the old Sidney Trail. The old trail left Deadwood, proceeding up Whitewood Creek, which flows north into Deadwood Creek, at the town of Deadwood. Mountain Meadow is at the junction of Whitewood and Split-tail creeks, where the wonderful placer claim of Judge Botsford's son was located, and where we took out two and three ounces per day, with a common tablespoon. There were great cracks there, in a rotten, soft, lime bed rock.

"I want to say, having helped cut the first wagon trail from Custer to Deadwood, that I know my onions in regard to the compass. Whitewood Creek flows north into Deadwood, then flows due east, until it empties into Shon's Park, as we named it in '76; it's now called Centennial Park, I understand. Deadwood Creek flows due east from its source at foot of Bald Mountain.

"Custer City is sixty-five miles south of Deadwood; Spearfish nineteen miles north! Nigger Hill, forty-five miles west; Two Bit Creek, eight miles east.

"I left the Hills in '78, and though I have spent four years in Alaska since that time, am still rolling strong in that paradise of the earth, Los Angeles.

"Best regards to all sour doughs."

Fast shooters and telegraph operators, hark ye to this here gent, who knows his guns and keys. His name is Warren Barto. He hails from Toledo, Ohio.

"Boss of the Round-up and Every

ONE ELSE: I've been reading the opinions of several of our friends in the Round-up for the past year or so, and enjoy them thoroughly. But I've just finished reading a few comments that got me all steamed up.

"Our friend who has been doing some mathematical gymnastics, comparing the speed of a telegraph instrument and speed of a gun, is, to my way of thinking, all wet, or does not understand telegraphy very well.

"In the first place, a telegraph operator has no time to count the dots when he takes a message. His ear and mind are trained to recognize letter figures and even whole words, by their sound, without considering how many dots or dashes or spaces the letters are composed of. He can tell the number of dots made, not by counting, but by sound. Therefore, I'll say that if a gun was to be fired so rapidly that the untrained ear couldn't tell how many there were, a telegraph operator could tell by the sound how many there were, provided not more than eight or ten were fired at once.

"We can compare this also with a rivet hammer or air hammer. I happen to be an operator, and I also have handled an air hammer quite a bit, and I'll bet any one a new hat that I can take one and make it strike one, two, three, four, five, or six taps in succession and stop it right every time, but, as I said before, it takes a trained ear and hand to do it.

"A word about guns. Of course the Colt .45 automatic is the regulation army pistol. I carried one through two enlistments and never had it jam once; and I was in a few places where it was a mighty good pal to depend on. Keep an automatic in perfect condition and it won't jam, but too much oil or a wee bit of dirt—and it's just too bad. I much prefer the old Colt single action, frontier model for mine.

"Now once more, and I'm through. I am wondering just how many people will look at a snake close enough to observe the pupil in his eye, when they meet one. A very much easier and safer way is to observe the shape of its head. The poisonous snake will have an irregular, ugly shape, while the harmless snake will have a round head and pointed nose. Another way is to observe the way the snake lies. The poisonous snake will lie in a coil, almost always, while the harmless one will be stretched full length.

"Now then, I think I've said a plenty, and I'll bet some one gets steamed up plenty over this. However, come on you hombres, and let's hear from you."

Here's Bill Meyers, Station D, Danville, Illinois. It's about clubbin' a gun that Bill's a-goin' to shoot. And, too, he's got a story to tell on the subject. Fire, Bill:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Slide over, somebody, and let me in at the fire; I'm near frozen.

"I heard a fellow talking, while I was in town, about tapping some one on the head with a gun. He said the tapper held his six by the barrel, and socked the other gent with the gun butt. That seems to me a dangerous thing to do.

"Now I'm just wondering why the other gent didn't grab it out of his hand, and, besides cutting his hand with the gun sight, tap him one for being fool enough to handle a gun that way.

"Nobody but a plumb tenderfoot would ever think of grasping a six-gun by the barrel to use it as a club, when he's in close quarters and doesn't dare risk a shot. The old-timer holds it just as though he was shooting with it—finger through the trigger guard to keep a good tight grip on it. One pat on the dome with the barrel of the

gun, and the guy that gets patted is out of the fight.

"But the new model self-action Colt is a mighty poor thing to use as a club, unless it is empty.

"In the midwinter of 1910 I saw Billy Sawtelle—yep, the same Billy Sawtelle that herded with 'Butch' Cassidy over in the Lost Cabin country in Wyoming, and was checked out up near Landusky, Montana. Well, anyhow, in the winter of 1910 Billy was doing a little gambling around Shoshone, Wyoming; and one day in Lloyd McGinness' Saloon, Sawtelle had an argument with some hombre from over on Ten Sleeps. While he was trying to clout him with his gun, Billy killed his pal, a lad called 'Race Horse Shorty.'

"Shorty and Billy were both in the game, but when the argument come up, Shorty shoved away from the table and got up. Just as he did, the stranger called Sawtelle a thief. The place was crowded. Billy was toting a .32-20 Colt, and, not being used to a double-action gun, he yanked her out and took a smash at the stranger—and pulled the trigger when he hit him.

"Gripping the gun hard, as he had gripped his old-time .45 many times, had come natural to him; but this time the gun was self-acting, and, just as it happened, Shorty was standing right behind the stranger. When the gun went off, the bullet got Shorty in the head.

"A gun is a plumb dangerous weapon, fellows, and unless a man handles it with proper care, he's going to hurt some one, or shoot himself with it. Keep the gun butt in your hand when using it as a club; and, just for safety's sake, pull your finger out of the trigger guard and lay it along the cylinder, because if it's a self-action gun you're sure to pull her off when you hit a man with it. Me, I know. I've done it three of four times, but fortunately there was no one standing close. If they had, they'd have been hit—that's all!

"The Irishman said the way to keep from smashing your fingers while driving nails, was to 'Howld th' hammer in both hands!' And that works with a six-gun, too!

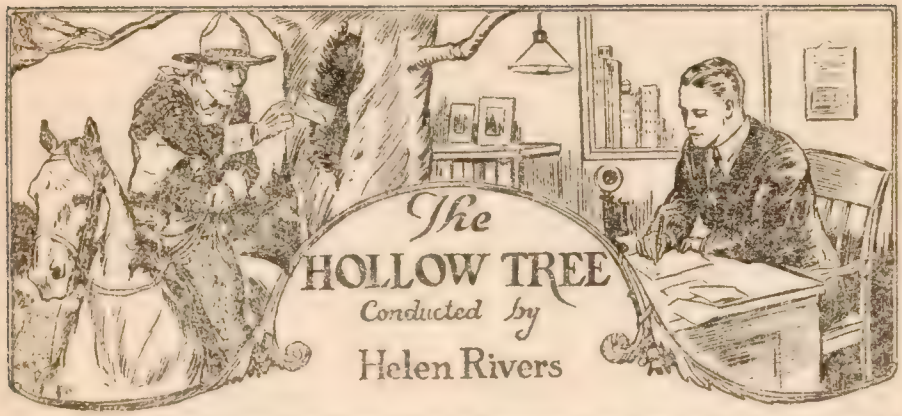
"Well, I'm driftin', folks, so good-by, and remember! Always keep the muzzle of a gun pointed away from *you!*"

THE WEST

And What Do YOU Know About It?

1. Where was the first permanent settlement in Alaska made?..... 2. By people of what nationality?..... 3. What industry did these settlers pursue?..... 4. What is known as a line-back horse?..... 5. What is usually the color of a line-back horse?..... 6. In what year was Arizona admitted as a State?..... 7. The first white child was born in San Francisco in the year..... 8. Where is the Golden Gate?..... 9. What is pemmican?..... 10. Why do Indians and trappers consider it an important acquisition?.....

Answers to last week's questions: 1. Vitrus Bering. 2. 1741. 3. 1912. 4. Kit Carson and Frémont. 5. Iowa. 6. In 1860. 7. Captain Lewis. 8. 1859. 9. Three hundred and forty millions. 10. June 25, 1876.



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.

WHEN a Gangster calls himself a dyed-in-the-wool Westerner, we expect certain things of him—or her. We expect him, in the first place, to be born to the saddle, and in the second place we expect that he's spent pretty much of his time on the hurricane deck of a bronc.

Here is a cowgirl, folks, who can lay claim to being one of the "dyed-in-the-wool" Westerners if anybody can.

DEAR HOLLOW TREE GANG: I am a Coloradoan and a dyed-in-the-wool Westerner. I've broken horses ever since I was knee-high to a duck. I've often heard folks tell about how many horses they've ridden and then in the next breath say that they've never been bucked off. Now, I must say that with all my experience—and I've spent a good deal of my time on the hurricane deck of a bronc—I've sure been bucked off so many times I couldn't begin to count them. I don't know what these hombres who've never been bucked off would say to that. Perhaps they'd call me a poor rider, but then, folks, there are bucking broncs *and* bucking broncs!

Now, I'm not what you'd call a writer, folks, because I spent too much of my time playing hooky when I was a kid, but I sure can tell you all about the great outdoor life and about the ranch and country hereabouts. I'll be a-waiting to see just how many letters a dyed-in-the-wool Western cowgirl can draw.

COWGIRL, OF S. D. RANCH.

Care of The Tree.

This ranger knows the West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have spent fifteen years roaming from ranch to ranch, from State to State, and have been a ranger for several years. I have met ranchers and homesteaders too numerous to mention, and I feel that I would like to offer the Gang the benefit of my experiences. Very often I receive letters from ranchers who are in need of a good man to work on a farm or to take care of a bunch of cattle. I am very willing to do all I can to help every honest and hard-working, hundred-per-cent American who wants to locate on a farm or ranch. If you're husky, and not afraid of work, and can convince me that you are ready to tackle Western life in real earnest, let me hear from you. Only letters that have return envelopes plainly addressed and stamped will be answered.

Folks, I am at your service.

EDWIN ANGER.

Box 30, Ogden, Utah.

Punched cows in the plateau States.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm unable to fork a bronc just at present, but up to two years ago

I traveled over the States from Maine to California and from Washington to Florida. I've railroaded in the Northwest and punched cows in the plateau States. I'd like to exchange notes with hombres who know the West. All letters will be welcomed, however, by this shut-in lover of the West.

JAMES E. ALMAND.

Camp 33, Perry, Florida.

A stray from the home range.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a Westerner, strayed from the home range, and lonely as all get-out. I'm twenty years old, fairly well traveled, and can ride, shoot, swim, box, and pack a load on a long hike. I am not unfamiliar with foils and cavalry sabres in their less ornamental usages. But I think this is enough about myself. I want to hear from you-all, Gang. JOHN HODGES.

1216 South Tenth Street, East, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

The wild woods of the West.

DEAR GANG: It has been two years or more since I greeted you-all, and during that time I've seen something of the wild woods of the West. I've enjoyed a lot of good fishing and hunting and I've taken a great many snapshots along the trail. I'll exchange the snaps with you, folks, and tell you about some of the best trails I've taken.

FRED A. MORGAN.

Room 301, Fourth and Jefferson Streets, Portland, Oregon.

The Owl requests the forest rangers of the Gang to please come forward.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I would like very much to get into the forest ranger service. I've worked in towns and cities all my life and I've always wanted to be out in the open spaces where there's plenty of fresh air and sunshine. If you rangers of the forest can help a hombre out, I sure will be mighty grateful to you. WILLIAM B. LEE.

Box 556, Shawnee, Oklahoma.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Are there any forest rangers or hombres living in the mountains or wilds who would care to scrawl a few lines to a city fellow? I'm tired of the noise and activity here. R. KIRKLEY.

7250 Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Native of Missouri.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've traveled through fourteen States, including my own, which is Missouri. I think I can interest you Gangsters who want to know about different places, especially you folks who would like to know about the Ozark Mountain region. I'm twenty-nine, and lonesome, for the rolling-stone kind of a hombre rarely gathers many friends about him.

ELWOOD SPARKS.

4107 Troost Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

"A friendship badge is a good-luck badge, for whatever brings friendship brings good luck. I am happy to wear one of The Hollow Tree good-luck badges," says Miss E. K., of Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

Well-informed on South America.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I know that there are many Gangsters who are interested in the mining game, and also in the lumbering game. If they are interested in the mining and lumbering activities in South America, I think I'm the one who can furnish the information. I'll be glad to hear from every one interested in the country that I'm so keen about. EUGENE SCHIFFEL.

Cortez, Colorado.

If we have a Greenland Gangster, we wish that he or she would please come forward.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am curious to know something about a certain large island in the north Atlantic of which I know little. Could you tell me anything about Greenland, folks—its climate, the population, the towns, existing conditions up there, et cetera? Let's hear from you who've made the trip into the Far North. A. L.

Care of The Tree.

This girl is looking for a pal.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm looking for a pal who is all alone in the world, like myself, and who will be willing to work her way West with me. I will furnish the car, but she must know how to drive. I would prefer that she be about my own age, which is twenty-seven, and she must be a straightforward, honest kind of a pal. Get in touch with me *muy pronto,* girls, as I expect to start this trip by the first of June.

PAL SEEKER.

Care of The Tree.

The Puget Sound country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Although I am not advising any one to come to this coast, I want to say that if a man can't make a living around the Puget Sound country he is a pretty slow hombre. This is in answer to a statement made not so long ago by one of our Gangsters who thinks he has a complaint to make agains this part of the world. There is a saying here that when the tide is out the table is set," and that is pretty much true. An ambitious hombre couldn't possibly starve in this here Puget Sound country.

I was born in old Kentucky, where the meadow grass is blue, but I've lived in Ohio, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, and for short seasons in several other States. I'll guarantee that any person who lives on Puget Sound for one year will want to stay. It is true, maybe, that a rolling-stone sort of a hombre wouldn't be the kind to appreciate this good old Puget Sound country.

T. C. KING.

4624 East G Street, Tacoma, Washington.

This Gangster's choice is New Mexico.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am going to New Mexico this summer, so would like to exchange snaps with some ranch folks, for I would especially like to get some camera shots from thereabouts. I would like to hear from other places, too, all the way from Mexico to Alaska. I have some dandy snaps to reply with. GALE D. NELSON.

2147 West Twenty-first Place, Chicago, Illinois.

Salmon trolling is something this Gang sister can tell you about.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My husband and I live on an island twenty-six miles south of Prince Rupert, British Columbia, and five hundred miles north of Vancouver. In between these cities are small settlements where mining and canning are carried on. There are also a few pulp-mill towns.

My husband is a salmon troller, and he is on the sea from June first to October. If there is a sister Gangster living in Prince Rupert, I would very much like to hear from her. A few British Columbia Pen Pals would be more than welcome.

MRS. BESS.

Care of The Tree.

"Who would like to correspond with a British soldier of twenty-two, now on foreign service in the Sudan?" asks Private Jim Griffiths, 3764604, A Company, 1st King's Regiment, British Barracks, Khartoum, Sudan. This Gangster promises much interesting information in regard to peoples and customs of the countries in which he has been stationed. He will also send snapshots.

"Won't some one be kind enough to drop a line to San Francisco?" asks Joe Evans, 240 Caselli Avenue, San Francisco, California. The Owl hopes that there will be a great many kind Gangsters who will write to this hombre.

"It seems as if the soldiers, sailors, rangers, and mounted police are getting all the mail lately, so I'm wondering if it will be possible for a marine to horn in on a little luck," says Private Burton Beauregard, 25th Company, First Battalion, 4th Regiment United States Marine Corps, Shanghai, China.

"I'd like a bit of information about El Paso, Texas, folks," says eighteen-year-old Edmund Chamberlain, 31 Springside Avenue, Pittsfield, Mass. This Gangster is especially interested in army life down there.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

by John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

IF some folks seem to forget all about the great out-of-doors during the wintertime they sure make up for this neglect when spring comes. Everybody is clamoring for advice these days about a promising place in the woods to put in some time away from civilization. Tom L., of Minneapolis, Minnesota, admits that his biggest desire at present is to get as far away as possible from city haunts. "Can you tell me something about Lake Vermilion, Mr. North?" asks this citizen of the Gopher State. "How big is this sheet of water? What about roads in its vicinity? Or does one have to travel by launch? Can cabins be rented along the lake, and what about camps sites?"

Lake Vermilion is in that region of lakes and woods known as the Minnesota Arrowhead. Four or five sheets of water were hitched together to make this lake, which is thirty-five miles from end to end. If you count the lake's many bays and arms, it would stretch out three or four times as long, and if you followed the shore all the way around it would make a trip of eight hundred miles. The shore is rock-rimmed for the most part, with here and there a sandy beach or a shingled cove. There is a good road from Cook or Haley, about eight miles to the lake, which skirts its western end and doubles back to Orr.

Of course, Tom must realize that a good road in this part of the world means a well-graded highway, heavily graveled, twenty feet or more wide, kept in good condition by a section crew. On the Cook-to-Orr road near Joyce's Landing are three or four camps and lodges, and farther on at Vermilion Dam is a lodge that maintains daily stage service. By launch, however, any part of the lake is accessible. There are a number of permanent summer homes and camps on the lake shore. Cabins may be rented, with or without boats and canoes, or a launch. But if Tom

wants to have a regular Robinson Crusoe time of it he can pick his own island in the lake for his camp site. In the more inhabited sections one has to pay a nominal rental, but for the most part a camping site is as free as the air and bass, pike, and muskellunge are there just waiting to be caught. On the shore of Lake Vermilion one can enjoy all the thrills of the open and sleep on a bed of boughs before a log fire under the stars.

This is just the sort of vacation that Bert A., of Lincoln, Nebraska, is interested in also, and this son of the Antelope State confesses that he is something of a greenhorn about such matters. He writes: "Can you tell me, Mr. North, what to wear on a camping or hiking trip? I'm going up into the Canadian wilds for my vacation, and I know that to really enjoy myself I must be comfortably dressed."

Bert is right. Lots of folks spoil their fun by wearing the wrong clothes when they answer the call of the open. On a trip of this kind a big clothing supply is just a nuisance, and sometimes one can make out with old things. If outing clothes are bought, they should be of rain-shedding duck, khaki, or forestry cloth. It's a good plan to travel in lightweight things, with extra garments to put on when resting or in camp. Nobody should undertake to get along without a sweater, and, of course, one must provide a waterproof against rain. This may be an army poncho, or a waterproof silk cape about four by seven, with a slash in the center for the head—either of these garments also serving as bedding. A cruiser's shirt of close-woven woolen will answer as both coat and waterproof.

Bert will find woolen shirts better than cotton, except in very hot weather. Underwear should usually be medium-weight cotton or lightweight wool. Felt hats give the best all-round service. Buckskin gloves are useful for working around camp and they keep off mosquitoes. The most important item in an outing wardrobe is footwear. Comfortable shoes and wool socks are absolutely essential. The uppers of shoes need not be of the heaviest weight, but soles should always be thick—for two good reasons. First, they keep the feet from tiring; and, second, they hold hobnails, which is important because soles become slippery on forest trails. After a hard day's hike moccasins will be found restful around camp.

That not everybody is thinking of vacations, however is shown by the following letter:

"Will you tell me, Mr. North, just what territory is included in the so-called Peace River country?" writes Will N., of Butte, Montana. "I'm thinking of taking up a homestead and have been told that that region offers good prospects to the new settler. Where are the land agencies for the Peace River country located? Tell me all you can about this part of Canada."

The Peace River country has no fixed boundaries, either natural or defined. It lies some three hundred miles beyond Edmonton, the capital city of the province of Alberta. The drainage basin of the Peace River proper, exclusive of its headwaters, embraces an area of ninety thousand square miles. The upper or western part of this area is quite mountainous, while the lower part is somewhat the reverse. In the popular conception of this country these extremities are ignored, thus leaving a great compact mid-section belt of potential agricultural land that extends somewhat beyond the actual north and south limits of the Peace watershed.

The tract of land thus designated as the Peace River agricultural country has an area of approximately seventy-three thousand five hundred square miles, or in round numbers forty-seven million acres. This vast country comprises the northwesterly part of the province of

Alberta and a smaller area known as the Peace River block in the adjacent province of British Columbia. Comparatively speaking, the location of the country is somewhat northern and judged on this aspect alone its agricultural possibilities have been doubted by many. It has been demonstrated beyond question, however, that the combination of favorable climate, moderate precipitation, and deep soil of surpassing fertility guarantees this area as being one of the world's great wheat and mixed-farming reserves. And there is plenty of unoccupied land.

For the convenience of land-seekers and settlers, the Canadian government maintains a number of local land agency offices. The Peace River country is now divided for these purposes, into two dominion land agencies, namely, Peace River and Grande Prairie. Each is in charge of an agent who is authorized to give immediate attention to the disposal of Dominion lands, the control of Crown timber, and the recording of mineral claims. The office for the Peace River Land Agency is located in the town of Peace River, with sub-offices at High Prairie, Donnelly, Fort St. John, and Fort Vermilion. The office for the Grande Prairie Land Agency is located in the town of Grande Prairie, with suboffices in Spirit River, Beaverlodge, Pouce Coupe, and Fort St. John.

There is not space this week to say more about this interesting Peace River country, but I shall be glad to answer any questions that anybody wants to send in by letter.

THE DAMAGING BEAVER

THE beaver, which has always been held up to us as a model of busyness and industry, now appears in a new light in which these hitherto extolled qualities are revealed as destructive forces. The beaver colonies are very destructive of trees, and the vast forest growths are actually endangered by the excessive industry of these model builders. The floods resulting from their indefatigable zeal have ruined not only many fine trees but also seriously threatened the black spruce swamps which give sanctuary and shelter to the white-tailed deer during the winter.

Mr. Paul Brandreth, writing in the New York *Times*, advocates a regular open season "to shoot and trap these indefatigable rodents" and "keep in check their superfluous numbers as well as avert further waste."

He says further: "A beaver reaches maturity in a very short space of time. It takes a tree a century or longer to attain its full growth. In their quest for food, beavers seldom cut down a tree over ten or fifteen inches in diameter, but the trees killed by their flooding often measure three and four feet."

It will probably come as a surprise to many to realize of how much damage these little creatures are capable.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

FRANCES LOUISE.—Born in Rosedale, Hanson County, South Dakota, on March 27, 1877. Her father, George Fuller, took her to Ireland. She returned to this country later. Information concerning her appreciated by her mother, Mrs. M. L. Fuller, Route 1, Miami, Oklahoma.

ALLEN, JOHN MILTON, or JACOB FULLER.—Last seen in Plankinton, South Dakota, when he was ten years old. Later he was sent to Danville, Illinois. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. M. L. Fuller, Route 1, Miami, Oklahoma.

HALLY, CHARLEY.—Of Portland, Oregon. Please write to Mrs. Zolena Rice, formerly of Des Moines, Iowa, care of this magazine.

THACKER, ROBERT D.—Last heard from in Columbia, South Carolina. Information appreciated by Harry C. Sackhoff, Box 184, Mobile, Alabama.

PERKINSON, CHARLES E.—Fifty years old. Born in Minnesota. Last heard from in Montana and Washington. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. James Culhane, Kilkenny, Minnesota.

McALLISTER, MRS. W. J.—Your brother still works for the U. S. E. Department, at Galveston, Texas. Please write to Earl M. Ruebins, Box 275, Angleton, Texas.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any who served in Company I, Thirty-fifth Engineers, in France, from February, 1918, to April, 1919. F. B. Phillip, 1427 East Thirty-fourth Street, Oakland, California.

LEAY, SERGEANT O.—Was top sergeant with Company I, Thirty-fifth Engineers, in France, from February, 1918, to April, 1919. Please write to F. B. Phillip, 1427 East Thirty-fourth Street, Oakland, California.

THELMA LUCILLE.—Seventeen years old. Left Texas in 1927. Information appreciated by Wesley, care of this magazine.

BALL, P. E. or TED.—Lived in Mexico at one time. Believed to be in Venezuela. Last heard from in Maracaibo, in 1925-26. Information appreciated by his father, J. H. Ball, 6 Broadway, Leagrave, Luton, England.

GAVARD, FRANK.—Last heard from twenty years ago in New York City. Information appreciated by his son, E. J. Gavard, 237 Spencer Street, Helena, Montana.

LAMBERT, LAWRENCE HAROLD.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, in 1919. A cook. Thirty-two years old. For your mother's sake, please write to your sister, Mrs. Maud Lambert Kane, 3430 Taylor Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

GLOVER, GLEN.—Last heard from in 1918 at Malvern, Arkansas. Information appreciated by V. E. Elkins, 5019 Holcomb Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

FARTAIN, ERNEST E.—Important. No danger. Please write to Mr. and Mrs. J. N. Gallop, 1723 Morgan Street, Parsons, Kansas.

LITTLE, RICHARD THOMAS.—Married after he left his children, Audrey and Fred. Last heard from two years ago, when he wrote to a friend and to grandpa. Letters were lost so we do not know his address. Information appreciated by his son, Fred Little, Texarkana, Texas.

DAVIS, TROY.—Last heard from at 1001 Spencer Avenue, Oroville, California, in 1927. Her home is in San Francisco. Please write to Leslie Sayers Farnsworth, Wirksworth, Derbys, England.

ROBINSON, BENIAMIN.—Born in Canada or Belfast, Ireland, in 1820. Came to Rochester, New York, in 1845, and in 1864 moved to Bremer County, Iowa. Had several brothers and sisters. Would like to hear from my relatives. I am his son, Richard B. Robinson, 5112 Vincent Avenue, South Minneapolis, Minnesota.

GILE, SHERLOCK, or McNALLY, OLLIE.—Twenty-three years old. A blonde from Kentucky. Information appreciated by her father, David C. Gile, care of Western & Southern Life Insurance Company, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

MIDDLETON, RICHARD.—Left Elton, Bury, Lancashire, England, about twenty years ago. Believed to be in Boston, Massachusetts. Information appreciated by M. E. Dixon, 130 Everton Road, Manchester, Lancashire, England.

HOOPER CHARLIE, and CLAUDE HAMMOND.—Please write to your friend, the archbishop. E. H., care of this magazine.

PENNINGTON, LEO S.—Information concerning him appreciated by his daughter, Otho Pennington, State Orphan Home, Corsicana, Texas.

WHITE, WILLIAM J.—Information concerning him appreciated by his daughter, Leta White, State Orphan Home, Corsicana, Texas.

LEN.—Everything is O. K. here. We are worrying about you. Please write to us. It makes no difference if you are in trouble or not. Ecyce, care of this magazine.

MOORE, JAMES.—Last heard from in San Francisco, in 1919, when he was discharged from the army. Information appreciated by his sister, Dorothy, care of this magazine.

OPTENHOFF, MRS. KATHERINE.—Last heard from in Rickmill, Indiana. Information appreciated by Hermann Grutter, 2500 West Harrison Street, Chicago, Illinois.

MARSHALL, FRED.—Left home in 1912, when his daughter was two years old. I am now eighteen years old. Brother and I need you. Please write to Frieda E. Marshall, Florence, Montana.

HILL, BERTHA MAY.—Last heard from in Ventura, California. Information appreciated by her husband and son, W. E. and Anora R. Hill, R. F. D. 3, Clinton, Oklahoma.

GRIGSBY, JOSEPH.—Twenty-eight years old. Last heard from in Springfield, Illinois, in 1922, when he was working in a brickyard. Information appreciated by his grieving mother, Mrs. W. H. Grigsby, McDonald, Tennessee.

KNOTTS, FRED.—An oil-well driller. Last heard from in Oklahoma about two years ago. Information appreciated by his brother, Frank, Route 3, Box A-1, Grafton, West Virginia.

BENNET, JAMES W.—Last heard from in New York City, in 1862. At that time he was about twelve years old and crippled in one leg. Had two sisters, Emma and Elizabeth. Information concerning him or his family appreciated by his niece, Mrs. A. F. Hill, Harrison, Nebraska.

LINDSEY, O. E.—You have an interest in two estates. Please write to your folks. J. E. Lindsey, 1101 Colorado Street, Pullman, Washington.

OLIVER.—Your mother and grandmother have passed away. Please write to Uncle Ernest, in Missouri. News for you. Jimuel, care of this magazine.

FLYNN, IRA B.—Last heard from in Seattle, Washington, in 1927. Scar on upper lip. Information appreciated by his son, Stanley Flynn, Roseburg, Oregon.

ELDRIDGE, SAMUEL R.—Last heard from fifteen years ago in Salina, Kansas. Information appreciated by H. R., care of this magazine.

F.—Do you remember Buck Rabbit? Am at the place where we were born. Please write to Elizabeth, care of this magazine.

CRABTREE, ALNA.—Left Chickasha, Oklahoma, in 1920. Information appreciated by his nephew, Homer, care of this magazine.

MALYNEUX, LOFE.—Black hair and brown eyes. Has a crippled finger on right hand. Left home December 30, 1927. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Lofe Malyneux, Moreno, California.

HOFINS, or DE LISLE, GEORGE.—Please write to F. L. Sherbino, care of this magazine.

GOODIN, PEARL.—Last heard from in Marysville, California, about three years ago. We love you and want you. Information appreciated by her mother, Mrs. A. E. Goodin, Washtucna, Washington.

LEE, ELISABETH.—Don't be afraid to confide in us. We are willing to do anything for you. Please write to Valentine, care of this magazine.

CANNON, BURL.—Inventor of the dry-steam kilns. Left Poyen, Arkansas, about nineteen years ago, to tour the United States in a car. Had a sister named Anna. Information concerning him appreciated by his niece, Erma F. Wetherton, care of R. G. Walker, 1563 East Thirty-first Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

THALLEN, JOHN R., and LESTER D. THOMAS.—Served in Company L, Twenty-second U. S. Infantry, during 1918-19. Thallen at one time lived at Ocean City, New Jersey, and Thomas in Philadelphia. Please write to your old buddy, W. E. Paterson, Jasper, Alabama.

GILLESPIE, BILLIE.—Last heard from at Swift Current, Saskatchewan, or Medicine Hat, Canada, where he worked for a Mr. Wood. Information concerning him appreciated by Sister Margaret, care of this magazine.

WILLIAM ERNEST.—Last heard from nineteen years ago, in Medina, New York, where he was adopted by Mrs. Sophronia Swarthout. Information concerning him appreciated by his mother, care of this magazine.

SINE, GEORGE E.—Information concerning him appreciated by his brother, L. E. Sine, R. R. 6, Decatur, Illinois.

HICKMAN, NAN.—About sixty years old. Left Jerseyville, Illinois, for the West when she was seventeen years old. Information concerning her appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Sarah E. Richmond, 1223 Toles Avenue, Larned, Kansas.

SPARKS, BERTHA.—Last heard from in Denison, Texas, in 1923. My letters to you returned. Are you still with your mother? Leonard Evgstrom, 138 Calendas Avenue, La Grange, Illinois.

JOHNSON, E., or LIZZIE SCOTCH.—Sad news from home. Please write to Happy Nub, care of this magazine.

PRESTON, FRED.—Last heard from in Vancouver, Washington, in 1910. Worked in Elyria, Ohio, in 1909. Information appreciated by G. Jacobs, Box 193, Ormond, Florida.

JOLLY, JOHN G.—Son of Lieutenant John J. Jolly of the New York Fire Department. Last heard from in Providence, Rhode Island. Please write to your brother, Edward J. Jolly, 1671 West Fifth Street, Brooklyn, New York.

BASSETT, LEROY C.—Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois, when he was working for the Western Union. Information appreciated by Helen, care of this magazine.

BARKER, MARION.—Left Illinois about thirty-five years ago. Information appreciated by his nephew, Floyd W. Carpenter, 105 East Highland Avenue, San Bernardino, California.

ANDERSEN, O. F.—Formerly in Company L, Twenty-first Infantry, at Camp Kearney. Believed to be in the U. S. army somewhere in the Pacific islands. Mother ill. I need your help. Please write to your son, William Ralph Andersen, Pyote, Texas.

JONES, BOB.—Formerly of Lamar, Colorado. Latterly with the K. C. Railroad Company. Talked with me in Kansas City, Missouri, about an Eastern trip after the holidays in 1926. Please write at once to George L. Thomas, Box 204-A, R. R. 1, Merriam, Kansas.

WRIGHT, NEITA.—Last heard from about six years ago when she left her grandmother's, Mrs. G. F. Lithel, in Sturgeon, Missouri, for Oklahoma. She was married. Her father's name was J. H. Wright. Father's estate to be settled. Please write to John Young, Independence, Oregon.

McKINZIE, ELSIE.—Last heard from in Freemont, Nebraska. Please write to your roommate, Edna Bassett Meyer, Route 7, Box 201-AAA, Salem, Oregon.

SIMONS, CARL.—Last heard from in Crabtree, Oregon. Went to school with him in Sodaville, Oregon. Please write to Daphine Gyssler, Route 7, Box 201-AAA, Salem, Oregon.

BROUGHTON, MRS. G., nee MONA SHANNON.—Formerly of Portland, Oregon. Last heard from in Goldfield, Nevada. Please write to the grandniece of John Broughton, Aline Farquhar, 509 Ross Street, Houston, Texas.

COOPER, RITA.—Formerly of Fort Smith, Arkansas. Last heard from in Houston, Texas, when she was working at Foley Brothers' dry-goods store. Information appreciated by Aline Farquhar, 509 Ross Street, Houston, Texas.

SALLIS, ELMER.—Last heard from in McAlester, Oklahoma, in 1915. Has also lived near Ada, Oklahoma, and Fort Smith, Arkansas. I need you. Please write to your wife, Rose Sallis, General Delivery, Norphlet, Arkansas.

PENDERGRASS, BUTHER.—Twenty years old. Bald on back of head, caused by a burn. Believed to be in California. Information appreciated by his brother, A. C. Pendergrass.

MACKIE, J. WALTER.—You advertised for Leona. Please send for letter held at this office.

GASTINEAU, GEORGE.—Hope you are well and happy. Please write to True Friend, care of this magazine.

RITTER, LESTER, CLARENCE, and ART.—Lived at one time in Highland Park, Illinois. Last heard from in Indiana. Please write to Emil Johnson, U. S. S. "Maryland," S Division, Bakery, San Pedro, California.

McCAULEY, JOHN M.—Lived at Bennett Block, Room 40, corner of Park and Arizona Streets, Butte, Montana, twenty-three years ago. Last heard from in Seattle, Washington. Please write to C. A. M., care of this magazine.

MILTON J.—Anxious to hear from you. Please write to Sister Nellie, Box 5, Scappoose, Oregon.

EVANS, DAVID J.—Usually works on the railroad. Please write to Howard Lynch, Box 5, Scappoose, Oregon.

CONKLIN, WARREN R.—Twenty-two years old. Left home February 4, 1928. Wife and mother know all and forgive you. Information appreciated by his mother, M. F. Wright, care of Conklin, 69 Lounsbury Street, Waterbury, Connecticut.

AMATUZZI, VIRGINIA.—I am going to the hospital. Please let me know where you are. Am worried about you. Tom Amos, 921 South Beacon Street, San Pedro, California.

ATTENTION.—Shipmates who served on the U. S. S. "Canopus" in 1925-26 please write to Kenneth Davidson, United States Military Academy, F. A., West Point, New York.

W. B. P.—Have replied to your request. I want you and love you. J. I. P.

EVERS, HERMAN.—Left Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1887. Information appreciated by his brother, Henry Evers, 1178 Mirasol Street, Los Angeles, California.

RUFUS.—Would like to hear from you. Hilda, care of this magazine.

MILLER, GEORGE.—Son of Joe Miller of Sayre, Pennsylvania, and Omaha, Nebraska. Please write to Ed. Frost, 101 Riverside Drive, Rialto, California.

WESTFALL, MARGARET.—Believed to be living with her uncle in Pittsburgh. Please write to the friend you met at Mrs. Griffis' rooming house at 720 Wilson Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio, in September, 1927. E. Wazelle, 111 South Eighth Street, Vincennes, Indiana.

GUNSAVLY, CHARLES.—Was a cook in the Service Battalion, Eighty-third Field Artillery, at Camp Knox, Kentucky, in 1920-21. Please write to your buddy, Ed. Wazelle, 111 South Eighth Street, Vincennes, Indiana.

MILLS, STARK R.—Was in the Air Service in France. Last heard from in the oil fields in Kentucky. Information appreciated by Hurless L. Nine, 510 Segal Street, Warsaw, Indiana.

ELMER, OTTO.—About forty-eight years old. Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois, in 1924, where he was driving a team. Information appreciated by Frank L. Smith, care of Dora Brown, 2719 Brighton Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri.

HIBBEN, R. C.—Last heard from at 1567 Henry Street, Chicago, Illinois, twenty-five years ago. Information appreciated by his son, Frank C. Hibben, 716 West Eighty-second Street, Los Angeles, California.

HORTON, MRS. MARGURITE.—Please write to Mrs. Clara Mossman, 213 Edmund Street, Flint, Michigan.

PRESTON, WILLIAM HUGH.—Son of James and Julia Preston of Junction City, Kansas. Moved to Chicago in 1893. Please write at once to Minnie W. Smith, 400 Williford Place, Memphis, Tennessee.

RAPAKKOLA, LEUNARD.—Last heard from twenty years ago in Hancock, Michigan. About fifty-five yeras old. Born in Oulum Laani, Finland. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Selma Rapakkola Niemela, Box 68, Paxton, Massachusetts.

WHITE, HENRY M.—Formerly of Stroudsberg, Pennsylvania. Served with the Eighty-second Coast Artillery at Fort Totten, New York, until June, 1906. We were separated when small children. I have searched twelve years for him. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Nellie Jones, 811 Capouse Avenue, Rear, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

BOUHL, EARL.—Was adopted from the Normal Orphans' Home at Bloomington, Illinois, in 1920. He is now seventeen years old. His Aunt Helen, who is married, would like to hear from him. Mrs. Helen Smith, 812 Third Street, Peoria, Illinois.

THOMASINO, TONY.—Last heard from in New York City, ten years ago. Information appreciated by his mother, who longs for him. Mrs. Mary Thomasino, 317 East Twenty-eighth Street, New York City.

COWEN, JOHN L.—Formerly of London, England. Was with the Royal Marines in 1896. Was discharged in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, and believed to have gone to the gold fields of Australia. Information appreciated by his brother, George Cowen, 265 West Thirty-seventh Street, New York City.

COLLIER, W. F.—Everything is O. K. Please return or write to your wife, Isabelle Collier, 8 East Grand Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

COUTTS, JAMES SINCLAIR.—Thirty-four years old. Last heard from when he left the American navy at San Diego, in 1912 or 1913. Information appreciated by his brother, John Coutts, 223 Forest Avenue, Hamilton, Canada.

ADAMS, LILY.—Born in Webb City, Missouri, nineteen years ago. Mother died and we stayed with Aunt Martha, who gave you to an aged couple when you were eight years old. Last heard from you in Portland, Oregon. Please write to your brother, Elzia Adams, 204 Picher Street, Picher, Oklahoma.

SHAW, CHARLES.—Last heard from in Pittsburg, California, in 1927. Left California, in 1927, in a Hudson touring car. Believed to be in Niagara Falls, New York. He is a common laborer and often works in steel mills. Information appreciated by an old friend, Tony Crivell, West Yosemite Avenue, Manteca, California.

FOSTER, LEORA BELL.—Last heard from in Guthrie County, Iowa, in 1893. Believed to be married. Information appreciated by Mrs. A. Mundt, Route 5, Box 25, Salem, Oregon.

WERBELMAN, WILLIAM H.—Last heard from ten years ago when he lived at 504 Washington Street, Providence, Rhode Island. Information appreciated by E. Swantny, 531 East Eighty-seventh Street, New York City.

STANNING, JOHN.—Last heard from in Plymouth, England, about thirty years ago. He married Emily Williams of Gunnes Lake, Cornwall, England. Was in the navy. Information appreciated by his son, John James Wells Stanning, Hillcrest Apartments, 132½ Union Avenue, Portland, Oregon.

LUCID, IDA.—Formerly of Plymouth, England. Last heard from in New York City, when she was at the Metropolitan Opera House, planning a trip to Europe. Information appreciated by John James Wells Stanning, Hillcrest Apartments, 132½ Union Avenue, Portland, Oregon.

MESSENGER, KENNETH L.—Last heard from when he left the Otter Creek Development Company, in Tipton, Oklahoma. Information concerning him appreciated by T. W. D., care of this magazine.

FOX, MARY.—Fifty-seven years old on January 5, 1928. Last heard from forty years ago when she was working in a mill in Auburn, Maine. Believed to have married and gone to Minneapolis, Minnesota. Information appreciated by her cousin, Mrs. Marian Adams, 25 Fifth Street, Old Lynn, Maine.

KESSLER, JACK.—A cow-puncher. Served in the U. S. Marines, at Pearl Harbor, in 1922. Information appreciated by his buddy, R. J. L., care of this magazine.

CONQUERGOOD, MILTON.—Last heard from in Klamath Falls, Oregon. If you remember Westwood, Susanville, and McCloud, please write to R. J. L., care of this magazine.

LANDIS, IRA A.—A salesman and music-store manager. Important. Please write to Pianist, care of this magazine.

MAYNARD or **MAILLARD.**—Believed to be a Southerner. Was in the milling business in National City, California. Do you remember the one who met with an accident in an Apperson car, around midnight, in January, 1926? You were in a taxi and took me to Utah Street, San Diego, California. Please write to Miss W., care of this magazine.

MORRIS, CHARLIE.—A butcher. Last heard from in Dawson, Alaska. Information appreciated by Mrs. Winifred Pan Key, Route 1, Box 182, Big Spring, Texas.

BURTON, FRANK O.—In 1925 he lived at 2128 South Tacoma Street, Tacoma, Washington. Information appreciated by Elsie H., care of this magazine.

DAVE.—It is a long time since May 28, 1919. We all love you just as much as ever. Guy and Sis are grown up and pray each night for word from you. Please let us hear from you. Mame, care of this magazine.

McCULLY, A' DON.—Lived in Springtown and Plainview, Texas, in 1925. Red Roach is dead. Would like to hear about the S. family. Hope everything is O. K. Please write to S. L. King, M. B. N. S., Cavite, Philippine Islands.

BABE.—I need you. Please come or write to Bart, 805 Castello Street, Santa Barbara, California.

DAINASKI, FELIX.—Believed to have joined the marines. Last heard from eight years ago. Relatives anxious. Please write to Mary Rogers, 1940 West Tenth Avenue, Gary, Indiana.

DIXON, JOHN.—Formerly from Louisiana. Believed to be in the postal service in Dallas, Texas. Please write to S. L. King, M. B. N. S., Cavite, Philippine Islands.

ADDIE MAE.—If you ever need a friend I am at your service. Please let me know how the baby is getting along. Am still in the P's. Sammie, care of this magazine.

RILEY, MARY, and **CHARLEY EVERETT.**—Lived on a farm in Achville, Ohio, in 1926. My letters returned. Please write to an old friend, Mrs. C. C. E., care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from the buddies who served with me in the A. E. F., in France, in Supply Company, Q. M. C., 301, stationed at Is-Sur-Tille, France. Alvert E. Terhune, 200 New York Avenue, Union City, New Jersey.

CASTO, DAVID.—My uncle, who is about eighty years old. Last heard from in California. Information appreciated by W. A. Lauchner, R. R. 2, Big Cabin, Oklahoma.

COFFMAN, JOHN F. and **EDWARD S.**—Fifty-two and forty-nine years old, respectively. Last heard from in Chloride, Arizona. Information appreciated by their nephew, Harry E. Poe, R. F. D. 4, Shelbyville, Indiana.

BURMEISTER, CHARLES H., Jr.—Last heard from in the Hudson River State Hospital, in Poughkeepsie, New York. Information appreciated by his friend, Emil L. Jensen, 967 Seneca Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

BEANE, FRANK R.—Last heard from when he was ill in Chicago. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Aline Smith, 65 Water Street, Hallowell, Maine.

OGLESBY, SARAH C. and **J. W.**—Last heard from in Seymour, Texas. Information appreciated by their niece, Sarah C. Mace, care of this magazine.

WOODRUFF, JAMES P.—Last heard from in December, 1927. Believed to be in Chicago, Illinois, or Detroit, Michigan. Have news for him. Please write to Nancy Meyers, 1105½ Ohio Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

McBRIDE, MRS. ALICE.—About twenty-five years old. Dark hair and eyes. Last heard from near Cincinnati, Ohio. Please write to an old school friend, Mrs. Wilma Dillon Vollmer, R. F. D. 2, Luceville, Ohio.

BREESE or **TEETERS MRS. ELVINA.**—Twenty-three years old. Formerly of Cincinnati Ohio. Please write to an old school friend, Mrs. Wilma Dillon Vollmer, R. F. D. 2, Luceville, Ohio.

KARNES, JOE H.—Last heard from in Calexico, California, in 1922. Have found your discharge papers. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Laura Burroughs, Box 531, Tucson, Arizona.

SIMPSON, JOHN ERNEST.—About forty-five years old. A harness maker. Last heard from in El Paso, Texas, in 1917. Believed to be in Tampa, Florida. His wife, Gustava, was from Ann Arbor, Michigan. Information appreciated by Mrs. J. E. Phillips, 324 Oakland Street, Springfield, Massachusetts.

HECKER, GEORGE.—Last heard from three weeks before the Armistice was signed, when he was at Camp Humphreys. At that time I lived at Manistique, Michigan. Information appreciated by J. M. S., care of this magazine.

HODGES, MRS. LENORA.—Last heard from in Globe, Arizona. Please write to B. Russell, 1506 India Street, San Diego, California.

SUGERPALM, FINGAL.—Last heard from in Kato, Pennsylvania. Please write to your friend, Gladys Campbell, 450 William Street, Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

M. B.—All is forgiven. Come back East and settle in New York. I know you will make good. This will bring us together again. For both of our sakes please do what I ask. Mrs. M. B.

CUMMINGS, CATHERINE.—I love you. Mother and every one will be glad to see or hear from you. Please write to Private George Smalley, Fort Monmouth, Ocean Port, New Jersey.

SWIFT, JESS H.—Last heard from in the Ninetieth Aero Squadron, at Saunderson, Texas. Information appreciated by Jess H. Boyt, 111 Moore Street, Flint, Michigan.

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