Western Story

Every Week Magazine Nov. 17, 1928

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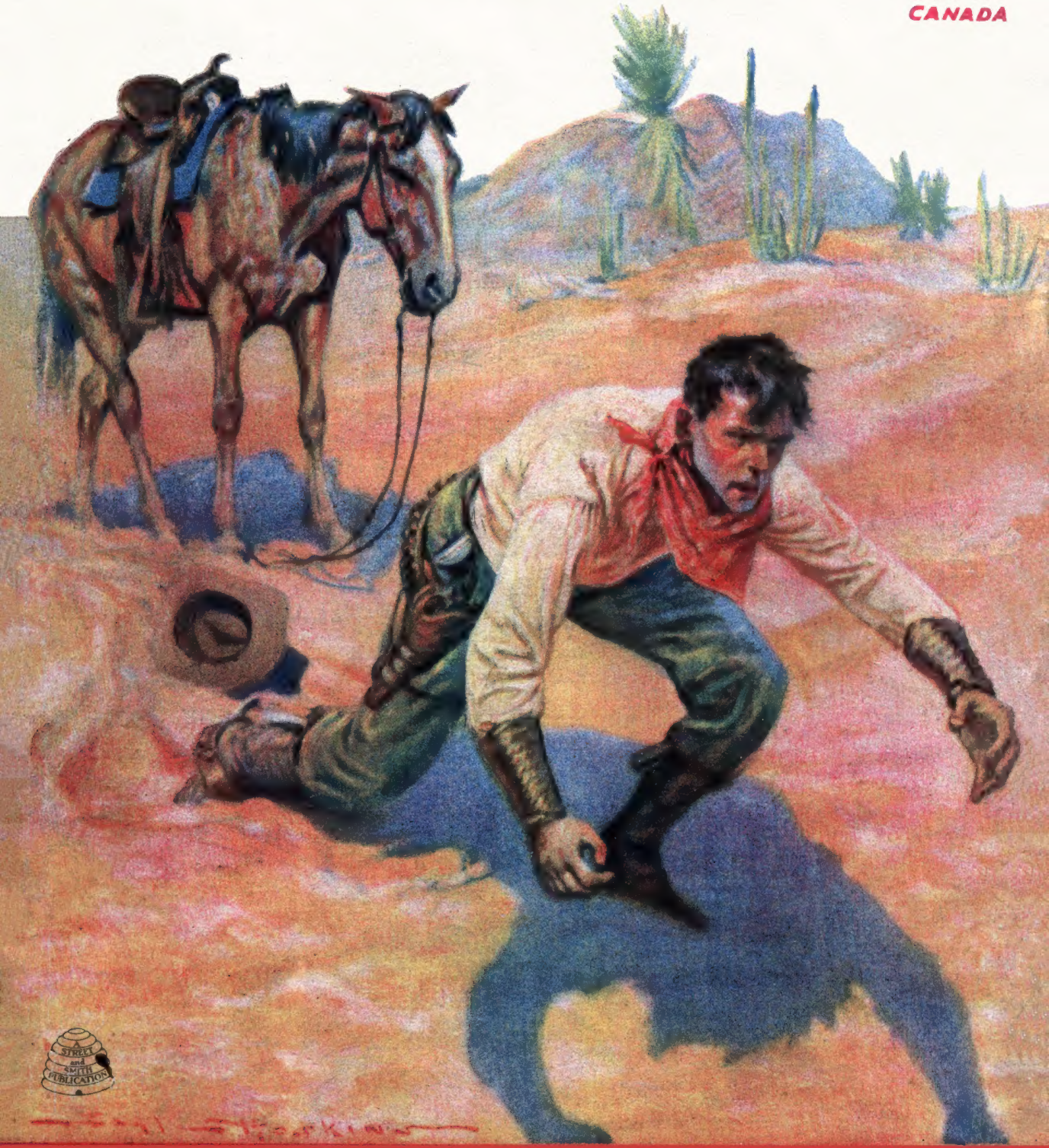

"It was only a picture of hope, but it lured him on."
from THE MOUNTAIN MAN *by* ROBERT J. HORTON

WESTERN STORY
MAGAZINE

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXXII Contents for November 17, 1928 No. 4

ONE NOVEL

TWO SERIALS

FIVE SHORT STORIES

ONE ARTICLE

MISCELLANEOUS

DEPARTMENTS

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"I'm Going to Raise His Salary"

"I've had my eye on him for some time and I know he can handle bigger work. He studies those I. C. S. textbooks every chance he gets, and I want to tell you it has made him a valuable man for this business. I'm going to raise his salary and give him that new job we were talking about. I wish we had more men like him."

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Jesse G. Vincent was a toolmaker before he enrolled with the I. C. S. He is now Vice-president of the Packard Motor Car Company. Walter Chrysler, President of the Chrysler Motor Corporation, is also a former I. C. S. student.

An I. C. S. course enabled Fred W. Southworth to leave a poorly paying job that he had held *for twenty years* and get a position as a salesman. In six months he also had increased his salary more than 300 per cent.

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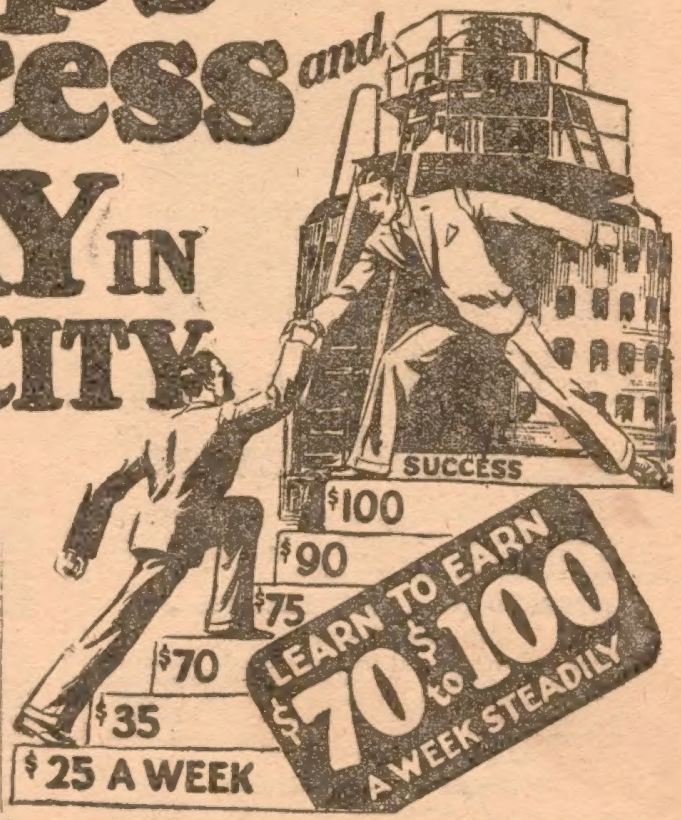

Join the big parade of young fellows who shook the dust of "no future" jobs off their shoes! They are making more money every year in electricity than their old jobs would have paid them in six years.

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Write today. I will send you immediately, one full ampoule of my marvelous fluid which I discovered, of which I hold the secret and which grew my own hair on my own bald head. Besides the Free Ampoule of Fluid, I will send photographs, names and addresses of men and women who successfully used my Wonder Fluid for Dandruff, Falling Hair and particularly for Baldness. Write for free Ampoule.

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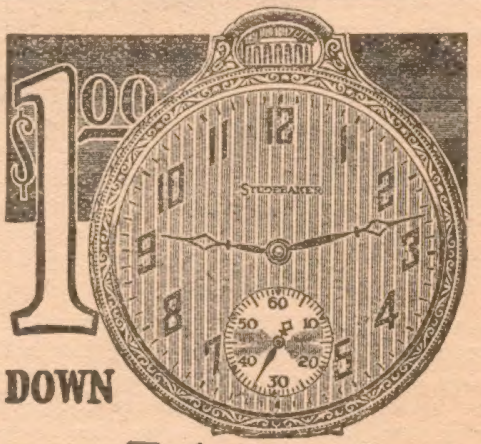

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Here's an absolutely new money-making idea. Brings big profits—easy profits—quick profits. You can make $50 a week in spare time—$100 a week in full time—helping me handle orders in your territory for No-Frost. No-Frost is a new scientific preparation that is absolutely guaranteed to keep steam, frost, fog, rain, sleet, mist, and snow off auto windshields, windows, eyeglasses. Think of it! Keeps glass clean, bright and clear in all kinds of weather.

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All you do is demonstrate to housewives, automobile owners, stores, garages, etc., and take the orders. We don't sell to dealers. All business from your locality must come through you. *You alone get the profit on every order.* Every demonstration brings you 2 to 4 orders. Just put a little No-Frost on the glass. It doesn't show. It won't streak, smear, mar, or scratch. Yet keeps glass clean and clear as crystal. A necessity for every auto owner, storekeeper, street car conductor, locomotive engineer, housewife, and everyone who wears eyeglasses. Prevents accidents and takes the place of mechanical devices that don't work half the time.

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C. Vaughn, Ohio, cleared $125 in one week and says he has more money and friends than ever before. Men and women everywhere are making amazing profits with No-Frost and my 350 other fast-selling products. H. Heintjes, N. J., cleared $30 in 1 day. Mrs. K. R. Roof, S. C., made $50 the first week in spare time. Mrs. B. L. Hodges, N. Y., averages $18 to $20 a day—day in and day out. H. C. Hanson jumped his pay from $25 a week to $75 a week—*and he works only part time.* You can make these big profits too.

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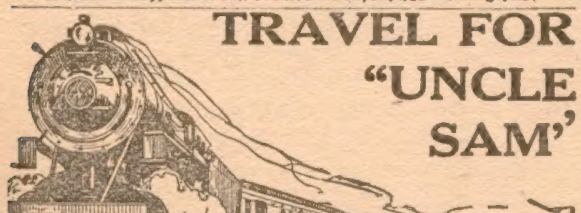

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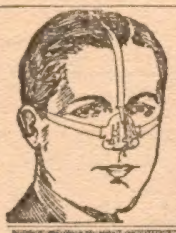

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"I want to say that KRISS-KROSS Stropper is the best thing I ever saw. I have been using one blade continuously for one year and nine months and have no idea how much longer it will last."
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KRISS-KROSS is destined to revolutionize all existing traditions of shaving! Its performance is so sensational that it seems hardly fair to call it a stropper. Rather it is a super-stropper or blade-rejuvenator! Almost literally it makes a new blade out of an old one every day. No longer do you find that your blades "die" after five or six shaves. KRISS-KROSS "brings 'em to life" a surprising way, week after week and month after month—and endows them with a keenness that they never possessed when brand-new! Actually you can take a blade right out of a fresh package and improve it as much as 100% in eleven seconds with KRISS-KROSS! No wonder experts pronounce it one of the greatest inventions ever patented!

Mystery Razor FREE

Magic Diagonal Stroke

Until you've seen KRISS-KROSS, fitted its sturdy, nickeled smoothness into the palm of your hand and tested its uncanny dexterity yourself, you never know how amazing it really is! It employs the famous **diagonal stroke**, same as a master barber uses. Never before has anyone captured the secret of reproducing it automatically. Eight "lucky leather grooves" do the trick in 11 seconds with a precision it takes a master barber years to attain.

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KRISS-KROSS produces unbelievable sharpness and prolongs the life of any razor blade for months and even years. Fits all brands and makes except Durham. Eliminates 83% of shaving costs. No more "raking" and scraping with dull blades. No more stinging and smarting that has to be relieved with messy lotions and harsh astringents. KRISS-KROSS solves your blade problem for all time and gives you keen, velvet-smooth shaves forever!

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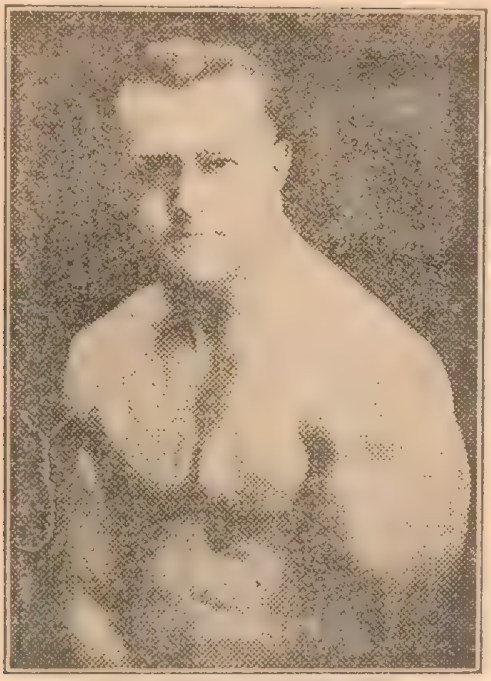

EARLE LIEDERMAN The Muscle Builder
Author of "Muscle Building," "Science of Wrestling," "Secrets of Strength," "Here's Strength," etc.

Muscles 5¢ apiece!

Wouldn't it be great if we could buy muscles by the bag—take them home and paste them on our shoulders? Then our rich friends with money to buy them sure would be socking us all over the lots.

But they don't come that easy, fellows. If you want muscle you have to work for it. That's the reason why the lazy fellow never can hope to be strong. So if you're lazy and don't want to work—you had better quit right here. This talk was never meant for you.

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I've been making big men out of little ones for over fifteen years. I've made pretty near as many strong men as Heinz has made pickles. My system never fails. That's why I guarantee my works to do the trick. That's why they gave me the name of "The Muscle Builder." I have the surest bet that you ever heard of.

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In just 30 days I'm going to increase your arm one full inch. Yes and add two inches to your chest in the same length of time. But that's nothing. I've only started; get this—I'm going to put knobs of muscle on your shoulders like baseballs. I'm going to deepen your chest so that you will double your lung capacity. Each breath you take will flood every crevice of your pulmonary cavity with oxygen. This will load your blood with red corpuscles, shooting life and vitality throughout your entire system. I'm going to give you arms and legs like pillars. I'm going to work on every inner muscle as well, toning up your liver, your heart, etc. You'll have a snap to your step and a flash to your eye. You'll feel the real pep shooting up and down your old backbone. You'll stretch out your big brawny arms and crave for a chance to crush everything before you. You'll just bubble over with vim and animation.

Sounds pretty good, what? You can bet your old ukulele it's good. It's wonderful. And don't forget, fellow—I'm not just promising all this—I guarantee it. Well, let's get busy, I want some action—So do you.

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Take it and read it. It's the peppiest piece of literature you ever flashed your eyes on. And 48 full-page photos of myself and some of my numerous prize-winning pupils. This is the finest collection of strong men ever assembled into one book—Look them over—Doctors, lawyers, merchants, mechanics, and every line of trade you can think of. I swear you'll never let this book get out of your hands again. And just think—you're getting it for nothing. Grab it.

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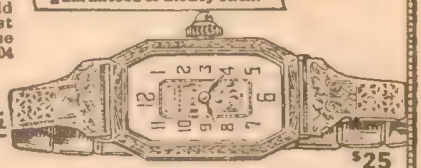

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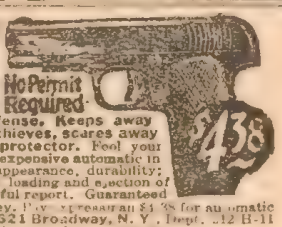

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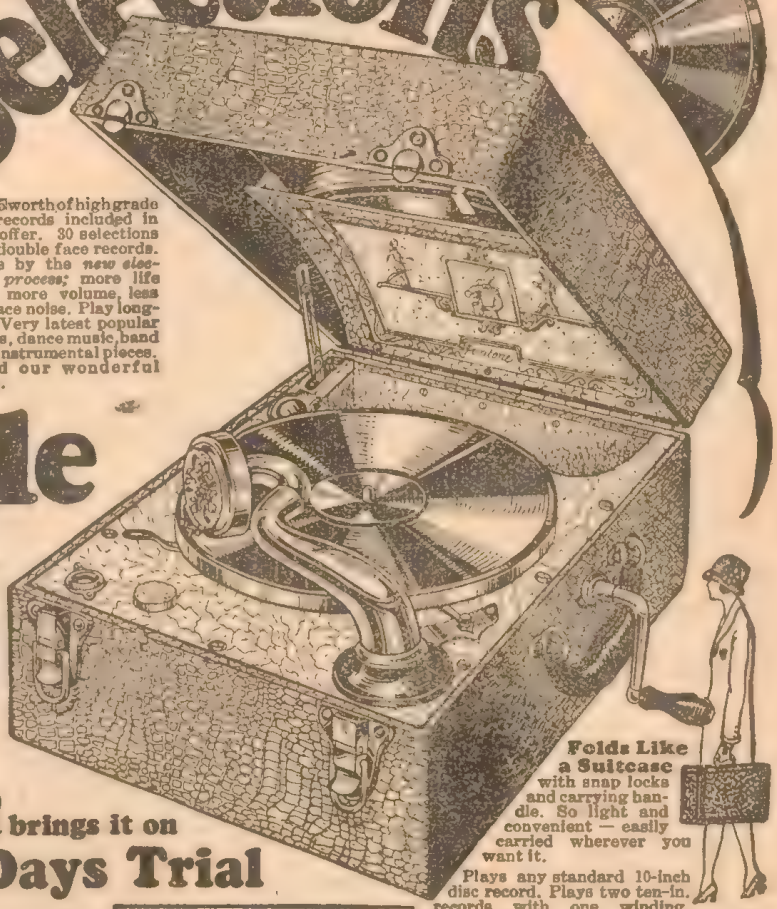

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If you want only our free catalog of home furnishings, mark X here ☐

"Don't spoil the party"

.. someone called when I sat down at the piano

—a moment later they got the surprise of their lives!

WAS just about to enter the room when I overheard Bill saying, "It'll seem like old times to have Dan with us again!"

"You'd better lock the piano!" came the laughing rejoinder.

"Nonsense! He won't have the nerve to play after what happened the last time!"

"That was a shabby trick. I almost wish we hadn't pulled it. . . ."

How well I knew what they were talking about!

At the last party I had attended I had sat down at the piano and in my usual "chopstick" fashion started playing some popular numbers.

Before long, however, I had noticed an unusual stillness. I stopped playing, turned around, and saw—the room was empty!

Instead of entertaining the party, as I had fondly imagined, my halting, stumbling performance had been a nuisance.

Burning with shame and indignation I had determined to turn the tables. At last tonight, the moment had come.

Every one seemed overjoyed to see me again—obviously glad that I had evidently forgiven and forgotten last year's trick.

Suddenly I turned to Bill and said, "Hope you've had the piano tuned, old boy. I feel just in the mood. . . ."

Instantly the friendly atmosphere changed. It was amusing to see the look that spread from face to face. For a moment no one spoke. Then, just as I was sitting down at the piano, some one called:

"For heaven's sake, get away from that piano! Don't spoil the party!"

That was my cue. Instead of replying I struck the first bars of "Sundown." And how! Easily, smoothly, with all the verve and expression I had always longed for!

I Fool My Friends

The guests gasped with amazement. Fascinated, scarcely believing their ears, they drew nearer. When I finished they loudly clamored for more. Time and again, when I would have stopped, they eagerly insisted on "Just one more, please!"

When they finally allowed me to leave the piano I turned around and said:

"Just a moment, folks! I want to thank you for what you did for me last year!"

The eager, laughing faces turned red with embarrassment. One or two of the boys murmured an apology. Seeing their confusion, I continued:

"I mean it! If you hadn't opened my eyes, I'd still be a dub at playing. I went home mighty angry that night, I'll admit. But it taught me a lesson. And believe me, folks, when I think of the real pleasure I get out of playing now, I'm only sorry you didn't pull that trick sooner!"

Before letting me go home that night Bill demanded "How did you do it?"

I laughed. "Why, I just took advantage of a new way to learn music, that's all!"

"What! Didn't you take lessons from a teacher?"

"No! I taught myself! When that trick showed me up last year, I sent to the U. S. School of Music for one of their free demonstration lessons. Well, it proved to be so much easier than I had hoped for, that I sent for the complete course. And believe me, I'm mighty glad I did! There wasn't any expensive private teacher to pay—and since the lessons came by mail, I didn't have to set aside valuable hours to study. I practiced only in my spare time, a few minutes a day. And the course is thorough! Why, almost before I knew it, I could play anything—ballads, rhapsodies, waltzes, jazz!"

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Voice and Speech Culture		
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This story is typical. The amazing success of the men and women who take the U. S. School of Music course is largely due to a newly perfected method that makes reading and playing music as simple as A—B—C.

Even if you don't know one note from another now, you can easily grasp each clear, inspiring lesson of this surprising course. You simply can't go wrong. First, you are told how a thing is done, then a picture shows you how, then you do it yourself and hear it.

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EVERY WEEK

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The Mountain Man

by Robert J. Horton

Author of "The Gun Girl of Tumble Creek," etc.

CHAPTER I.

JOAN FRENCH.

THERE was a sound of music. Joan was playing a violin. She was not playing it, as you might assume, in a cool drawing room or studio; nor was she playing it, if you had known, in the great rancho far below among the pepper trees, where she lived. She was playing high on the eastern shoulder of Smoky Butte among the junipers.

She played well, but you would not have recognized the melody. For the music was sweet and sighing. loud and chanting, weird and haunting; a singing in the strings of the wind in the junipers, of the shimmering heat waves that hid the oasis of the rancho, of the blue, slaty haze that smothered the horizon, of the black, forbidding outlines of distant lava hills—Joan's was a song of the spirit of the desert, which was her own.

She would not have played like this at home. The same inspiration was not to be had indoors. She would have loosed the spirits of the great masters there, or filled the long, cool living room

with crooning, throbbing lullabies, and old Zeb French would heave his tremendous frame into a great chair, and stroke his white beard, and stare at his willful daughter out of faded, blue eyes brimming with pride and appreciation.

But sometimes, when the notes unexpectedly soared in wild exultation, the expression in Zeb's eyes would change and troubled lights would shade them, and he would shift uneasily in his chair. Zeb French loved this girl, who was the living spirit of her dead mother; loved her to distraction—and he was afraid of her. For Joan did strange things, and gave free rein to an imagination which created a longing for strange adventures. But this side of her character he could not know nor understand; he realized its existence, the irresistible lure it held for that other side which he *did* know, and did not fear.

Sometimes her brothers, Will and Frank, would sit on the low stoop of the patio and listen also. And they sensed the meaning of those high, soaring notes; and they would look at each other in understanding. And, too, at such times as these, the old Mexican housekeeper would live in heaven.

The brothers had heard Joan play in the high junipers, and on the wide, yellow stretches of the desert, and in the deep, wild ravines along the border; but they never spoke of these times to old Zeb, nor did Zeb expect it. He had been left alone with his sons and daughter when they were young; when certain activities had kept him away from home for days and weeks at a time; and the Mexican woman and the desert had reared them. True, a school-teacher had come from somewhere and lived at the rancho for three years for her health. She had taught them a good deal, and had sent them books, which Joan had read, to her brothers' scorn. And she had seen to it that the girl's natural musical talent was developed; but Joan could now instruct her former teacher. All this notwithstanding, the desert had been the schoolmaster, and it had found willing pupils.

This day Joan played with greater strength than usual. Wild, tempestuous notes softened the yearning strains, and climbed the heights again. She was at her best. Her horse stood near, motionless, ignoring the luscious feed about him, listening—a splendid, iron-gray stallion whom none but Joan could touch. So they were, girl and beast, communing with the spirits of that desolate land of burning sands, dry washes, lava hills—juniper, greasewood, cactus, sage—and slimy, creeping things, under a sky of brass.

But they were not alone.

High on the shoulder of the butte the heat beat down upon a horseman. He was covered with gray dust, and there were ridges on the shoulders and flanks of his mount where the sweat had run in streams. He had come far, this rider, far and fast; too fast for desert travel. He leaned forward on his saddle horn and listened. Wonder, awe, and incredulity were commingled in the gaze that swept downward. At last, he urged his tired horse down the juniper slope.

As he was riding into the wind instead of with it, the man was favored in his effort to surprise the player. Had it been otherwise, the wind would have carried the scent of his horse to the stallion and his presence would have been betrayed at once. The junipers, too, aided him; for they were high enough to screen his advance.

Nevertheless, the stallion's head went up with a snort, and he turned, giving warning of the man's nearness before the latter could spring his surprise. He drove in his spurs, but the player had laid aside the violin, made some quick motions, and had risen when the newcomer rode out of the high junipers.

He whistled in astonishment. It was a *girl,* and *she was masked!* As he

rode toward her, she made a lightning move with her right hand and covered him with a .45.

"That's far enough!" she called sharply. "An' don't reach for anything but the sky, unless you think I'm fooling."

He checked his mount and elevated his hands. He was not smiling nor grinning because she was a girl; he was looking at her keenly, taking in every detail of her appearance. Her hair was covered by the big range hat she wore. He could only see the lower part of her face, but the lips were full and ruby, her cheeks and chin well molded. Her hands were slim and beautiful. Her riding habit was well worn, but her boots were new and betrayed small, dainty feet.

"A gun girl!" he ejaculated, not realizing that he spoke aloud.

"Yes, a gun girl, if you think so," was the retort, in a cold, hard, feminine voice. "An' I don't hanker to have no long rider spying on me!" Her eyes flashed through the mask, but he could not determine their color. They were shaded by the hat, too.

"I wasn't spying," he said sternly, "I saw——"

"Don't lie!" she broke in. "I could make you pay for it, too; an' nobody'd know a thing about it."

"Yes," he drawled, "you could shoot *me,* but I couldn't shoot *you.*"

"Why not?" she demanded suspiciously. "I wouldn't trust you far."

"You can trust me *that* far," he said dryly. "I might shoot a man, an' maybe I *have,* but I couldn't very well shoot a woman."

She was nonplused at this, and found herself believing him. His eyes were good, and a woman is apt to know much of a man by his eyes. His face was good, too; he would be right good looking after a hard wash. Young and well built. Well, she had seen them come bad, young, well built and good looking!

"You might lower that gun," he suggested. "Not that I'm afraid it might go off, for I take it you know your business; but I'd sure like to roll a cigarette. I heard the playing—an' it was good playing—up above, but I couldn't make out who was making the music. So I came down."

She lowered her weapon. "You can make your cigarette," she said, "but don't try any tricks. It just happens that I'm able to shoot from the hip."

He nodded in approval, and for the first time he smiled, betraying a fine set of white, even teeth against his tan. "I had a hunch you could do that very thing from the first." He nodded again, took out tobacco and papers and started to build his smoke. "That's not a lady's pearl-handled affair you're packing; it's a *man's* gun."

"An' I know how to use it," she said coolly. "Where you from?"

"Up north," he replied, calmly lighting his cigarette. "You live aroun' here?"

"I'm not answering questions, I'm asking 'em," she returned. "I suppose there's no use asking you your right name. Anyway, you—where you going?"

"Down south," he grinned. "I don't reckon there'd be any use asking *you* your name, but mine's Deadwood Dave."

He saw the flush on the lower part of her face. "In your case, it ain't none too safe to get fresh," she said angrily, raising the gun again.

"Listen, gun girl, I'm peaceful, understand?" he drawled. "An' if you're going to shoot *any*thing with that gun, shoot the end of this cigarette off, instead of my head."

He had hardly held the cigarette out in insolent challenge when her gun broke sharply on the stillness. He held half his cigarette between his fingers! He regarded it thoughtfully. Then he took off his hat and bowed to her.

There was no twinkle in his eyes; only genuine respect. "You're the first girl I ever met who could pull that trick," he said soberly.

"An' I've got more up my sleeve," she said harshly, to conceal her appreciation of his flattering remark. "I reckon you better be on your way."

"I was thinking the same thing," he said. "If you don't mind, I'll stow this away as a souvenir." He carefully placed the short portion of cigarette in his hat rim and put the big Stetson on his head. "By the way, could you tell me where Sunrise is?"

"Down in this country it's in the east, an' early in the morning for them as gets up," was the blistering reply.

"Why—I had in mind a *town,*" he said, looking grieved. "I was told there was a town down this way called Sunrise—a right smart town, too, 'twas said."

"Just keep on east an' you'll see it early in the morning," she answered. "Me—*I'm* saying good-by or getting mad; one of the two."

"I wouldn't want you to get mad," he said soberly, shaking out his reins. "But *I* hate to say good-by, an' maybe it isn't any such thing. So long."

He spurred his horse and threaded his way down through the junipers, leaving her thinking hard over his last remark. She put up her gun suddenly, called the stallion, put the violin in its case, mounted with it, and rode at a sharp pace southward. Not until she gained the lower mesa did she remove the mask.

CHAPTER II.

THE OASIS.

THE rider went on down the east slope, pondering deeply over the unexpected and brief meeting with the masked gun girl. "Gun girl she sure was," he muttered. "Now, where——" He kept a sharp lookout in all directions. The girl lived somewhere about, that much was certain. "Why the mask?" he kept asking himself. And why, indeed? She could have sent him on his way, unmasked, and without any gun demonstration, just as easily. And he would have had just as much of a chance of finding her. In fact, if she have *not* been masked, and had not acted as she did, he would have merely asked directions and gone on. He had no time in particular for women. But now he wanted above all things to see this wild creature again. Proficient as he was with his own weapon, respected, and feared, and outlawed, he had met a girl who could apparently match his skill. She had said Sunrise was eastward and he might reach it by morning. He doubted if his horse could make it, and tried to shake off the conviction that the beast could not. He was nearly spent himself and just began to realize it.

The junipers gave way to sage and greasewood. The heat increased, drove in upon him like a wall of fire. His mouth and throat were dry. He dared take but a sip at a time of the scanty supply of water in the canteen which hung from the horn of his saddle. With each sip he had to tilt it a bit higher, and he was tilting it dangerously close to straight up. He had ridden long and far, and he was weary, and was beginning to slump in the saddle as he dreamed of cool mountain brooks, and ice-cold springs—lakes, rivers, oceans of water! *Water!* He brought himself to with a jerk and looked about with eyes that were rapidly becoming bloodshot. It seemed to him that the terrific heat struck him suddenly like a blast out of a furnace.

He had reached the floor of the desert—the inferno. What a fool he had been to come south in August! He should have taken to the high mountains. He could see the glistening peaks, the tall stands of pine and fir,

the flower-splashed meadows with their ambling brooks, the foothills——

Why, there they were straight ahead! Tall trees and a lake! He spurred his horse toward the mirage. The animal stumbled and threw him. He sprawled on his hands and knees in the hard, burning sands. He had been thrown by a horse! He—Louis Lane—had been thrown by a horse—by his *own* horse! Had been thrown——

He toppled forward on the hot floor of the desert. Then he scrambled unsteadily to his feet. This would not do. What was the matter with him? He had been too long in the north and the inferno was getting him fast. But, could the thing he feared happen so quickly? Everywhere was that bluish haze, and at hand was the dazzling sunlight, thrown up into his eyes by the yellow floor of the desert. And ahead, or far behind, were the trees and the water. But he knew them for what they were—the deadly, deceitful lures of the desert. To try to reach them was the first sign of the end. He knew that end: swollen lips and black tongue, tearing off of clothes, digging in the sand, and at the finish—the Death Watchman. When *he* came, it was over.

He staggered to his drooping horse and clutched the canteen. He unscrewed the cap and tipped the canteen to his lips. He would take just a sip, just a sip. The bottom of the canteen tilted upward, and upward. He had not the power to draw it from his lips. He would have to save at least one drink. And now nothing came. He was looking straight up into the mocking, blazing sky. Gone! He threw the empty canteen down.

But the drink had refreshed him and some of his strength returned. He climbed into the saddle. His horse lurched ahead, wavered, and stood trembling. He dismounted and, walking slowly, led his mount. Relieved of his weight, the beast followed well enough. But Lane's lips were pressed tightly. This would be the last phase. Who would give out first, himself or the horse? What was that in the sky? A dark speck—no, two specks, and three—buzzards!

Lane laughed, and the hoarse, unearthly cackle that came from his lips frightened him. It was his imagination, of course. There were no buzzards. Why should they come so soon? Why should they come at all? It was all trash, this buzzard business. Desert gossip. Like the coyotes on the northern ranges. Buzzards and coyotes! Bosh! But the specks did not disappear. They continued to drift about up there in the sky. But Lane no longer looked up. He looked at the ground just ahead, nodding. There was cactus now, towering giants which lifted their spiny arms above him; la chollas, and ocotillo, and yucca. And straight ahead were feathery pepper trees. It was only a picture of hope, but it lured him on.

Lane cackled again, stumbled and fell. He got to his feet with difficulty. The mirages were getting close; coming to him. And yet—he croaked in excitement and staggered on. They *were* trees! Pepper trees close at hand! *An oasis!* He tried to run, fell—crawled on his hands and knees——

It was Will French who came running to help him. He got Lane to his feet and supported him so he could walk in under the trees of the oasis. He put him down in the flickering shade of the peppers and called loudly in Spanish. A Mexican appeared shortly and French snapped out an order in the same language. The Mexican took the horse away.

Lane looked up out of blurred eyes. "Don't—give that horse—too—too much water to start," he breathlessly mumbled.

"Don't worry," said Will. "We

know how to take care of your horse, an' you, too."

"Touch—of sunstroke," Lane muttered.

"Sure," Will nodded grimly. "But it would have been more than that if you hadn't stumbled on this place when you did."

The Mexican returned presently with a canteen of water. Lane grasped it eagerly as Will French held it to his lips. "Easy," said Will, withdrawing it after Lane had had a swallow. "You're not so strong at present that you can take this away from me. You talk about watching out for your horse an' then try to make a fool of *yourself*. Now, take another swallow."

It was fully half an hour before Lane had had two cupfuls of water. His eyes had cleared. "Thanks, old-timer," he said, surveying his rescuer. "It got me all of a sudden out there," he explainly wryly, with a yawn. "I'd had a long ride," he added.

"What you need now is some sleep, an' plenty of it," said French. "When you've had it, you can talk, if you want to. I guess you can walk."

Lane waved aside the proffered aid and got to his feet. But he was still unsteady and French took his arm and led him to the house. They turned into a room directly off the patio. The thick adobe walls shut out the heat. There was a bed, a table with a lamp upon it, two chairs.

Lane took off his coat and hat. But he had to be helped with his boots and the rest of his clothes. He was asleep before French could get him into bed. French examined the gun and belt he had thrown on the table. He hefted the money belt he had removed from about Lane's waist. He opened the pockets, one by one, and his eyes gleamed. He muttered to himself in Spanish. He looked about uncertainly, stared at the face on the pillow. Then he carefully went through Lane's clothes. Apparently, what he found did not interest him, for he took the money belt and went out.

Some time afterward he returned with his father. Zeb French looked long at the face on the pillow and shook his head. "Never saw him," he said. "Too young, anyway. I was scoutin' around before he was born."

They went out, both so tall they had to stoop going through the door. Will French was the elder of the two boys, about thirty. His brother, Frank, was twenty-five. Thus, Joan at twenty-two was the "baby" of the family. This day Frank was in Sunrise and would not return until the cool of the night —if he returned then.

The next visitor to Lane's room was the old Mexican housekeeper. She left a jug of water and a stone mug on Lane's table. And she, too, looked long at the stranger. Visitors at the rancho were few and far between, except when friends came.

With the sunset, Lane had another visitor. It was Joan. She stole in silently and a single glance at the sleeper's face sufficed. She tiptoed out, walked rapidly around a small fountain which played in the center of the patio, made her way through an opening in the opposite wall, and hurried to the low, adobe barn. The Mexican in attendance there ran toward her eagerly.

"Take the stallion to the lower pasture at once, an' see that he *stays* there, where the strange señor cannot see him," she commanded crisply in Spanish. She turned back for the house, her face clouded. "Might have known he'd stumble into the place," she said to herself.

She was not pleased over Lane's arrival and had fully expected him to die in the desert. For there were no springs between Smoky Butte and Sunrise. If Lane had known it, he was the first man who ever had surprised her playing on the butte or elsewhere.

She did not like it; she did not like men —strange men who were young and good looking. The very fact that she kept thinking of him annoyed her. She took her violin from its accustomed place in the living room and put it in her bedroom. Then she curtly told her father and Will that they were not to mention that she played. They shrugged. They had no intention that the stranger should even see her.

The twilight came swiftly and was brief, as is the case in the Southwest desert areas. Stars filled the purple night sky. Lane slept on, the sleep of utter exhaustion—deep and dreamless. But a Mexican squatted on guard without his door until the silver light of dawn streaked the eastern horizon and the household was astir.

Lane was sitting up in bed yawning after his long rest when Will French came to the room. Outside the door the patio was flooded with golden spangles as the rays of the sun broke through the trees. Birds were singing sweetly. A soft breeze was filtering through the latticed window.

"Morning," Lane said to French. "I reckon I took some snooze. I was about all in."

"I guess you had it coming," Will answered. "You was pretty well played out. Better come an' have a bath."

"Eh?" Lane was out of bed and putting on his clothes in no time. "That's the sweetest invitation I've had since——" He bit off his words with his hands patting his waist. Then his eyes narrowed and he looked at Will French squarely. "Did you take it?" he asked coldly.

French smiled. "I shore did," he answered. "Think I was going to leave your money out here with you dead to the world? We've got a pretty good bunch of Mexicans on the place, but I wouldn't trust one of 'em on a bet where there's a stake in sight. Your money's safe enough. It's in the house. Better leave it there till after you've had your bath."

Lane looked relieved. "It's everything I've got, 'cept my horse, saddle, and gun," he said in explanation. "An' I had a hard enough time getting it," he added grimly.

French betrayed his interest only with his eyes. When Lane was ready, he led him across the patio and out the doorway to a little adobe house where Lane, to his surprise, saw an open pool. It was walled in with stones and the top of the walls had been worn by countless bare feet. He looked at French questioningly.

"Agua caliente," said Will. "These hot mineral springs have been here nobody knows how long. This one was closed in by the Indians years before my father ever saw this country, an' he's eighty. Help yourself, an' when you're through your grub will be ready."

"Say, you're white people!" Lane exploded impulsively. "Honesty an' hospitality don't always run together, but in this case they sure do. I appreciate it. My name's Louis Lane, an' I'm just down from the northern ranges." He held out his hand.

French took it, looking at his guest keenly. "We've got to do what we can for each other in the desert, Lane," he said gravely. "You're at the French ranch, an' my name's Will French. We're not bad people in some ways." With that he turned and went out.

On a stool was soap and a huge, rough towel. Lane undressed quickly and plunged into the warm, soothing water. His bath lasted half an hour and when he came out of the water he rubbed his fine, muscular body with the rough towel until his skin was fiery. He felt fit as a man could feel as he donned his clothes.

He came out into the bright sunlight and entered the patio to come face to face with a dark-haired girl who

stopped as if struck and stared at him out of dark-brown eyes in which all the mysterious lights of the desert sparkled. She was dressed in white and held an armful of flowers.

He was so taken with her beauty and freshness of youth that he forgot to greet her. And Joan French forgot her animosity as she looked at this man she had met the day before. His damp, touseled hair—a true bronze in color—his hazel eyes and clean-cut features fascinated her. It was as if he had been made anew. And she saw he didn't recognize her.

"Good morning," Lane stammered finally.

"Good morning," she said in a low, sweet voice and hurried past him.

"Your breakfast is ready, Lane," came Will French's voice sharply from across the patio.

Lane hurried toward his room.

CHAPTER III.

SUNSET AND SUNRISE.

SOMETHING told Lane, as he looked at Will French, that it would not be policy to ask about the girl. He recognized the resemblance between this tall, dark, young man and the girl and knew at once that she was his sister. He saw his breakfast on the table. For a few moments he resented his not having been invited into the house; then as quickly came the realization that he was a stranger about whom they knew nothing. He smiled at French.

"That bath was worth a yellow chip in *any* sized game," he said, as he sat down to eat. "You can have it any time you say."

"Your money belt is under the pillow," Will remarked dryly and left the room.

Lane knew men. No word had been spoken, no look had been flashed. Still, Lane was convinced that Will French was very angry. The reason was plain: Lane's meeting with the girl had not been intended nor expected. There would be talk in the house.

"Anyway, I saw her," Lane muttered and attacked the excellent breakfast before him with gusto.

When he had finished, he leisurely rolled a cigarette and smoked contentedly. A Mexican woman came to take away the dishes. He reached into a pocket and brought forth a silver dollar which he gave her. She smiled and nodded brightly. When she had gone, Lane secured his money belt and counted the contents of the pockets. The sum it had contained when Will French took it was intact. He buckled it about his waist next to his skin and felt better. He had seen the barn when he had gone for his bath and now he crossed the patio and made his way there. Joan French had foreseen this move on his part. She knew any experienced rider would keep an eye on his mount. Which was why she had had the stallion taken from its stall in the barn.

Lane found his horse all right and gave the Mexican who had looked after the animal a five-dollar gold piece. He got the same grin and nod of thanks that he had received from the housekeeper. He considered his next move. It was getting fearfully hot and he dreaded the ride to Sunrise under that blazing, relentless sun. At this thought the events of the day before passed in bold review before him in swift mental pictures. The girl in the mask! He wondered if it would be policy to ask Will French if he knew of her. Then a startling thought occurred to him. Could there be any connection between the girl he had seen that morning and the gun girl? The idea was no sooner born in his mind than he dismissed it as being absurd. Will French's sister was not only beautiful; she was demure. She had a soft, sweet voice, whereas the gun girl had tones that

were knife-edged. She was the kind one could not hire to wear a simple, white frock and gather flowers. "Not *that* girl," Lane told himself as he entered the patio. He saw Will beckoning to him from the rear of the house and his heart gave a bound. He was to see the dainty, desert flower again, then; perhaps meet her. He hurried toward Will French.

"Was over to look at my horse," he explained. "He seems none the worse for the way I've mistreated him lately."

"Come in an' have a smoke," Will invited in a casual tone.

Lane followed him into the house, through the kitchen and dining room to the long living room. Zeb French was there, sitting in his big chair, but as Lane's eyes swept the room even to the shadows in the corners, he saw no sign of the girl. They were not going to permit him to meet her after all. Well, why in the world should he care? What did it matter? He never would see her again anyway.

"Have a cigar," Zeb French invited, pointing to an open box of Havanas on the table. "Reckon you don't pack many cheroots with you on the trail."

"It isn't hard to take you up on that proposition," said Lane, helping himself from the box. "No, I travel light."

He caught a significant look that passed between father and son. He knew he had been invited into the house to be questioned. He took a comfortable chair which Will indicated and lighted his weed.

"Traveling far?" old Zeb asked casually.

"Sunrise is my next stop, an' I hope it's not far," Lane replied easily. "Just how far *is* it?"

"'Bout thirty-five miles or so east," the old man answered. "Three-four hours ride in the cool, but it's all day in the heat. You'd never made it yesterday."

"An' well I know it," said Lane energetically. "Mighty good thing I struck *this* place, Mr. French, an' I want to thank you so much for treating me so white."

"We ain't in the habit of lettin' folks die in the desert," said the old man dryly. "I've had too many years of it myself."

Silence followed this retort. Lane looked from the old man to Will French. The latter regarded him languidly. And, somehow, Lane felt or sensed that other eyes were looking at him; hidden eyes—the girl was watching and listening from somewhere. The silence grew heavier. Lane decided to take the initiative.

"Gentlemen," he said behind a cloud of cigar smoke, "I know the signs. I see you want to know more about me. Of course, I'm ready to leave any minute. As I said, my name's Lane. I'm not a line rider, nor a long rider, but I don't follow the trail just to be exercising my horse. I'm a gambler. I'm a good gambler, an' a square gambler—so long as the other gents in the game are square. I've worked the North clean. I had to correct a little fault of the dealer in the last game I played in"—he smiled and waved his cigar in an aimless gesture—"an' I lit out in a hurry. I had to discourage some of the gentleman's friends from following me, as I wasn't wanting company. So I'm on my way to this town of Sunrise, which I hear is up an' going at all hours of the day an' night. I'm not so particular about the days. Now you have it."

He resumed his cigar, relishing the attention his audience had given to his simple statement.

"Waal, it ain't no crime to gamble," Zeb French observed. "Least it wasn't no crime in such places as I've been in, an' Sunrise is one of 'em. An' I didn't suppose you packed that smoke wagon of yours to shoot squirrels with." He

paused, but Lane made no comment. "Any place in view after Sunrise, son?"

"None as I know of yet," said Lane. "I take one place at a time an' let it go at that."

"You are figurin' on goin' in to Sunrise to-night, wasn't you, Will?"

"Thinking about it," Will answered.

Lane thought Will appeared more cheerful. The old man seemed in better humor, too. Lane assumed that his statement had clarified the atmosphere regarding himself. People living in isolated places always want to know something about the strangers who happen their way. It also seemed to him that these two were more pleased with the nature of his profession, or occupation, than if he had been in a more legitimate business—if it could be called such. There were other things he could have told had he so wished, but he had no intention of doing so.

"Reckon you wouldn't mind, Will, if Lane, here, rode along with you," Zeb French suggested.

"Not a bit," said Will cheerfully, turning to Lane. "We'll start a little after sunset, when it's cooler. I'll be able to show you around a bit. Ain't much to Sunrise, but what there *is* of it is hot stuff."

"Sounds promising," was Lane's comment. For some inexplicable reason which he did not try to fathom, Lane felt a vague suspicion of this pair. With the announcement of his calling, his status in the household had automatically changed. He thought swiftly. While the oasis which constituted the rancho was large, it was hardly large enough for cattle raising, and the desert surrounding it offered no range. To assume that French was farming was preposterous. Yet the very room in which Lane sat was richly furnished, and there were actual indications of wealth on every hand. This was no ordinary *hacienda.* Could it be, then, that the French boys also were gamesters? On the face of it, it looked that way. And the old man's suggestion that Will French take him in to Sunrise—it amounted to nothing more than that—and Will's ready and cheerful acquiescence—did they propose to fleece him in Sunrise? This did not appear plausible in view of the fact that they had taken good care of his money—not a small amount, by any means. All this passed through Lane's mind in the space of split seconds. He gave it up. But he could not shake off the feeling that some scheme was afoot.

"All right," said Will French, "that's settled." He rose. "An', by the way, Lane, we'll meet up with my kid brother in town. His name is Frank. Treat him easy; he's just feeling his oats."

Lane rose, as it was plain the interview was ended. He followed Will out through the dining room and kitchen to the patio. No sign of the girl. Yet he could actually *feel* her presence! In all his thirty years or so, Lane could not remember when he had toiled with so many conflicting emotions. But one conviction was uppermost in his mind. Adventure—perhaps *dangerous* adventure—strode beside him.

The boiling heat of the desert was now pouring down upon them. He yawned as they entered the patio. He wanted a chance to think; he wanted to be alone.

"You know." he said to Will French, "I think, after the time I've spent in the North country, this heat has got me. I feel sleepy."

Will French laughed. "Take an early siesta," he advised. "Sleep won't hurt you none. An' I can tell you without giving away any secret that you may not get so much in Sunrise—so much sleep, I mean."

They paused before the door of Lane's room and Will French faced him. "You know, Lane, I like you," said Will impulsively. "We're about

the same age an' build; an' we've got a lot of ideas, I take it, that hook up. I reckon we'll get on. Take your snooze. I'm going over to look at the horses an' then I'm goin' to do the same thing. So long."

"So long," said Lane. He entered his room more puzzled than ever. "Going to get on," he muttered to himself. Now just what did Will French mean by that?

He lay down on the bed. He had not been joking when he told Will that the heat was affecting him. He fell asleep almost immediately.

The sun was slanting in the west when he was awakened by a commotion in the direction of the barn. There were shouts, and the heavy pound of hoofs.

"It's Nero!" he heard Will French cry. "I knew he wouldn't stay down there! Let him in the barn, Pedro!"

Lane leaped from the bed and hurried across the patio and through the doorway. There he stopped suddenly as a great iron-gray stallion dashed past. Lane went cold, then hot—and then he found his senses and darted back to his room, where he lay upon the bed, his heart throbbing. What did it mean? What *could* it mean? What—how—but one thing was certain.

The great stallion was the same magnificent animal he had seen with the gun girl—the girl who had played the violin, and who faced him masked!

CHAPTER IV.

"WE HAVE MET BEFORE!"

IT still was insufferably hot. It would undoubtedly be some time after the sun went down before he and Will French would start for town. In the meantime, Lane wanted above all other things an opportunity to speak to the girl he had met accidentally that morning. The sight of the iron-gray stallion had given rise to a startling surmise. Could it be that the girl of the rancho was his gun girl—the girl of the mask?

It seemed absurd, preposterous, actually ridiculous; but there could be but one such stallion in that country. He could not possibly mistake it. So—here was the stallion, and here was a girl. He could not help but link the two. Still, there might be another girl at the rancho whom he had not seen. He gave it up, but he was resolved to see the girl again before he left.

As he was at the lower end of the patio, it stood to reason that the girl, since she apparently did not wish to see him, was keeping to the front of the house. Therefore, that was the place to find her. Lane decided to get up there *some* way. He looked out his door and made sure no one was in sight. Will French was at the barn helping take care of the stallion; he would probably be there some time. The old man possibly had not finished his siesta; old men of the desert like to sleep during the heat of the day.

Lane walked around to the rear of the house. No one was about; there were no sounds. He slipped along the side of the house. On either side of the house was a narrow passage between walls, for the place was so constructed that there were really two patios, one in front and one in the rear, with the house proper as a separate unit. As Lane reached the front of the house he slipped behind a hedge which partially hid the wall and made his way to a point where he had an excellent view of the front of the house and the front patio.

The patio was larger than the one in the rear. It also had a fountain and there were many flowers, showing plainly that this was the favorite playground of the mistress of the rancho. Now, could a girl so inclined to be one to go to a mountain top, face a man masked, draw a gun, and talk as the

girl whom Lane had met? He shook his head. It just was not in the picture; but he wanted to meet her again just the same.

Lane was musing on this when the girl suddenly appeared, coming from the house. She was dressed in white, and he marveled at her beauty. She was a veritable desert flower; a delicate, beautiful flower, such as springs up on the floor of the desert during the rains, and vanish when the hot sun comes to rule again.

She walked up to the patio and was lost among the shrubs beyond the fountain. Lane waited a short space and then boldly followed. He found her among the flowers at the upper end. She did not appear startled, but looked at him gravely out of large, questioning eyes. He removed his hat and gallantly bowed.

"Señorita," he said soberly, "I could not leave without seeing you again."

"Why should you wish to see me?" she asked. Her voice was low and sweetly questioning. It was not anything like the voice of the girl of the mask. But he had made his resolution and he would live up to it.

"Because I believe we have met before," he replied, smiling.

"Yes?" Her brows lifted slightly in surprise. "But you are mistaken, of course."

"I don't think so," said Lane, shaking his head slowly. "Of course I did not see all of your face, señorita, but there are other reasons why I am sure. I saw the big stallion this afternoon. There can be no other horse like that hereabouts, nor anywhere else. I know horses, señorita, and I remember the markings. And there is the shoulder brand, too." He smiled pleasantly.

A dark light glowed in her eyes. "But what has a stallion, or any horse except my own saddle animal, to do with me?" she said in the same low voice.

"Do you not play the violin?" he asked boldly.

She looked him steadily in the eye. "My father and brother have been hospitable to you," she said coldly. "You repay them, then, by attempting to flirt with me? I do not talk with strange men who might come from anywhere or be anything. Please go."

Lane was thrilled. In this speech there was more than a hint of that voice which he had heard high up on the shoulder of Smoky Butte. He was convinced.

"But I am *not* mistaken," he said in a sterner voice. "I can understand your motive in donning the mask. Beauty such as yours should be concealed in wild country before a stranger. But, señorita, I have not forgotten the gun!"

Her eyes flashed. "I half believe you're crazy," she said angrily, with a harsher note in her voice. "If you do not go, I shall call my brother. It would not be well for him to find you here. Are you going?"

"Of course," Lane answered, bowing. "Now that I have learned that which I wished to know, I am going. But we'll meet again, my gun girl. I won't mention this coincidence to any one. Adios!"

With that he slipped off and made his way hurriedly back to his own room.

Joan stood for some time, her hands clenched, fire in her eyes. The fool! But he could not know his danger. The fire died away. This was no ordinary long rider, no tinhorn gambler. He was different from the young men who came to the rancho and whom she scorned. She could not scorn this man. He was far too clever. She knew in her heart that he was convinced of her identity. What of it? Wasn't he riding to Sunrise with Will that night? She would never see him again. A word to Will and she would be *sure* of

not seeing him again. Yes, that was the best way. A word in Will's ear——

She started at a swift pace for the house, her pretty lips pressed tightly in the heat of her resolve. But as she neared the house her pace slackened; she walked more and more slowly, biting her lip. Finally, she stopped and idly plucked a flower. A word to Will——

But she knew in her heart that the word never would be spoken. It irritated and puzzled her. This man was to be invited into the house for supper. She would not eat with them, of course. But she would watch him covertly, study him, and listen to what he said. Yes, that would be best—and there would be no word to Will!

Lane's thoughts were crowding each other as he entered his room. The interior was in shadow because of the heavy foliage which darkened the window, and he started with surprise, his hand automatically whipping to his gun, as he perceived a man sitting by the table. He recognized Will French, and laughed.

But French did not laugh. He looked at Lane coolly as the latter sat down on the edge of the bed. "Where have you been?" he asked slowly.

"Oh, looking aroun'," Lane replied casually. "Don't know as I ever saw such a snug layout in the desert. You've sure got water enough. Where does it all come from?"

French ignored the question. "You've been up there trying to talk with my sister," he said. "Lots of 'em have tried that an' learned better. Can't say as I blame you, exactly, but it don't go, Lane. Understand? *It don't go!*" His eyes burned into Lane's.

"I found that out from *her*," said Lane, shrugging, and taking out tobacco and papers. "You can't blame a man for wanting to talk to such a girl as your sister. You know I met her out there this morning——"

"Don't try to see her again!"

Will French's tone was more than convincing; it was a threat which could not be misunderstood. His eyes had narrowed and the look he gave Lane backed up his words. And Lane felt that this attitude on the part of Will supported his conviction that the man's sister was the gun girl. It was palpable that her family did not want any one to know of her ramblings in the lava hills and of her proficiency with her weapon. But why? There was nothing wrong in these things.

"Don't worry," was all he said.

Will French's mood changed instantly. "We'll be taking on some supper shortly and at sundown we'll start," he said in an ordinary tone. Evidently, the incident was closed. "How'd you like a good stiff game of cards, Lane?"

Lane looked at him sharply. So *that* was the play. Will French was scheming to get him into a game for big stakes with some other sharpers—no doubt Will was one himself—and clean him of his stake. He smiled wryly and looked at French with a new light in his eyes.

But French read his thoughts and laughed with genuine delight. "I've got you pegged," he said merrily. "I know just what you're thinking about. You're thinking that I'm scheming to get you into a crooked game and fleece you." He chuckled gleefully. "Why, I reckon you could take care of yourself. Anyway, that ain't the play, Lane"—his voice became serious—"an' I was inviting you into a select game. There are a few of us, who can afford it, who play pretty high. We play square an' we watch each other like hawks. I merely suggested it as a favor since you said——"

"Oh, I'll come in," Lane interrupted, convinced the thing was on the square although he, too, would watch the others like a hawk. "The point is, when do we eat?"

"Come on," said Will, rising.

He led Lane to the house, where supper was ready. There were only the three of them—old Zeb French, Will, and Lane. The girl did not appear and Lane had not expected to see her. He suspected that she was watching and listening, and in this he was correct. His every remark was guarded.

It was a strange meal, with the old man doing most of the talking. His conversation dealt mostly with the old days, and Will French winked at Lane several times when his father started off to tell something, remembered there was a stranger present, and ceased abruptly.

After the meal they went into the big living room for a smoke. Still no sign of the girl. But Lane sensed the invisible eyes and ears of his gun girl of the mask.

Above the lava hills in the west burned the sunset fires. Gradually the crimson changed to gold—to purple—to blue, and the twilight fell swiftly. They went out to the barn for their horses, and when they rode out of the oasis it was dark.

Through the soft desert night, with the star clusters dancing above them, with the shadows lying in grotesque patterns across the desolate land, with the giant cacti standing like sentinels to mark their path, they sped in silence toward town.

CHAPTER V.

THE TEST.

A FAINT glow among the pepper trees ahead betrayed the location of Sunrise. They seemed to come upon it suddenly—a dark shadow on the desert which swept toward them, becoming larger and larger as they neared the water wells which gave reason for the town's situation. "That's her," Will French called. Lane nodded. He was glad to be near a town again.

Sunrise was a collection of adobe houses, a few stores and cafés, several resorts; all with narrow doorways, with signs painted in black on their front walls. The one street was a lane of dust, lined with hitching rails. At this hour of midnight, the lights shone only from the narrow windows of resorts and cafés, and the one hotel.

They proceeded to the hotel and put up their horses in the livery behind it. Then Will French led the way up the dusty street to a resort labeled "El Cantina." It was a low building, dull and drab on the exterior, but its outward appearance belied the nature of the numerous activities within.

A long room, with a dirt floor and a low ceiling; a short bar; numerous gaming tables; benches along one wall; hanging lamps. The crowd was a motley one, with Mexicans in the majority. But there were no Mexicans at the front bar. And then Lane noticed another bar in the rear, which evidently was reserved for those from below the border. There was a door back there, too, which Lane surmised led to private rooms; rooms, for instance, where the big games were played. They went to the bar for a drink, and Will motioned to a dark youth who was playing poker at a near-by table. The youth played out his hand, rose, tipped his chair against the table where his chips were stacked, and sauntered to a place beside them. Lane caught the resemblance at once.

"This is my brother Frank, Lane," said Will casually.

"Hullo, Lane," said the young fellow, holding out a hand. "New in town?"

"Haven't been branded yet," smiled Lane in reply.

Both brothers gave him a queer look. It was a peculiar statement, they thought. "Oh, you'll get branded soon enough—if you're the right sort," drawled Frank.

"Lane's from the North," Will explained. "Found him all in on the desert near home yesterday an' took him in. We rode in to see if there's anything doing."

"Plenty doin' for you, I take it," said Frank with a trace of bitterness in his words. "You've got the cluckers to play the big stuff. I have to stick to piker games. But I'm a decent winner to-night at that."

Lane surmised that the feeling between the brothers was not of the best. The younger was very jealous of the elder.

"When you've won your spurs you'll be with the big ones, Frank," Will remarked dryly. "Who's on deck?"

"Most of the gang," was the reply; "'Mesquite Sam' is back there." He jerked a thumb toward the door in the rear. "If there ain't anything more, I'll settle into my game again. I hope this break don't change my luck. So long." He flashed a look at Lane and turned back to his table.

Will French's eyes were sparkling as he looked at Lane. "You don't mind meeting a hard character, do you?" he asked with a grin.

"Been meeting 'em all my life," Lane replied cheerfully. "Oh, I'll take one, maybe two, but that's the limit." This last as Will motioned to the bartender. "I'm not a drinking man," he added.

Will French nodded in approval. "I think you're a smooth article," he said, raising his glass. "Anyway, you don't punch cows for a living, an' none of the rest of us does." He looked at Lane meaningly and again Lane sensed the premonition that Will had some kind of a scheme afoot.

"Who's this hard character you mentioned?" he asked.

"Oh, Mesquite Sam?" Will shrugged. "He isn't so terrible hard, at that; but he's bad. Fast with his gun an' a killer. He's playing in the back, according to the kid. You'll meet him. Watch him, for he's mean. But there's worse than he is aroun' here."

"I'd admire to have a look at him," was Lane's comment. "Bad folks interest me. Have the next one on me and I'm through with *this* department."

They drank again, and if Will French noted that Lane merely took a sip of the vile, white liquor, he said nothing. He failed to drain his own glass. He turned to Lane.

"I'll go in an' take a look aroun', an' then I'll come back an' tell you the lay," he said, dropping into the easy vernacular of open country and open towns. "Look on at one of the games for a minute." He strode toward the rear door.

Lane sauntered over to Frank French's table. To all appearances he was merely a casual spectator without a care on his mind. But he was thinking deeply. This preliminary investigation of the rear room provided more thought material. He fully believed what Will had said to the effect that no frame-up in the way of a card game was contemplated. But, nevertheless, his native intuition—a sixth sense which is possessed by men who live by their wits or follow the long, long trails—told him that Will had something in mind. And Lane's thoughts continually reverted to the girl at the French rancho—his gun girl of the violin. He could not deliberately go back there without some reasonable excuse. And he wanted to see her again. He decided that the logical way to accomplish this would be through a member of the family—through Will French, for instance. With this realization, he made up his mind. He would fall in with whatever scheme or frolic Will French had in mind in the hope that through him he would be able to meet the girl again. He had hardly made this resolve when Will returned.

"They're having a quiet little game in there for easy stakes," he told Lane.

"More amusement than anything else. Want to take a hand? Sam's the little fellow in the beaded sombrero; we never give introductions aroun' here." He winked.

"Always ready for entertainment," said Lane.

He followed Will through the rear door and found himself in a short passageway with a door at the rear and one on either side. Will opened the door on the left and they entered a small room. It contained nothing except a card table in the center over which was a hanging lamp with a reflector arranged to throw the light downward. About the table were five men, absorbed in the game of stud poker. None looked up at their entry save one, a wizen-faced man, slight, who wore a beaded sombrero. This, as Lane knew, was Mesquite Sam. He met the small man's flashing look with a curious glance. Will had pulled out two chairs and Lane sat down beside him with a casual inspection of the others in the game. Four were typical men of the desert or the hills, the fifth, a pasty-faced individual with a pair of black sleevelets and a green eyeshade, was without the slightest doubt the house man.

The play was desultory, the stakes low, and there were few hotly contested pots. Mesquite Sam grumbled and growled continually and tried to force the play, which resulted in frequent losses when he permitted his irritation to get the better of his judgment. At such times he indulged in a stream of profanity. His attitude in time affected Lane, who was more or less disgusted. He availed himself of every opportunity to play Sam to the limit and frequently won. This did not improve the latter's humor. Finally, when Lane raked in a particularly sweet pot Sam looked up angrily.

"So I suppose you think you're a slicker," he sneered.

"I've never thought of myself in that way," said Lane calmly.

The man who was shuffling the cards ceased his labor.

Lane's cool reply seemed to enrage the man across the table who wore the big sombrero. "You seem to know how to rake in the pots," he said in a mean voice. "I ain't been watchin' none too close."

"What I've won is all stacked up here in front of me in case you haven't seen it before," drawled Lane.

"I don't mean that," said the other harshly; "I mean I ain't been watchin' your play."

"All my cards, save one, have been exposed right along," was Lane's rejoinder. "Maybe you need glasses."

Mesquite Sam half rose. "Why, you dirty——"

"I wouldn't get *too* personal!" Lane broke in sharply.

The other sat down and leaned on his elbows on the table, his dark eyes glittering with malice. "Did you sit in this game intending to ride *me?*" he asked in a low voice that was almost a whisper.

Lane leaned on the table in a similar attitude. "No," he said, in the same tone that had been used by the other. "But it begins to look to me as if *you* have started something *I* will have to finish!"

"Then I'll give you a chance to finish it!" roared the other, leaping to his feet and kicking back his chair even as Lane leaned back in his.

Will French struck at Lane's right arm, but too late. Lane's hand came up like a flash of light and the room rocked to the roar of his gun. A howl of astonishment and pain came from Mesquite Sam's lips as his weapon crashed to the floor, and he grasped his right arm with his left hand.

Lane rose, sheathing his gun. Then Mesquite Sam dropped suddenly down behind the table. Lane was over the

top of it in a single leap and the table toppled over on the man on the floor, who had secured his gun with his left hand. Lane grasped the wrist and flung it upward just as the weapon spit its message of flame and lead. Six times Mesquite Sam in his rage pulled the trigger uselesly, and the bullets thudded into the roof, bringing down a rain of dry adobe.

Lane picked Sam up and flung him against the wall as Will French and the others caught him and held him.

"Take that fool home!" French shouted, pointing to the wounded man. "An' get out of here, *all* of you!"

He loosed his hold on Lane as the men left. He was frowning heavily. "There wasn't supposed to be any shooting," he grumbled.

"No?" drawled Lane, lifting his brows. "I suppose it was to be a bit of play acting."

"I was tryin' you out," said Will sharply, "an' that simple ass lost his head. Well, I guess you'll do."

"In that case, perhaps you'll tell me what it's all about," said Lane.

"When the time comes," Will French retorted. "Come along."

He led the way out of the room and out the rear door into the cool, starlit, desert night. Had he looked at Lane closely, he would have been puzzled by the quality of the latter's smile. But he did not look, and they made their way toward the hotel.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GAME.

LANE and Will French were given rooms at the rear of the hotel, a long, one-story, adobe building. They had to pound hard upon the door to gain admittance and were shown to their quarters by an old Mexican who carried a smoking lamp at a perilous angle. He accepted Will at once, but peered long and suspiciously at Lane.

Lane did not undress. He put out the light and sat by the window, looking through a gap in the line of pepper trees to the vast, unending expanse of desert, coldly white in the moonlight. So Will had planned to test him and had said he would do! This meant that whatever was afoot did not merely concern cards. Had the test been meant to try his mettle, or ascertain the speed of his draw? He shrugged. He had demonstrated both.

It was considerably after midnight, but Lane was not sleepy. He had slept long the night before and the afternoon of yesterday. It was hot and stuffy in the little room, which lacked ventilation. He decided to go out. He had noticed a rear door when he was shown to his room and now he slipped stealthily into the narrow hallway, drew back the bolt of the outside door, and stepped out into the cooler air. He closed the door noiselessly, intending to return before daylight. He knew of no reason why Will French should know of this little nocturnal excursion. He did not know that before he returned he would be bound as if with chains to Will French; a ready volunteer for any scheme French and those with him might have in mind; a willing prospect to take part in any enterprise, regardless of its nature.

The Cantina, with its numerous games, was an irresistible lure for Lane. He had spoken the truth when he had told old Zeb French and Will that his business was gambling. He had been forced into it by a series of unfortunate circumstances, and he had followed the green tables for a little less than three years. But, as he turned up the street, he realized that the shots in that rear room must have been heard, must have raised some kind of a turmoil, and must have led to an investigation, even though all had left immediately after the affair. Mesquite Sam might have friends ready to take up his cudgels, if

they knew. Pshaw! The affair had been framed. He had nothing to fear on that score. But Frank French was in there——

He stood at the corner of the gambling place in indecision. From up the street came the soft tattoo of a horse's hoofs in the dust. The rider was coming in from the desert; coming in from the same direction he and Will French had come from that same night. Lane drew back into the shadow of some trees near the rear of the Cantina, expecting to obtain a glimpse of the rider as he passed on the way to the livery, if that was his destination.

But the rider, instead of proceeding down the street, turned in and rode to the rear of the Cantina, passing within a few feet of Lane. In the shadows, Lane stood struck motionless and dumb. For under the big hat was the fair face of Will French's sister—he did not know her name was Joan—and she was dressed in the same worn riding togs in which he had seen her high on Smoky Butte!

He brought himself to with a jerk and stole through the shadows to where he could see the rear door. The girl dismounted and went inside. Evidently she gave some one a message, for she returned almost immediately and waited by the door. The moonlight shone full upon her face and the thrills raced up and down Lane's spine as he saw that she wore her mask. This was doubtless a protection against recognition by the man to whom she had given her message. For a wild moment Lane felt an impulse to rush out and confront her, but he swiftly realized it would be folly. Then Frank French came out the door.

"Joan!"

It was thus that Lane learned her name. Pretty name, he thought to himself, and strained his ears in a futile effort to hear what they were saying. But they talked in an undertone. He caught only a few of Frank's words when the youth raised his voice: "Foolishness—can't be done—has to end some time—no!" Then Joan became angry and impatient. She stamped her foot and started for her horse. But she turned and, raising her voice, spoke so that Lane could hear.

"I tell you I'm going along! It may *be* the last time, but I'm going. You come for me, Frank, or send word, or I'll follow an' maybe turn up at the wrong time—if you want *that*. I heard Will an' dad talkin' an' you can't fool me. Tell Will I said so." She swung into the saddle. "An' tell him I didn't ride over here just to get the night air!"

With that Joan French was on her way, beating around the corner of the building, tearing off her mask as she rode. She left two people in an excited state of mind. Frank French was swearing as he turned back into the gambling place; Louis Lane was experiencing a series of thrills of greater intensity that he had ever known before.

What luck! That was what it was —pure luck! He had no business there, had had no business to leave his room; but the Goddess of Luck had taken him firmly by the hand and led him forth to give him some priceless information. An expedition of some kind was contemplated and Joan French insisted on going along! And, from the events of that night, as Lane saw it, he was to be asked in on the enterprise.

He stole back to the hotel and let himself in silently. He threw himself on the bed to wait for morning.

That night he met Brule.

Not once during the day was he out of the company of either Will or Frank French. For some reason best known to himself, and to which Lane offered no objection, Will did not want him circulating about town alone. He experi-

enced the queer feeling of being watched, but he did not know why. He noticed, however, that while he was subjected to many keen glances of inspection, men mostly looked at him respectfully.

Will was with him during the morning and until after lunch. They took a siesta, and by that time Frank was up. He played cards most of the afternoon at a table with the younger brother. He had taken a liking to the dark-faced youth at once. Anyway, he did what he thought Will French wanted him to do, because of all things he wanted to win his friendship and confidence after what he had heard and seen during the early morning hours.

At sundown Will came into the place and took him out of the game, a moderate winner. They took a look at their horses and had supper. They sat on a bench in front of the livery in the cool in the twilight, smoking. Lane asked about Mesquite Sam.

Will French grunted. "He'll be all right," he said. "Your lead didn't hit the bone. If you'd shot him in the head the bullet would have glanced off." Which showed that Will did not have any too good an opinion of the man! Lane let it go at that and asked no more questions. They smoked in silence, as Will evidently was deep in thought. Lane could not shake off the premonition that he was to learn things this night.

After some three or four cigarettes, when the night was an hour gone, Will French rose suddenly. "Come on, Lane, let's go up to the joint," he said cheerfully.

When they entered the place, Will led the way straight to a man who was lounging against the bar. "Brule, meet a friend of mine," Will said in introduction. "Name's Lane." He turned about. "Lane, this is Brule. We'll have a drink, an' then, if it's jake with you, we'll sit in for a little session."

Lane found himself looking into a pair of cold, gray eyes—eyes that seemed to look through him and read his very thoughts. They were cruel eyes, too. Without noticing anything else about the man, Lane realized that whatever the nature of the enterprise in which Will and his associates might be engaged, here was the leader. Brule's face was brutal; swarthy, thick-lipped, with a flat, pudgy nose, a square chin that was blue-gray after a recent shave. He was as tall as Lane and of heavy build. The black sateen shirt he wore was open at the throat, showing a large, short neck. Everything about the man suggested tremendous strength. But after his quick appraisal, Lane's gaze came back to those cold, cruel eyes with a glint in their depths that would have caused most men to shiver. Here was a killer, thought Lane, if he ever had seen one.

Brule held out a hand and his grip was far from gentle. "Howdy," he said. "Stranger in this end of nowhere, I take it."

"Not so long as my friend here is around," said Lane, indicating Will French. "I get acquainted fast—with *some* people."

Brule laughed; but the laugh jarred on Lane's sensibilities. In it there was no suggestion of mirth. It had a metallic ring like the clashing of steel drills.

They drank and sauntered into a rear room, with the eyes of most of the men in the place following them. As Brule passed the Mexican bar at the rear of the room, Lane noted that the Mexicans nearest the door crowded back against the others. He did not miss the looks directed at the big man's back. For some reason—and probably a good one—the Mexicans feared and hated this man.

Four men were playing when they entered the room. It was palpable to Lane that this game had been arranged, since there were three empty chairs

about the table. Brule bought in for a thousand, and both Lane and Will followed his example.

"These are just markers," said Brule in his coarse, throaty voice. "Any player can overbid what he has on the table and dig into his kick afterward. Ain't that so, Will?"

"That's the way we play," said Will.

"Suits me," said Lane, "so long as you gents have money in your kicks." Brule's quick look gave him a thrill of satisfaction.

The game did not prove spectacular, although the bets were high. In time, Lane came to believe that the game they were playing was not being played with cards. The session had been arranged to give Brule an opportunity to study him.

Lane held his own, won a little. For three hours they played without a sensational pot. Then, with Brule shuffling, Lane saw what he half expected was coming. Brule's manipulation of the cards was perfect. Only the most experienced of gamblers could have caught the swift movements, which probably escaped the notice of the others at the table. Lane received a king in the hole. He knew Brule had dealt himself an ace. Then Lane got another king, which made kings back to back. Brule dealt himself a seven. The betting was moderate, however. When four cards were out, Lane had two kings in sight and one in the hole. Brule had an ace in sight and Lane was certain he had another in the hole. On the next turn, Brule would deal himself another ace, making three, and beat Lane out for the pot.

Lane bet a hundred dollars.

Brule studied his hand. "Oh, I'll step in here," he said easily. "I'll raise you a thousand."

Lane yawned. "Gentlemen, I'm not making any donations," he drawled, turning over his third king and bunching his cards. "That's good."

Brule tossed the pack into the center of the table, raking in the checks. Out of the corner of his eye, Lane saw him nod slightly to Will French. Then he spoke to the house man.

"Count these up an' put a checker in the drawer," he said. "I'm quitting for the present."

He left the room and at Will's suggestion he and Lane cashed in and went out in front. Brule had left the place. They took a drink at the bar.

"I'm ridin' out to the ranch," said Will in a casual tone. "Want to come along?"

"Nothing else to do," said Lane indifferently.

Inwardly he was jubilant. Whatever the game was to be, he had been accepted. Brule's nod had done the business.

CHAPTER VII.

A PROPOSITION.

A WAVE of exhilaration swept over Lane as they raced their horses over the hard, even floor of the desert in the hour before dawn. There was just a suggestion of a breeze from the Wizard Mountains far to southward; mountains that towered eight thousand feet, with long, velvety slopes of pine, cold streams, and fragrant meadows. There were mines there, as Lane knew. And this faint breeze brought a cool breath to the desert which stimulated man and beast alike.

Will French was in an excellent mood. He whistled and sang snatches of range songs. At times he looked at Lane and chuckled.

"Why all the hilarity?" asked Lane when they finally slowed their pace.

"I'm thinking of the way you pegged Brule," Will replied. "It tickled him, too. But I don't mind telling you that if you hadn't been wise, he'd have kept that thousand. He would have *had* to. Brule isn't such a bad sort, as long as he isn't crossed. You have to watch

him. His gun hand an' his temper are both greased lightning."

"Worse than that Mesquite chap, I figure," Lane observed.

Will French laughed. "An' *then* some," he avowed. "You'll get better acquainted with him if you come along with us, an' we can use a man like you —if you've got the nerve." The last was uttered in a matter-of-fact voice, but Lane knew it was the first step toward a disclosure of Will's plans.

"I've been known to have it," Lane said, laconically.

"Well, if you hook up with us, you'll sure need it," said Will, favoring Lane with a keen glance.

The moon was dipping in the west and the stars were dimming, but the desert was a cold gray and practically shadowless. They could see each other plainly. Will had checked their pace to an easy walk, although the horses wanted to run. By this sign he showed Lane he was inclined to talk.

"Where y'all planning on going?" Lane asked, striving not to appear too eager.

"Well, that's goin' ahead pretty fast," Will replied, leaning on the horn of his saddle and eying Lane. "I take it you haven't gone in for anything stronger than gambling; am I right?"

"That's been strong enough at times," Lane evaded, frowning.

"Well, you didn't edge down this way lookin' for a job as cowhand, or mine mucker, or store clerk, did you?" Will asked sharply.

"Not so as you could notice it," Lane answered. "I came first because I had to slope up North, an' second because I wanted excitement. Excitement an' I have been pals ever since I can remember. What you got on your mind, French?"

"Dangerous business," came the quick reply, as Will French's eyes narrowed. "Business that takes a rider like yourself, a brain—which you seem to have —an' a gun hand like you've exhibited. It won't be no pink-tea party. I suppose you know there isn't any money in the cattle game around *here*."

"I'd figured as much," said Lane, "although *you've* got a pretty nice place."

"Not big enough," said Will, shaking his head. "Never was. I don't mind tellin' you the gang was looking you over in town."

"I thought as much," said Lane. "I'm not dead in the head an' I'm not blind. What was the verdict?"

"We're willing to take a chance. You can't double-cross us an' get out of it with a whole skin, anyway. We don't ask *every*body in on our game, but you've got the goods, an' if you're not afraid of hot lead an' posses an' twelve or fifteen-hour shifts in the saddle you could trail along with us to the big money."

Will French was deadly serious, and Lane hesitated. He knew the men he had met and played with in town were outlaws, and so were the French boys, and the old man, too, probably. To join up with them would be automatically to put himself in the same category. Then he thought of Joan French and of what she had told Frank about going along. His mind fairly leaped to a decision.

He looked steadily at Will French. "I'm not afraid of the little things you mention," he said soberly. "I'm ready to join up an' go through with whatever you've got on, an' you're not taking a chance. Is that good enough?"

"That's good enough—*if you mean it!*"

"It looks to me," drawled Lane, "as if you'd have to take my word for it."

Will French held out his hand and Lane grasped it. Then Will smiled. "You've hooked up with the toughest outfit between the Gila and the border!" he said cheerfully. "Brule usually does the leading. All the men

you played with in town are with us. Frank trails along, but we have to keep an eye on him, for he's wild. You'll stand high because of your gun work. We'll start for the Wizards to-night. But just now we're goin' to the ranch. Come on."

They spurred their horses and sped westward, with the rosy dawn at their backs. In an hour they were riding in among the pepper trees of the oasis. They turned their horses over to Pedro at the barn and repaired immediately to the house, where the Mexican housekeeper already was up and preparing for breakfast. Lane's hopes of seeing Joan were high, since she could not know of their coming or arrival.

"We'll eat right here in the kitchen an' then get some sleep," said Will French. "Better hug our bunks all day for it may be some time before we get another chance."

Lane's hopes crashed as they washed and sat down to breakfast. No one appeared during the meal and afterward Will took Lane to the room he had occupied before and announced that he would bunk next door. As Lane had no sleep during the night, and very little the night before, he dropped off into a deep slumber as soon as he was in bed.

He awoke when the sun was dying in the west. A look into the next room showed that Will French already was up. He crossed the patio and went out to the mineral bath, where he spent half an hour. As he returned to the patio he stopped suddenly and listened with an appreciative grin on his face. From the front of the house came the strains of a violin. Joan was playing—which signified that she was not aware of his presence. He might see her yet!

In the doorway of his room he sat down to roll a cigarette and pondered this matter of his interest in Joan French. He was not a woman's man; he had never really had a girl—a sweetheart—in his life. Then why was he so worked up over Joan? "She's different from the others," he told himself, and smoked contentedly as he listened to the music.

Will French came striding from the rear of the house. "Get inside out of sight an' *stay* there," he said as he passed Lane. And, as Lane obeyed, he heard the soft hoofbeats of a horse under the trees. Then came Will French's voice:

"Hello, sheriff! Pretty hot riding, isn't it, in daytime? Thought you knew better."

"'Lo, Will," answered a drawling voice. "I just crossed from Smoky Ridge. Wasn't so bad. I'll put up my hoss an' stay to supper, if you're agreeable."

"You're always welcome here, sheriff," said Will heartily. "You ought to know that. Ride right across to the barn. I think supper's brewin' in the kitchen."

Lane risked a stealthy look as the pair started for the barn and saw a tall, spare man, with sandy mustaches and a thin, narrow face, riding a chestnut gelding. A sheriff!

"'Always welcome' is right," the official was saying. "I'm wondering if the time'll come when I won't be so welcome. Been doin' much ridin', Will?"

"In an' out of town quite regular," replied Will French easily. "Nothing much else to do till you chase out those gamblers down there, sheriff."

"No long trips, Will?"

Lane caught the last question, but as the two men left the patio he could not hear Will French's answer. Still, what he had heard started him thinking. The sheriff evidently was aware of the operations of the French boys, or at least had definite suspicions; but it was plain he had no proof, and, as things stood, was a friend of the family. Will had been wise to warn him—Lane—for, so far as he knew, no sheriff in this district knew him by sight.

In a short time Will French and the sheriff came from the barn and proceeded to the house. Lane sat down on the bed and rolled a cigarette. He became aware that the music had stopped. Well, there would be no seeing Joan unless she should happen to come out into the patio. It was certain he would not get into the house for supper while the sheriff was there. Lane swore softly. But soon afterward the Mexican woman came to his room, bringing a bounteous supper with a pot of strong coffee. It was after sunset and he ate in the fast-gathering twilight, fearing to light the lamp.

As night fell, Will French came out of the house with the sheriff. The old man called good-by from the rear porch. The two walked rapidly toward the passage to the barn.

"So you're not figurin' on any long trips, Will?" Lane heard the sheriff ask.

Will French's laugh rang cheerfully in the patio. "If I *was,* sheriff, you'd be the last man I'd tell," he said, chuckling.

"It's bad business, Will," said the sheriff in a tone which was almost mournful.

With that they passed out of hearing. It was not long, however, before they reappeared. The sheriff was riding his chestnut. They passed along the road that ran through the lower end of the patio.

"So long, Will." With that the sheriff was off like a shot, making a getaway that astonished Lane in view of the fact that the official had appeared to be such a mild-mannered man.

"That was Sheriff McClure from the county seat," Will explained, as Lane came out of his room to meet him. "Been over west somewheres, an' now he's on his way to Sunrise. He won't get up to bother us where we're goin', until it's too late."

"An' we're going——"

"Into the Wizards," said Will gruffly. "Go see the horses are ready. I'll get our grub pack. We're starting pronto."

Lane saw to the horses and Will came with two packs to be wrapped in their slickers and tied on the rear of their saddles. Old Zeb French came out and peered closely at Lane in the yellow rays of the lantern. He said nothing, but Lane sensed that he knew everything. As they rode out of the oasis and turned southeast toward the distant Wizard Mountains, Frank French came racing in from town. He waved to them, and that was all. Lane wondered if he had come for Joan.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

THEY started out at an easy trot as Will had explained that they had an all-night ride, most of which would be over a treacherous mountain trail. Will's spirits seemed to soar as they sped over the hard floor of the desert, cold white under the moon and stars. He called to Lane frequently.

"His nibs, the sheriff, won't see any of *our* crowd in Sunrise," he said jubilantly. "Brule an' the others started out, one at a time, long ago."

"Sounded to me, the way he talked, that he's sort of suspicious," Lane vouchsafed.

Will laughed and shook out his reins. "Sure he is, old-timer. That's part of his job—to be suspicious. But what he doesn't know would fill a lot of books. I thought it was just as well he didn't see you, for he's a sticker for asking questions in that mouse voice of his. McClure isn't any fool, though."

This ended the comment on the sheriff, for Will French dismissed him and his activities with a wave of the hand. They pushed on at an easy lope, a pace both horses could maintain for hours if need be, and the great, shadowy bulks

of the Wizards marched toward them, beckoning with their cool slopes of pine, and, after a time, sending a light breeze, harbinger of comforting relief day and night from the searing heat of the inferno.

As yet, Lane had no inkling of the enterprise upon which he was engaged, or their actual destination. Under ordinary circumstances, even if he had consented to engage in an act of outlawry, he would have demanded full details well in advance. But in this case he was "going blind" because of his interest in Joan French. And now that he was actually on the way to take part in whatever the band proposed to do, he had his first misgivings. Why should he outlaw himself merely because he had taken a fancy to Joan? It was very doubtful that she had any interest in *him;* at least, she had shown none. So Lane began to look upon himself as a fool. It angered him, and gave rise to a feeling of animosity toward Will French, although he liked him. But it was too late to back out; he had to go through with it. There was just one thing, he told himself: Brule would have to watch his step so far as he, Lane, was concerned.

They now were climbing the first long slope toward the foothills of the Wizards. This slope was a great "forest" of giant cactus, with smaller varieties scattered about. Far off to eastward, Lane thought he could catch the faint glow of the lights in Sunrise. It lacked an hour of midnight.

The cacti gradually gave way to juniper. The slope became steeper and they started zigzagging. Then Lane realized they were on a trail. Will French went on ahead. Soon they were on a ridge and the first pines appeared. In an hour they were winding about ridges, crossing them, passing through ravines, splashing in small streams, and then they entered a forest. The trail was hard, with gentle grades in the main, but they were climbing continuously.

The size and height of the pines increased. They rested their horses frequently. Will French was strangely silent. Lane was busy with conflicting thoughts. Only one thing was certain: if Joan came he would confront her, and, if necessary, tear the mask from her face. Under the spell of the cool forest his resentment toward Will French died. For Lane was more of a mountain man than he was of the desert.

In another hour they halted, after a hard climb to the top of a high ridge which ranged southward to the shoulder of a towering peak. Below was a long, narrow valley, deep in shadow, and Will French pointed up this valley. Lane looked and made out a faint glow against the side of the mountain.

"What is it?" he demanded abruptly.

"That's Running Wolf Canyon up there, an' where you see the light is the mining town of Raysville," Will replied. "It's one of the livest camps in the Wizards."

"I suppose that's the place we're goin' to hit," Lane conjectured.

"You said it," Lane confirmed. "That's where we make the big clean-up. We'll have to scatter to the ends of the earth afterward," he finished grimly.

Lane was struck by his tone. "Must be high-powered stuff," he ventured.

"The bank an' the Ace of Clubs gambling hell," said French slowly. "The plunder ought to figure two hundred thousand, an' the beauty of it is, they can afford it. Gold proposition—everybody rolling in money. That's why I said something about nerve, remember?"

Lane remembered. He had caught his breath when French had mentioned jobs and the amount. He had not stepped into any mild raid. He had

thought they might try him out on something small. Now he saw the reason for his admission to the band. In this desperate undertaking they needed his gun! There would be no carrying out such an enterprise without shooting. Never! But would Will allow Joan to come on such an occasion? Lane surmised from what he had heard pass between the girl and her brother Frank in Sunrise that she had been in the habit of accompanying them on various raids; but *this* venture——

Will started on, with Lane following. They rode along the crest of the ridge toward the mountain for two miles or more. The valley had narrowed and deepened into a canyon. Finally they began to descend, but instead of going down into the canyon they came upon a plateau or shelf above the chasm that was thickly timbered. They followed a trail through the timber and at last came out into a large meadow through which flowed a small stream.

There were some dilapidated cabins here. Lane saw horses grazing and men moving about. Light streamed from the windows of two of the cabins, and Lane realized that they had reached the rendezvous of the outlaws. They stopped before a large cabin which was dark. Many saddles hung on pegs driven into the chinking between the logs. They unsaddled, hung up saddles and bridles, and hobbled their horses.

Then Will led the way to one of the lighted cabins. Here they found Brule, sprawled in a big chair at one end of a long table. There were a dozen men sitting or lying on benches along the walls. Lane had heard laughter and loud voices from the other lighted cabin, where more men of the outfit were making merry. From the number of horses he had seen grazing in the meadow, he estimated there were at least twenty-four men in the band. And he confessed to himself that they were a hard-looking lot.

Brule sat up at his coming and looked at him keenly out of his cold, hard, gray yes. "Took us up, did he?" he said, evidently addressing Will French, although he continued to look at Lane.

"Called the turn," said Will laconically. "I reckon he'll do."

"He'd better do," said Brule in a threatening voice. "Suppose you know what you're up against?"—this last to Lane.

"I haven't been told all the particulars," said Lane curtly.

"Well, there's mighty few of 'em," said Brule, with a heavy frown. "We're goin' to take a bank an' a gamblin' joint—the bank first, then the joint; or both together, 'cording to how things come up. You, an' Neff, there"—he pointed to a tall, stoop-shouldered, dark man on the bench—"an' myself are goin' to be the lads who'll guard operations. If anybody near you gets frisky, it's your job to start shooting, an' there's only one thing to remember—*don't miss!* I don't look for trouble, but if trouble comes, Raysville will mark time from to-morrow night."

"Sounds exciting," was Lane's cool comment.

Brule's frown darkened. "You don't seem very enthusiastic," he observed.

"What am I supposed to do?" Lane asked in the same cool, even voice. "Jump up an' down an' cheer?"

Brule leaped to his feet. "Don't talk back to *me,* do you *hear?*" he shouted, while the others in the place sat up and took notice and Will French stepped to the table.

But Lane's clear, ringing tones cut through the room. "You've given your orders, Brule. I'm not deaf, an' I've brains enough to understand. Let it go at that!"

He turned abruptly, showing his back to Brule as he stepped to the door. Brule clenched his fists and fumed but remained silent. Finally, regaining control of himself, he said: "I suppose a

little spirit is a good sign in a new man. Well, don't forget your orders." He sat down and Lane went out, with Will French following.

"I told you not to cross him," Will complained.

Lane whirled. "Don't talk to *me* about crossing him," he said hotly. "I'm in this thing an' now that I'm in, I stay; but if that big bully tries to ride me, I'll make him draw!"

Will French did not comment on this. Very possibly he realized that Lane meant exactly what he said. He asked him if he wanted to join in the game in the other cabin, and when Lane refused, saying he would snatch some sleep, he directed him to still another cabin and joined the game himself.

But Lane did not want any sleep, having slept most of the day. He walked around behind the cabins and strode up and down in the shadows of clumps of pines, thinking. He knew he had made an enemy of Brule, although the outlaw leader had striven to smooth things over. Lane had a sneaking idea that Brule would attempt to cheat him out of his share of the loot. With this thought, Lane stopped dead in his tracks. Did he *want* any of the loot? He realized, with a grim smile, that he not only did not want any of the loot, but that he had no intention of shooting anybody in this affair. He made a desperate decision. If Joan did not show up, he would not take part in the bank robbery and gambling hold-up. Thus began the complications with which he wrestled as the sky grew gray in the east.

Fate is a trickster. Lane had no sooner made up his mind than there came to him on the soft breeze the message he had been half expecting—the throbbing notes of the wild, weird melody Joan had played high on the shoulder of Smoky Butte.

It came from somewhere up the slope, he thought; no, from the timber off to the left below the cabins. He started in that direction. He could barely hear the subdued strains of the violin, sometimes they were lost altogether—drowned in the plaintive wail of the vagrant wind blowing through the pines.

As he entered the timber, he stopped dead still again, startled. Frank French came out of the trees some little distance away and hurried toward the cabin. Lane edged down to the spot where Frank had emerged, and discovered a faint trail. The dawn was breaking and Lane had no difficulty in following the trail. Thus he came to a clearing so small that there was room for only one tiny cabin—the abandoned temporary home of some wandering prospector—and a small corral in which were two horses.

Lane noted these things instinctively. What interested him was the figure of Joan French, clad in the worn riding habit, her gun on her right side, the big hat pulled over her hair, sitting on a bench by the cabin door, her violin tucked under her chin.

For some little time he watched her and listened to the peculiar melody which flowed from the strings of her instrument; then he stepped boldly into the meadow and walked slowly toward her.

The violin went down on the bench instantly and the girl's gun was out in a flash. In her eyes was a look of commingled consternation and astonishment.

"You needn't draw on me, Miss Joan," said Lane gravely; "I'm one of the crowd." He stopped near her, noting that she did not raise the gun.

"How—how did you get here?" she stammered.

"Rode up with Will," Lane replied. "Are *you* in on this business, too?"

"And if I am—what of it?" she asked defiantly.

"Hardly seems the thing for a nice

girl like yourself," he said soberly. "I wouldn't expect——"

"Don't preach!" she broke in impatiently, stamping her foot. "Look at yourself—I might have known. I was beginning to think you were halfway honest, or——" She broke off her speech abruptly, biting her lip.

There were several answers Lane could have made to this and he saw she realized it. "It's my first try at the game," he said lamely. Then, frowning: "But I'm in it an' I'm going through with it. I suppose you'll be going back before—before things begin to happen."

"You haven't any right to suppose anything about me," she said haughtily. "An' you had no business coming down here."

"There are no restrictions on my movements that I know of," he returned; "an' the traffic in these hills is wide open. If I were you, Joan, I'd go back."

Her brows arched. "You're giving me advice?" She burst into scornful laughter. "When I really *do* want advice, I know where to go for it an' I can depend upon it. I haven't asked any yet. An' drop the first name. I'm Miss French to you."

Lane bowed. "You may not have asked for any advice, Miss French, but you sure need it," he said soberly.

The girl's face flushed an angry red, which made her look more beautiful than ever. She groped for words with which to frame the proper scathing remark.

"I'm not trying to be smart, Miss French," said Lane earnestly. "An' I'm not tryin' to annoy you or bust into your business. What I've said, I've said simply because I like you an'—well, you're in more or less danger here."

"I've been in danger before," she returned.

"I don't know where you've been before, although I have reason to think you've been out on raids in the past, but *this* is big turkey. From what I know of the gang's plans, this job will be no grand-stand exhibition."

Instead of angering her further, Joan appeared to be interested. "How'd you happen to be taken in on this?" she asked curiously.

"Because I can handle a gun," he replied truthfully.

"They lost a good man a while back," she said, sheathing her weapon. "I guess that's why they picked on you."

"Oh, I joined the outfit willingly enough," he said lightly. "But I had a reason."

"What was it?" She was eager.

"I can't tell you. Anyway, I won't. Some time, perhaps. In a way, it concerns yourself."

Her eyes widened and she flushed slightly. "In that case, I don't suppose I should ask." Her hauteur returned to some extent. Then a frightened look came into her eyes as she looked over Lane's shoulder.

He turned quickly and saw Will and Frank French striding toward them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RAID.

LANE turned his back on the approaching pair and smiled at Joan, whose chin was tilted in defiance. "Will doesn't like the idea of my meeting you," he said. She flashed him a friendly look of understanding as the two brothers came up.

"I thought I told you to stay home," Will French said harshly, addressing the girl and ignoring Lane.

"I didn't promise," said Joan curtly.

"You're going back," wrathfully said Will, while Frank looked at Lane with an amused smile.

"Who said so besides yourself?" said Joan saucily.

Will bit his lip and shook his head,

raging inwardly. It was plain to Lane that the brothers had no control over this willful sister. Will French's manner showed that he knew he was beaten at the start, and Lane surmised that Joan held the upper hand because the brothers had permitted her to accompany them on previous occasions. Still, it was no business for a girl to be mixed up in and French was right in ordering her home.

"Now listen to reason, Joan," said Will, striving to control his temper and his voice. "This business isn't like some of the jaunts you've been on. We've got to scatter an' scatter fast after—after our work is done. You'd only be in the way. Don't you see?"

"I've got a good horse," replied the girl, "an' I can ride as well as any of the rest of you. Besides, I haven't had any excitement in months. Suppose they *did* run across me; would they think *I* had anything to do with your schemes?"

"But don't you see, Joan, you would be in the way," Will pleaded. And then, seeing the uncompromising look in her eyes, he lost his temper, which, under the circumstances, was the worst thing he could do.

"You've got to go back, that's all," he said in an angry voice. "If you won't go willingly, I'll have you *taken* back! You can make the ranch before noon—or you can wait an' go to-night. I guess that would be best. But you've just got to go, Joan."

"Oh, let it go at that, then," said the girl, turning away.

For the first time Will French seemed to notice the presence of Lane. He scowled heavily at the new recruit and seemed on the point of making a sharp remark, but held the words on the tip of his tongue. In fact, he was so exasperated that he was not sure of himself,

"Come on back to camp," he said gruffly, and he and Lane started back through the trees to the rendezvous, leaving Frank with his sister.

Although the sun was mounting steadily, throwing its burning rays into the seething desert, it was cool in the mountain retreat of the outlaws. Will French paused before one of the cabins and faced Lane. "I'd take it as a favor if you'd forget about this business, and stay away from that place down there," he said, looking Lane straight in the eyes.

"My memory can be poor when necessary," Lane replied, "an' I've no intention of going down there again—unless your sister should send for me, which, of course, isn't likely."

Will French gave him a queer look and turned into the cabin. "I'm going to get some sleep," he said. "We'll be forty-eight hours without it, startin' to-night."

Lane made no comment. He went into another cabin where some of the men were having coffee and a bite of breakfast, and took his morning meal with them. He spoke to no one and none spoke to him. He was wondering if Joan really would go home. Her last words, "Let it go at that," had been uttered in a tone which conveyed a meaning to him that was apparently lost on Will French. In his heart, Lane did not believe the girl would go home. Her wild, adventurous spirit was roused. She might pretend to go back, but she would not. Of this, Lane felt certain. Had he been *sure* that Joan would go home, he would have laid his plans for his own escape from the desperate enterprise. He walked for a time after the scanty meal and then sought a bunk in the cabin where Will French was sleeping.

Raysville was an old mining camp that had a past, a present, and a future, so far as actual mining operations were concerned. It had first been a silver camp of small proportions, abandoned when the price of silver

"dropped into the sump," as the saying went. But several old prospectors who had never lost faith in the camp kept one or two of the mines working on a small scale and continued to prospect. Then had come the discovery of gold-bearing quartz; the camp became a gold proposition, flowered into a boom overnight, and now was the most prosperous town in the Wizards, with prospects of even greater prosperity as the veins widened and the ore became more and more plentiful.

The Miners' State Bank had been established and carried large surpluses of cash against the regular pay days. There were several stores and cafés, two hotels, other business houses, and many resorts, the largest of which was The Golden Nugget. This was both a drink emporium and a gambling place. It was the chief rendezvous of miners, prospectors, professional gamblers, hangers-on and the riffraff of a booming mining camp. Large amounts of cash were carried in the safe in the front office against the no-limit games which were played at the tables, the roulette wheels, craps, and blackjack. Everything was cash in Raysville, which was the lure that attracted Brule and the band of which the French boys were members.

It lacked an hour of midnight when a cavalcade of riders filed slowly down a trail perilously steep above Raysville. The trail wound through the timber, along the rims of precipices, across treacherous shale slopes, and ever downward. It was little more than a game trail and used only by occasional prospectors. There were no mines or habitations near it, and it let Brule and his band into the timber on either side of Raysville unobserved.

Shortly afterward there was a faint glimmer of light in the bank, which was situated near the upper end of the street. Behind the bank were horses and men. A rear window was open. Down the street, in the trees behind The Golden Nugget, were other horses and men. The street was quiet, but the resorts were booming.

Lane was with the men behind The Nugget. Neff was in charge of this unit of the raiding band—a nervous, shifty-eyed man who was plainly suspicious, or jealous, of Lane. Lane knew that any attempt on his part to make a break would draw a bullet from this lieutenant of Brule's.

Will and Frank were with the men at the bank. Frank had come into the rendezvous camp at nightfall and had told his brother that Joan had gone. Lane had overheard him. "Sloped before I woke up," Frank had said. "Fiddle an' all. For once she's showing some sense." And Lane had smiled to himself, for he had not believed that Joan had gone home. But now, after the trip down the dangerous trail at the head of the canyon, he had his doubts. No girl would be likely to try to negotiate such a trail alone at night, and to enter town by the main road from the foothills would be inviting recognition.

Lane was turning these thoughts over in his mind when a man came hurrying around the corner of the building. Neff's gun was out in a flash, but Brule's huge form was readily recognized in the moonlit space between the clump of trees and the rear of the resort.

"All right, Neff, we're goin' to take 'em both together," said the chief in a guarded tone. "When you hear my whistle in front, go in the back way with the bunch an' go fast. Drive 'em back against the wall an' keep 'em reaching. Lane, you edge up front toward the office. I've picked some men to clean the table drawers. We'll go down the road afterward."

That was all. It already was understood that they would gather at a town near the border in a week's time. Brule

slipped away, and Neff and the others held their guns in readiness. Lane reluctantly drew his weapon. Then the old spirit of reckless adventure seized him. He forgot his qualms in these moments of waiting. Joan could not very well censure him for taking part in an enterprise in which her brothers were engaged. Nor could Will or any one else at the rancho object to his seeing her after this. He would make straight for the ranch after——

A sharp whistle sounded in the street in front of the resort. "C'mon!" Neff commanded, and they started on the run for the rear door of The Nugget. But the door proved to be bolted on the inside. Neff swore horribly and turned back against the others. "The front!" he shouted. But at this moment the bolt was shot back, the door opened, and several men plunged out, running full into the midst of the outlaws. At once there was a mêlée, the outlaws flailing right and left with their heavy gun barrels.

"Let 'em go," yelled Neff, leaping inside.

Lane and the others followed him. In the short space during which they had been delayed, Brule's men had started operations. The place was in a turmoil, with Brule, brandishing two guns, roaring orders; his men, covering the crowd, were driving them back against the wall. The hands of the players and bar patrons were elevated. Tables and chairs were overturned in the scramble to reach the wall; men fell, and curses came thick and fast. Already two of the outlaws were emptying the money drawers of the poker tables. Another leaped over the bar to secure the bank notes and gold in the money boxes there. And from up the street came a dull rumble of thunder as a blast shattered the doors of the bank's vault.

Lane slipped toward the front, where Brule was herding the white-faced proprietor of the place into the office to open the safe. At this moment a shot rang out at the lower end of the long room. The glass partition of the office was shattered a scant foot from Brule's head. The outlaw whirled and emptied the gun in his left hand. Two men in the line against the wall went down, shot in the back.

Lane cried out in protest involuntarily. A gambler shook a derringer out of his sleeve and shot at him twice. Both shots missed. And then the whole double line of men seemed to turn at once. Some dropped to the floor to be out of the way of flying lead; guns appeared as if by magic, and the battle was on.

Bullets shattered the hanging lamps, the dripping oil took fire, one lamp exploded. The other lamps, ranged along the wall in reflector sockets, cast a weird, yellow glow over the scene. Men took refuge behind overturned tables. Several of the outlaws went down before the fire of the intended victims. Lane leaped over the bar to safety. Brule was roaring inarticulate orders from the office, where the owner of The Golden Nugget was working with feverish fingers at the combination dial of the safe.

There was firing outside now, signifying that the outlaws had left the bank and were in the street. Lane's practiced ear caught the difference in the reports of weapons. "Rifles!" he ejaculated. "The miners are out!" And then a tall, stoop-shouldered figure appeared in the front entrance. It was Sheriff McClure.

Brule came running out of the office through a door that opened into the bar. In one hand was a sack and the other held a gun. He whipped his gun hand over to shoot at the sheriff, but at this moment Lane, as if by accident, bumped against him and the shot went wild.

Brule staggered back, cursing, and

deliberately turned his gun on Lane. For the first time that night, Lane shot. Brule's weapon went spinning to the floor. Into Lane's mind came the thought of flight. The bank robbery might have succeeded, but the holdup of the Nugget had failed!

His gaze flashed to the rear and his heart seemed to stop beating. Standing at the entrance to the narrow hallway leading to the private rooms was a slight figure in worn riding togs, *masked!*

He went over the bar in a twinkling with bullets whistling in his ears. Some one was shooting out the lights along the walls and the remaining outlaws were fighting their way toward the front doors, presumably to aid their comrades in the street. Lane plunged into the mêlée, swinging his gun right and left and striking out with his left fist. He caught sight of a flashing star on a man's vest which showed he was a deputy. The man was making for Joan. Lane could see men crowding into the passage behind her, saw her turn and then whirl about, gun in hand, as the deputy made a lunge for her. His leap fell short and Joan's gun cracked above the uproar. The deputy went down. Then Lane reached the girl.

"Follow me!" he commanded.

At this juncture the last of the lights went out. Lane grasped the girl by the arm with his left hand and drew her with him as he threw himself against the crowd behind her, using his pistol barrel as a bludgeon. In this way he literally battered his way to the rear door and outside.

"Take off that mask, it makes you a target," Lane ordered. He did not wait for her to comply but jerked at the mask, breaking the cords which held it. Even in that fleeting moment in the moonlight, he had time to see the wide-eyed look Joan gave him. It was not terror and it was not fright. It was more a look of puzzled astonishment. But there was no time for delay. A bullet cut between them, to bury itself in the rear wall of the resort. The miners were firing rifles from their cabins on the canyon slopes. Lane dragged Joan toward the clump of trees as men came running toward them.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTURE.

IN planning the raid on Raysville, Brule had made one fatal mistake. This mistake was the choosing of the hour before midnight for the start of operations. Raysville had not yet gone to bed when the outlaws swept into town. The street had been fairly well lighted and, while apparently deserted, the resorts were teeming with life. Moreover, the denizens of the town were far from tame. The camp had drawn rough characters from all along the border; men who would use fists or firearms at the drop of the hat. Brule had been actuated in selecting the early hour because he wanted several hours for flight. Now, with the safe of the Golden Nugget rifled, and much of the money taken from the cash drawers of the gaming tables, the hour of flight had arrived.

In the darkness in the gambling hall it was impossible to tell friend from foe. The firing ceased and the crowd surged toward the wide front doors, which crashed outward with the impact of scores of struggling men. Pandemonium raged in the street, with riderless horses dashing about, mounted men charging the crowd, guns winking like fireflies against the shadows. As Brule and the other outlaws emerged from the resort, they caught horses and mounted, or ran around the building to get their horses which had been left in the trees. And Brule, still clinging to his bag of plunder, headed the dash for the road out of town.

Lane and Joan reached the shelter

of the trees with bullets clipping the leaves over their heads. The man left with the horses had been unable to keep them together and they had scattered.

"Where'd you leave your horse?" Lane asked Joan.

She pointed up along the slope. "Did —did I kill him?" she asked.

"I don't know," returned Lane sharply. "An' this is no time to be thinking about *that*. Lead me to your horse, an' *hurry!*"

At this juncture the outlaws coming from the front of the building clashed with the men who were running after Lane and the girl. The night became hideous with shouts, yells, and curses. A man came plunging into the timber. It was Neff. He stopped short when he made out Lane.

A curse came from his lips. "Brule would have got McClure if it hadn't been for you, you double-crosser!" he shouted hoarsely.

His gun whipped up, but Lane's weapon spit fire from his hip a fraction of a second before Neff's shot went wild. Neff wavered and fell backward, full length, under the trees, the moonlight spattering his still form with silver spangles through the interlaced branches.

Lane again grasped Joan's arm and they hurried along the slope to where the girl's horse was tethered to a sapling. Lane jerked the tie-knot loose and ordered her into the saddle. The shooting now came from down the road, where residents of the lower town were trying to stop the flight of the outlaws. Escape in that direction was impossible. Lane had no horse. To attempt to make the street in hopes of catching a mount, or to remain and search the slope, was out of the question. There was but one thing to do.

"It's the upper trail," he told Joan. "Did you come in that way?"

The girl shook her head. "I came up from below," she answered.

"I'll lead you out," he said quickly, and started afoot along the slope for the perilous trail at the head of the canyon.

They reached the foot of the trail and started up. Lane warned the girl to let her horse have its own way on the narrow path above precipices and across the shale slopes, for the animal's instinct could be trusted to keep it on the trail. Joan now was taking his orders willingly. She asked only one question, and that concerned her brothers.

"I didn't see them after we split up in town," said Lane. "They went to the bank. But they had plenty of chance for a get-away."

This seemed to satisfy her and they went on up the ridge. But escape was not to be so easy, as Lane discovered almost immediately. The whole camp had been roused by the commotion at The Nugget. The word spread quickly that bandits were holding up the town. From cabins, boarding houses and mine bunk houses, men swarmed with whatever weapons they possessed, eager for a fight, for a chance to shoot and kill! And some of these, coming down from a mine at the head of the gulch, spotted the pair going up the steep trail. They followed with shouts and yells and occasional shots, scrambling up the trail after the fugitives.

Lane stopped at a wide place in the trail and motioned Joan on. "Follow this trail to the top of the ridge," he told her; "then you can go north an' down an' hit the trail for home. You can't get lost because you can't get off this——"

"What about yourself?" she demanded.

"I'm goin' to hold this crowd until you're well away," he said. "An' you better get goin' or I won't be able to do it."

"I'll stick with you," she flashed. "Two guns are better than one."

"I'm not goin' to do it with my gun!"

he cried. "Go on! Don't you see you'll get both of us caught?"

He slapped her horse on the flank and the animal started ahead. Then Lane scrambled up the steep slope above the trail and picked his way along to where the trail narrowed above a cliff. Boulders were plentiful and, as the vanguard of the pursuers hove in view, Lane sent a boulder hurtling down the slope and across the trail. The men coming up stopped in their tracks as another boulder followed the first, breaking off a portion of the edge of the trail. They turned and crowded back upon each other. One man slipped, lost his footing, and went over the cliff with a horrible cry. The others started pellmell back down the dangerous path.

Lane's own position was extremely perilous. He had scarcely any footing and was holding to a cedar bush with his left hand. But he had an inspiring idea. It was to dislodge a huge boulder above him and send it crashing down to demolish the trail over the cliff and thus effectively prevent further pursuit.

Slowly, inch by inch, he succeeded in getting up the slope behind the great boulder, which was balanced on an outcropping of granite. He clung to a bush and pushed with his feet. The big stone rocked. He pushed again to give it momentum and then made the supreme effort. The boulder rolled off its base and plunged downward, cutting a wide gash in the trail and dropping hundreds of feet to the base of the cliffs below.

But with the sudden loosening of the rock, Lane's full weight tugged at the bush and it came out by the roots. He slid downward in the path the rushing boulder had made. He threw out his arms, grasping at whatever came within reach, digging his fingers into the dirt, bruising them and breaking his nails on loose rocks. But he stayed the speed of his slide and with a twist of his body succeeded in rolling to one side, so that he slipped down on the trail and came to a stop with an arm and a leg over the edge. He drew back and lay on his pack, panting and looking up at the cold stars. For some moments he experienced a feeling of weakness because of his narrow escape.

Meanwhile, his predicament was observed by the men below. With cries of triumph, they started back up the trail. Lane got to his feet, his hand whipping to his holster. It was empty. His gun was somewhere in the dirt above. He looked about quickly. To attempt the steep slope from that spot was suicide. The great boulder had cut a deep gash in the trail and the gash was filled with loose gravel; also it sloped downward. To cross to the farther side of the trail was, therefore, out of the question.

Lane smiled. At least there would be no pursuit of Joan. He walked down the trail toward the mob. Fierce yells greeted him. He held up a hand.

"Just turn around an' march back," he said in a loud, clear voice. "I'll follow you, an' I'm unarmed." He raised his hands and turned around slowly so the men could see his empty holster.

The men were undecided, yet what Lane suggested seemed the only thing to do. "All right," said the leader, "but if you try any tricks you'll find out that I've got eyes in the back of my head."

"An' a gun in your hand," said Lane sarcastically; "that ought to be enough."

They went down the trail, with the men continually twisting their necks to keep an eye on their captive. When they reached the floor of the canyon they spread about him and walked down the middle of the street. There were cries from both sides of the street and soon a crowd was following. "They've got another one," Lane heard a man shout. It told him that some

of the outlaws had been taken—perhaps all of them. It made him uneasy because of Will and Frank French. He hoped the brothers had got away. "He had a boy with him," was another sally from his captors that disturbed Lane.

They turned in at a building at the lower end of the street. Here was a large crowd and there were ominous mutterings, cries, and threats as Lane was led inside. He saw Sheriff McClure at a desk, and several others, evidently special deputies, standing about. This, as Lane knew at sight, was the Raysville jail.

When McClure saw Lane, he rose from his desk and stepped into another room. "Bring him along," he told one of the deputies. "I want to speak to him alone.

This seemed to excite some curiosity, but Lane speedily found himself alone with Sheriff McClure in a little private office. "Sit down," said the sheriff, indicating a chair on the opposite side of the desk.

Lane sat down as directed and drew tobacco and papers from his shirt pocket.

"Who was that boy with you?" asked the official in his soft, drawling, tired voice.

"What makes you think I had a boy with me?" Lane countered. He knew, of course, that Joan French, with her trim, slender figure, soft cheeks, and smooth chin, could readily be mistaken for a boy.

"I have eyes an' can see," said the sheriff. "What's your name?"

"Lane," came the reply after a few moments of hesitation. Then: "You got anything in particular against me, sheriff?"

"I have something very particular against all who were in with Brule on this deal," replied McClure. "You came in here, blew the bank safe, an' made off with a good bunch of cash besides what was taken at The Nugget. It might even have been worse if I hadn't happened up this way just by chance, arriving when the festivities were at full blast. If I had been half an hour sooner, nothing would have happened. How'd you come to join up with Brule, or did he send for you?"

"He didn't send for me, which is about all I've got to say along *that* line," Lane replied.

McClure leaned over the desk, tapping its surface with the fingers of both hands. "Peculiar thing," he said, looking up suddenly into Lane's eyes. "You didn't stumble into Brule accidentally when he turned to draw down on me; you did it on purpose."

"What makes you think so, sheriff?" asked Lane pleasantly.

"As I said before, I have eyes an' can see," replied the sheriff in a complaining voice. "You didn't want Brule to plug me, for some reason I do not know but would *like* to know; an' I didn't want to plug Brule because I wanted to capture him. So you helped things all aroun'."

"Did you capture him?" Lane asked casually, affecting little interest.

"Not to-night," the sheriff confessed. "*You're* the only important man we got." He took a cigar out of his vest pocket and bit off the end.

"Me!" Lane exclaimed. "Important? Where'd you get tangled up with that notion, sheriff?"

McClure calmly put the match to his cigar and puffed slowly before he replied. "You're a stranger aroun' here an', you don't belong to that gang. You've just joined up. You're no bank robber or holdup man, an' I don't think you're an outlaw. If you was, you'd never have bumped into Brule to-night an' then shot the gun out of his hand instead of givin' it to him in the heart when he drew down on you. You had some reason for goin' in with the gang, but it doesn't look to me like it was just to make some money out of a rob-

bery. You had another reason. That's why you're important. An' that boy you helped out shot one of my deputies. That's another reason why you're important."

Lane laughed. "You're mistaken, sheriff," he said, sobering. "It wasn't the—the boy who shot your man, it was myself. I don't want the boy to take the blame for something he didn't do."

The sheriff nodded amicably. "That makes you, an' the boy, too, all the more important—you wanting to take the blame, I mean. I'm goin' to hold you in hopes that you'll see the light an' talk, an' I'm giving you my word that you won't lose anything by it." He rose and went to the door, indicating to Lane that he was to follow.

The sheriff led the way through another door into the cell room. "I want this fellow kept away from the rest of 'em," he told the turnkey. "Put him in the scrub room."

Lane was led to a small cell at the end of the tier which was used as a storeroom for pails, mops, brooms, and other cleaning implements. The barred door clanged shut after him, a key grated in the lock, and he found himself alone.

CHAPTER XI.

ESCAPE.

LANE sat down on the bench, which was littered with old newspapers and magazines. There was no bunk in the place, for it was not intended as a regular cell. He was thinking of the sheriff's statement to the effect that he, Lane, was the only important prisoner taken. That meant that the French brothers had got away; for, had they been taken, the sheriff certainly would have considered them important prisoners.

It was also news to learn that, to some extent at least, the bank robbery had been successful. The outlaws who had got away would meet in the town near the border and divide the spoils. But what about those who had been captured? Would Brule find a way to get them out on bail? Would he even try? And if they *did* get out on bail, would they dare to show up for trial? Lane smiled grimly. He suspected what would happen.

But Joan was safe and Lane was satisfied. When he got out, she could not refuse to see him and to talk to him. She had, of course, done a foolhardy thing, and she was responsible for his present predicament; but she would never get a word of reproof from him. And he had nearly lost his life in protecting her from pursuit by rolling down that huge boulder. He wondered vaguely if she had seen. Something told him she had paused up the trail to see what he was going to do. If that was the case, she had seen plenty. It gave Lane a thrill of intense satisfaction to suspect that Joan had seen him risk his life for her. For the first time he confessed to himself that he had more than a mere ordinary liking for the girl. And this thrilled him, too.

He rose and began pacing back and forth, busy with his thoughts. It was some time before he showed any particular interest in his surroundings. Then he began to look about him. The light was dim, as there were only two lamps in the cell room and these were on the front wall near the corridor. In the gloom he could vaguely discern the forms of mops, brooms, and a variety of other things. It was not until he looked up that he became interested.

About three feet below the high ceiling was a window. This window was about four feet wide and two feet deep. That there should be a window was not surprising, yet Lane looked at it from every possible angle from below. Then

he sat down on the bench and stared straight ahead. He had good reason for his interest, for the window was not barred! Evidently, the room he was in had never been intended to hold prisoners; possibly, for the building was practically new, the bars were yet to be installed. But the fact remained that the window was free of bars and offered a means of egress if he could reach it.

Lane immediately began to consider means of getting up to the window. The wall which separated him from the other cells and the rear wall were smoothly plastered and offered no foothold of any description. The mops and broom offered no solution. He paced about restlessly, puzzling his brain. Then came an idea.

He placed the bench upright against the wall under the window. But the next problem was to get up on the end of the bench. He tried standing on a pail and pulling himself up, but his weight brought the bench out from the wall. He tried with the bench slanting, but saw that even if he got up on its end he would be unable to reach the window. He put the bench back in its place and sat down in disgust.

The jail was quiet, the other inmates apparently having gone to sleep. Lane nodded himself as he sat on the bench, and then he was suddenly wide awake and alert, staring at the wall under the window. There, writhing like a brown snake against the white plaster, a rope dangled.

Lane could hardly believe his eyes. He looked at the rope stupidly for several seconds. Then he sprang forward and grasped it, tested it with his weight. It held firm. In a flash, he understood. Some one had thrown the rope through the window and it was secured outside. Moreover, it was a cow rope and had seen service. Lane grasped it and went up hand over hand. He reached the window and slipped through, clinging to the sill with his hands. Then he dropped.

To his surprise the drop was not so far as he had anticipated, for he landed on a high pile of dirt left during the construction of the building. He clambered down from this heap, pulling down the rope. A soft whistle came from the trees some little distance behind the jail, and when he hurried over Joan French stepped out to meet him. Lane could only stare in dumb astonishment.

"I didn't know it would be you," the girl said hurriedly in a guarded voice. "I saw the open window up there an' took a chance. I figured *some*body would come out. I'm glad it was you. Is Will or Frank in there?"

Lane shook his head. "I don't believe so," he said. "But how did you get here, an' why did you come back?"

"I had to find out *some* way about my brothers. I didn't know how I was going to find out till I saw that window. Then I took a chance on the rope. It was too risky to call. I went up that awful trail and raced around to where I could get down into the canyon again. I saw what happened up there on the trail." She paused, then added: "You'd better come with me, for I know where there are some horses."

She touched his hand and started down the canyon in the shelter of the trees along the creek. Raysville had quieted down. They crossed the deserted street at the lower end of town and plunged into the timber on a steep slope. Soon they reached the horses which had wandered there after breaking away from behind The Nugget. Lane gave a peculiar whistle and repeated it several times as he moved about the horses. Finally, he got an answering whinny, and in a few moments he had found his own mount.

"Pure luck," he murmured; "an', Joan, I don't know whether to call you

a brick, or an angel, or just a foolish little girl." He took one of her hands and they walked up the slope a short distance to where Joan's horse was tethered. There they mounted.

"I'm going to take you to a place where you can hang out for a spell," said Joan. "They'll take it for granted, I reckon, that you went the easiest way —by the road."

They followed the slope by a zigzagging game trail, with Joan in the lead, and Lane noticed for the first time the small case on the rear of the girl's saddle which contained her violin. When they reached the top of the ridge above the canyon, Joan waited for Lane to bring up alongside and then handed him her gun.

"You'd better take this," she said, "an' you needn't be in any big hurry about returning it."

Lane understood and took the weapon. "I told the sheriff that *I* shot that deputy," he said, "so don't forget if it should come up any time. He saw you an' he thinks you're a boy."

"Is he—dead?" asked the girl, her tone sharp with anxiety.

Lane shook his head. "No," he answered cheerfully. "If he had been dead, or even seriously wounded, the sheriff would have mentioned it."

"We'll go on," said Joan, and they started, pushing their way higher and higher into the mountains.

With the first gray light of dawn streaking the eastern horizon, they came to a cup in the shoulder of a high peak. It was a natural bowl in the mountain, with a waterfall at its upper rim and an entrance by means of a narrow creek on its lower side. The bottom of the bowl was a flower-splashed meadow, with a clump of firs in the center.

"We can stay here to-day," said Joan. "To-night I will show you a trail that leads over the Wizards and down to the border desert. They may come up this way, but I don't think any one except my brothers an' I know of this place."

"I will try an' find Will an' Frank," said Lane as they dismounted. "They'll have to be warned. Joan, some of those fellows McClure captured are sure to talk to get out of it easier. They know they haven't a chance in jail, an' I know Brule well enough to say that he won't help them. Will an' Frank should not turn up at that rendezvous in the south."

Joan looked at him soberly. "It was bad business when my brothers got mixed up with that Brule," she said slowly. "They would have been better off to have kept on their own."

Lane unsaddled the horses and opened his slicker pack. In it was the package of emergency rations brought from the ranch. They ate beside the stream in the cool shade of the firs with the sun swinging up in the east casting its glory on the towering peaks.

"Joan," said Lane when they had finished and he had built a cigarette, "I'm going over the range to hunt for Will an' Frank. I'll find them somewhere an' talk cold turkey to them. I reckon Will has sense enough to listen to reason. Then I'm coming back to the ranch to see you. After that, the sheriff can do what he pleases."

The girl was silent, but she was looking at him surreptitiously. If Lane had caught the glow in her eyes at that moment he would have learned much.

"You saved the sheriff's life last night," she said in a low voice. "He won't be forgetting that. It happened just as I came in."

"Maybe I saved Brule's instead," said Lane with a wry smile.

"Lane, why did you hook up with that outfit?" Joan asked, after a short silence.

"Why did you double back an' show up at The Golden Nugget?" he asked.

She looked at him out of troubled

eyes. "Because I like the excitement," she replied, and he saw that she spoke the truth. "My brothers have been my only companions almost since I can remember. They taught me to draw an' shoot, an' thought it was fun. But I never turned my gun on any one until last night. I was excited an' when I saw that deputy's star I became frightened. I didn't think the raid was going to be such—such hot stuff. I've trailed along with Will an' Frank for the fun of the thing. I've been sort of a boy at heart. But I can't explain it so you would understand. I'm two persons, I guess."

"I believe I understand," said Lane. "Joan, I know it makes you happy to play your violin an' I like to hear the music you make in the hills. Will you play for me?"

The girl flushed and her eyes sparkled. If Lane had but known it, it was the very thing she wanted to do; the thing that would give her an outlet for her pent-up feelings and soothe her nerves. She took the instrument from its case, made sure of its tuning, tucked it under her chin, and played.

Lane lay upon the grass, looking up at her, fascinated by her soft beauty, the sheen of her hair in the sunlight; charmed and stirred by the enchanting music that flowed from the strings. She played on and on. In her eyes was a dark, mysterious glow, with an occasional spark of fire. There was everything in the notes that swelled and sang and wavered on the faint mountain breeze—hot love, and swift death, the blistering heat of the inferno, and the cool shadows of silent forests, the wind in the pines, rippling brooks, and moonlight. For Joan played of the great desolate wastes of desert, of the black lava hills, of the mountains—of the wide outdoors which she loved. And then a softer note of wistful yearning seemed to come into her music. Lane thrilled at the change of mood. It was almost as if she were conveying a message with her bow.

She stopped suddenly. The violin was lowered and she stood looking up at the towering mountain. Lane could not stifle the impulse that seized him. He rose, stepped to her side, trembling. Then he took her in his arms and kissed her.

With the kiss, she broke free. Her eyes flashed. "You had no right!" she cried. The bow fell and her hand dropped to her empty holster.

Lane quickly drew the weapon from his own holster and held it out to her on the palm of his hand.

She looked at him steadily and slowly the angry look in her eyes died. "You must never do that again," she said slowly.

"Only with your consent, Joan," he said softly; "and some day you will give it."

Any answer she might have made to this was checked by an exclamation from Lane, who leaped forward, flipping the gun into place in his right hand as a rider came splashing up the creek at the entrance to the bowl. But Lane did not fire, nor did he cover the rider who drew up before them, looking keenly at Joan in her boyish clothes. It was Sheriff McClure.

The official dismounted leisurely. He looked at Lane with a quizzical light in his eyes. "I *thought* you had a reason for joining up with Brule besides the prospect for loot," he said in his drawling voice of complaint. "You needn't scowl," he went on in sharper tones. "I've known for some time that the young lady, here, had a fancy for these jaunts with Will an' Frank. I knew her last night the moment I saw her. Lane, you threw in with Brule because you expected the girl to be present when things happened, an' you can't deny it!"

Lane was frowning. "Isn't there some way we can leave Joan out of it?"

he said curtly. "She was merely out for the—for the excitement of the thing." Joan was looking at him with wide eyes.

"Exactly," nodded the sheriff. "An' one of my deputies has a smashed collar bone, thanks to a bullet from her gun. That's sure exciting."

"You know how it could happen," said Lane. "I don't have to explain to you."

"Nope," said the sheriff, almost cheerfully. "We all know how bullets are sent about their business." He looked sternly at Joan, who was pale but defiant. Then he turned back to Lane. "Did you kill Neff?"

"Yes," Lane replied laconically.

"Not a bad job," drawled McClure. "I suppose he got frisky. Do you know where the gang was to meet for the split?"

"I do," nodded Lane. "But I'm not telling."

"No reason why you should," said the sheriff. "You've got plenty of money to bail yourself out, I take it. One of my official friends up North mentioned you in a letter some time ago. Said you were dangerous but square, an' a wizard with the cards. Name's Lane?"

"That's it," was the answer, accompanied by a scowl.

"The men I captured seem to think you're a double-crosser," the sheriff went on, "but I told them they were probably mistaken. Some of them talked an' I expect to have the whole outfit rounded up an' cooling their heels in jail in less than a week. I had a sneaking hunch that it would be something like this that would wreck Brule. An' when I asked Will at the ranch if he was considering any long rides, he as much as told me so in the look he gave me. I figured it might be Raysville."

"It's kind of you to tell me all this, sheriff," said Lane, "but there's no need of worrying Joan. You want me, an' I'm ready to go. But I'll tell you that I was merely goin' south to warn the gang an' then I was coming back. Don't think I'm asking any clemency. I don't give a dog-gone for you an' your court. But maybe you'll be fair enough to leave Joan out of it."

"I don't care *what* he does!" Joan exclaimed.

Sheriff McClure nodded approvingly. "Good spirit," he said. "There was some of it in that music you were playin' which steered us over here. You don't have to promise you won't go on any more of these expeditions, because there won't *be* any more. I'm going to send you home."

"Good!" exclaimed Lane, smiling at Joan. "I'll saddle up, sheriff, an' we'll be on our way!"

When they rode out of the bowl, they were met by several men, and Lane surmised that the sheriff, suspecting that he, Lane, and possibly some of the others had made for the trail over the range, had come up that way. Then, too, the tracks left by their horses could be picked up on the lower slopes.

They rode back down the shoulder of the mountain, down to the lower ridges, down past the point where the trail turned off for Running Wolf Canyon and Raysville. "He's going to take me to the county seat, wherever that is," thought Lane. They rode on to where the trail turned westward and led down the long slopes to the burning floor of the desert and the French rancho. Here the sheriff called a halt. He motioned to the members of the posse to draw back out of earshot. He pointed down the trail, looked Lane steadily in the eye as he spoke:

"You go home with her and stay there until I tell you your next move. There's still a job for you to do."

Lane looked at him in surprise. But the sheriff forestalled a question. He turned to the girl.

"Joan, I hold you responsible for this man. See that he does as I have ordered. He is not to leave the ranch."

A minute later, Lane and Joan were riding down the winding trail toward the desert, where the heat waves shimmered and a dark spot showed the location of the rancho.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST JOBS.

IN from the blistering, blinding, burning heat of the inferno, Lane and Joan drank long and deep of the cool waters of the rancho spring, while Pedro took the horses in charge. As they walked up the lower patio, old Zeb French came out on the rear porch. He merely glanced at Joan, and then looked searchingly into Lane's eyes. What he saw there caused him to pass a faltering hand over his brow.

Joan went to her room and Lane followed the old man into the big, cool living room. There French sat in his great chair, his gnarled hands lying palm downward on the arms, and listened while Lane smoked and told the story of the affair in Raysville and the aftermath. When he had finished, Lane rose and stood as if he expected the old man to ask some questions. But none came. Zeb French waved a hand in a gesture of dismissal. He seemed suddenly to have grown very old, and his chin dropped upon his breast.

Lane went to his room, where he took some clean garments from his slicker pack. Then he had a bath and a long siesta, waking with the setting of the sun. Joan was at the supper table. It was a silent meal and at almost every sound from the kitchen Zeb French would start and cock his left ear. His attitude was one of expectation.

After supper Lane walked in the lower patio, smoking. He half expected Joan to come out and join him, but she did not come. She had changed with the return to the rancho. Now she seemed as remote as ever. If the sheriff had not found them in the mountain retreat when he did——

Lane wondered.

Then, from the front of the house, came the strains of Joan's violin. Lane walked around to the front porch, seated himself in a chair there, listened to Joan's playing, while the twilight shadows gathered and deepened into night. For an hour she played—sweet, wonderful music of a different quality than that she had played in the fastnesses of the mountains. Then all was still. Lane looked into the living room after a time. It was dark and empty. He went back to his room.

Soon he was pacing the patio in the moonlight. "Another job," he muttered to himself. What did the sheriff mean by that? What kind of a job did he have for him? Lane puzzled over this, and over Joan's attitude. Was he still the stranger—the long rider she had hinted that day on the shoulder of Smoky Butte? Had he made no progress after rescuing her in The Nugget and risking his life for her on the treacherous trail above Running Wolf Canyon? She had seen what had happened up there, for she had said so.

His ruminations were terminated by the pound of hoofs. Will and Frank French swept in from the desert. In a few minutes, Will and Lane were sitting in the latter's room and Lane was explaining what happened. Will gave an occasional grunt. He plainly was nervous.

"I've got the bank money," he said when Lane had finished. "I thought I'd be as well off here as anywhere till it came time for the split. McClure hasn't got anything on me. He didn't see me or Frank. Those rats in jail can talk their heads off an' McClure can't prove a thing. I'm goin' to bed."

Lane followed Will French's example. Next day he saw Joan only

twice. He and Will and Frank talked. Will would not listen to Lane's suggestion that they go into the county seat and see Sheriff McClure.

"You fool!" cried Will angrily. "That would mean my giving up my gun, and *that* would mean——" He broke off, sputtering, and went into the house.

Lane was in the living room after supper, deliberately holding forth in a chair in hopes that Joan would come in. He intended to talk to her this night. His face was rather pale with the firmness of his resolve. Shouts came from the lower patio.

Lane hurried to the dining room as Zez French came running into the kitchen. The old man took down a Winchester that had rested on pegs above a window. Through the open door in the rear, Lane could see the cause of the trouble. Brule was walking slowly up the patio!

In a trice, Lane had wrested the rifle from Zeb French's clutch and tossed it out the window. Then he strode out upon the back porch and down the steps. Brule's face went black as he saw him. Frank and Will French stood on either side of the steps, watching breathlessly. The old man came out on the porch, croaking hoarsely in an effort to speak. There was a little cry, and Lane knew Joan was with her father.

"C'me on, you double-crossing rat!" cried Brule hoarsely. "Sent 'em after us, eh? Wanted to save your own skin. Well, you haven't done any damage yet. C'me on, you begged for it, *now take it!*"

The soft silence of the twilight hour was split by the roar of guns. Lane was down, his left hand and right knee on the ground. Smoke curled from his right hip. Brule staggered toward him, arms outflung, his gun hand empty. Then he plunged forward on his face and lay still.

Lane stood motionless, while a sigh came from the spectators. Then Sheriff McClure rode into the patio, dismounted, and walked swiftly to Lane. He looked at the still form of the outlaw leader on the ground at his feet. "That was the job I spoke of yesterday," he said in a grave voice, addressing Lane. "I knew he'd come here." He beckoned to Will French. "Will," he said in his mournful voice, "I'll take the bank money back with me. What Brule got is in his saddle bag. Don't keep me waiting, Will; I have a long ride to-night."

Will French, white-faced, looked the sheriff in the eye. He wet his lips. "And then, sheriff?" he said quietly.

"Are you goin' to take any more long rides, Will?" asked the official.

Will French shook his head impatiently. "This is kid stuff," he said crossly. "Well, if you must have it—*no!*"

"That's right, Will. Get the bank money. You'll have to come into town later, on a few matters. Maybe we can smooth 'em out. I'm not forgettin' your dad did me a good turn once by dragging me back from the edge of kingdom come. Get the bank money, Will."

Will went into the house for his saddle bag, which contained the plunder taken from the Raysville bank.

Lane looked about and was surprised to find Joan standing behind him. Now the sheriff was speaking to her. "You got him out of jail, little lady—now you take care of him." Joan's cheeks bloomed with roses.

Will French came out of the house and handed over the saddle bag.

Joan had finished playing. She came out on the porch where Lane was sitting in the gathering twilight. He rose and led her down into the cool patio, fragrant with the breath of countless flowers. They walked hand in hand,

walked to the far end of the patio. There they stopped. Lane took her hands in his.

"I used to think of you as my gun girl," he said softly, "but Joan, I want to think of you as my sweetheart. I'm not worthy, but there are ways of making a living besides at the green tables. I'd change for you, Joan."

There was a period of tense silence. Then Joan's arms went suddenly about his neck. "Just so your heart doesn't change," she whispered.

The sunset flamed in a last crimson glow; then the twilight cast its purple veil over the golden desert, and over the man and the girl, fast in each other's arms.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA.

The Snow Bunting
(Plectrophenax nivalis.)

THESE friendly little birds are winter visitors which defy even the coldest blasts. The reason that they are able to stand the cold is because under their skin is a thick layer of fat, which Nature allows them since they seek residence in snowbound locations.

Wherever dried stalks of mullein or ragweed rear their stiff and broken heads above the snow, the snow buntings may be seen in small flocks devouring the seeds of last summer's crop. Since their breasts so nearly match the snow beneath them, and the tawny russet markings on their backs is much interspersed with white, they look like so many brown and curled autumn leaves dancing lively capers in a snowy depression of some field or orchard.

Summer finds the snow bunting breeding within the arctic circle, not coming to the northern United States until winter is well advanced. Usually, the nest is built on the ground, nearly covered from view by stubby bunches of grass or slabs of rock. It is made of a short, curly grass which is a growth of that location, mixed with moss, and about an inch thick. The cavity is small and rather deep. Feathers from some waterfowl serve for a warm lining. The eggs are usually white, with brown markings, and vary in size as well as coloring.

In June, when the female is sitting, the male brings food to his mate and entertains her by bursting into song. He rises in the air at the beginning of his lay and drops quickly to the ground as he ends it. His song is not intricate but is, nevertheless, very sweet.

The buntings are valuable to the countryside because of the vast amount of weed seeds they consume. They do for the farmer what the farmer neglects to do for himself.

Before the government came to their defense and protection, thousands of the buntings were killed every winter for sport and food, although, because of their size, they afforded but a mouthful.

An oddity of the snow bunting is that his dress changes in the summer and becomes a clear black and white.

Moose or Men

By Kenneth Gilbert

Author of "The Scented Trail," etc.

WHEN old "Ep" White and his young partner, Jim Travers, came out of the Northern wilderness and struck the moose trail leading them to the Stikine River less than twenty miles distant, both men were near exhaustion. For days they had been battling their way through a sub-arctic jungle of pines, balsams, alders, willows, and buck brush, up and down the sides of appalling canyons and across miles of treacherous muskeg where a misstep might mean that a man would be swallowed up in the black ooze before he could call for help. For three days they had been without food. Tortured by the incessant attacks of mosquitoes and black flies, and worn by the tremendous effort they were making to reach the river before their strength failed them utterly, the narrow, hard-packed moose trail seemed like a veritable boulevard to them. Under any other circumstances it would have been regarded as a rough trail at best, but now it appeared like a broad highway which beckoned them on. In sheer relief at the discovery, old Ep White paused rather dramatically.

"Jim," he said to his partner, "do you know what this means? It means that we are saved, and by a moose! Ever since we've been in the North we've killed moose whenever we've needed food, and this is the way they repay us—by givin' us a trail which will take us all the way out of this cussed country!"

Travers shook his head. It was apparant that he, too, was impressed, but not to the degree that his partner had been. Travers grunted.

"Well, we're saved, anyway," he remarked. "Moose are moose. We kill 'em when we're hungry, and when we've plumb lost the way, as we've done this

trip, they give us a trail out of the country."

Old Ep appeared not to hear.

"Jim," he went on earnestly, "I'm never goin' to kill another moose! If we hadn't struck this trail the chances are we'd be dead or crazy before tomorrow mornin'.

"See," he added, "there's the tracks of old Mowitsch himself, that big bull who lords it over the other moose in this region! This is his trail; chances are he pioneered this through himself many years ago when he was a young bull, and he's kept it up ever since. Many's the time I've worked hard for a shot at him just for the sake of bringin' in his head, but I'm blamed glad I didn't do it. Far as I'm concerned, old Mowitsch is safe from now on. We're the only prospectors in this country, and if we don't shoot him, nobody else will; he'll live on and on and end his days in his own fashion. Jim, I'm never goin' to shoot another moose!"

Travers looked mildly bored.

"Why not?" he asked. "You don't mean to tell me you'd starve to death, do you? What if old Mowitsch did drive this trail through—I'll admit that he was a real engineer when he laid out this course through the cussed hills and canyons, takin' the best way possible—he's only a moose, anyway. Moose were put on the earth so that man might have food. Old Mowitsch has the finest spread of horns of any moose in this country. If I cut down on him, he's not goin' to get away, whether I need meat or not. No use in being foolishly sentimental about this thing!"

Old Ep glared up at him.

"Sentimental or not," he asserted doggedly, "they may say a lot of things about me, but they can't say that I'm plumb ungrateful. Old Mowitsch has done saved our lives, and, by gravy, he's not goin' to be shot if I have anything to say about it! Not even by you, Jim Travers!"

Travers glanced sharply at his partner; then shrugged. He was too wearied to quarrel. He desired to reach the river rather than to enter into futile argument with his partner, whom he liked well enough, but whose strange notions at times were decidedly irritating.

"Well, we won't fuss about it now," he replied. "Let's get goin'."

They moved on toward the river and safety.

As a matter of fact, while the two men were standing there in the trail discussing the fate of old Mowitsch, that monarch of spruce glooms was watching them in mild curiosity. He had come silently along the well-beaten path, moving with a peculiar soundlessness despite his bulk and the spread of antlers which in this summer season were still "in the velvet." That is, the bone which later would take on almost flintlike hardness was now spongy and covered with skin and fuzzy hair. Even in their present undeveloped stage, the antlers gave strong promise of the kingly spread they would possess when old Mowitsch reached his matchless fighting prime during the love moon of the fall. No bull moose in all that wild region could boast a set of antlers so heavy and so wide as were those of this forest king who loved the cool, shadowy chancels of the spruce trees which fringed marshy lakes and muskeg swamps.

Years ago as a young bull he had driven this very trail through to the river, that he might spend winter and spring in the lowland, and later work upward to the wooded ridges when the mosquitoes and black flies came and the cool greenery of vegetation followed the receding snows toward the summit. There among the high hills he would gather with antlered clansmen during calling season when the love moon hung in the heavens and at dawn and eve-

ning the hoarse challenge of mighty gladiators went echoing from slope to slope.

Year by year his prowess grew until there came a time when no other bull for many miles around could match him in strength and sagacity. Of human beings, he saw none except these two men who had come into his domain. Mowitsch regarded them with distrust which bordered on fear during all seasons save when he was in quest of love; as for other enemies, the grizzlies, the black bears, and even the gray wolves—he feared them not at all. He did, however, understand that when the snows were deep and the gray wolves hunted in packs they were to be respected; but with his craft in planning out the yards which he and some particular band of moose would use during the winter, he could cope with the wolves.

As for the men whom he tolerated in his region, caution whispered to him that they were more deadly than any of the wild creatures which he knew. They could kill from afar with a clap of thunder and a flash of lightning. So he avoided them except during the weeks when he was insane with the fighting rage which attacks all bull moose in the fall. Had he met the men at that time he would have forced the issue, but chance so far had decreed that both he and they should be spared that climax. Now, after watching the men set out on the trail in the direction of the river, old Mowitsch turned and made his way back into the hills.

There was no truculence in him at this moment. For many weeks after he had cast his antlers during the snows of February, old Mowitsch had become morose and sulky, as though he resented the rôle of an uncrowned monarch which he was compelled to play. It was only when the knobs of new antlers appeared and began to grow amazingly, giving promise that he would be restored to dignity, that his spirits appeared to lift. But now his antlers had not attained their full spread and until they did so and he had assiduously polished the velvet from them, so that the palmated bone became white and hard, he would feel no desire to do battle.

Back into the hills Mowitsch went that day, occasionally meeting other moose who regarded him without fear and whom he in turn calmly ignored. In the weeks that passed, his antlers attained their full weight and width and became weapons with which he could properly defend himself against any and all enemies save man. But of men he saw nothing. Yet twice he was to meet them; and the last meeting would come about in the heart of a spruce swamp during December, when succeeding blizzards had piled the drifts many feet deep until old Mowitsch and his little band of moose were compelled to work constantly to keep their yard open. Meanwhile, he fought many battles, and always he triumphed, for he was a monarch of his clan and had wisdom as well as strength.

In all the many years during which moose had inhabited these high slopes along the Stikine, the antlered clansmen had never flourished as now. The sons of old Mowitsch were lusty young bulls who gave promise of some day attaining the magnificence of their sire. And because old Ep White had vowed that no one should harm the great bull whose sway was otherwise unchallenged, the reign of Mowitsch bade fair to continue in the way in which nature had intended from the first. When Mowitsch had pioneered a trail through to the river he had wrought more than he knew. He had saved the lives of Ep White and Jim Travers, and if White kept his word, old Mowitsch, monarch of spruce glooms, had nothing to fear.

But the vows of men, no matter how solemnly made, have been broken before this. For fate sometimes has a cruel

way of arranging circumstances which leave the wild kindred bewildered and helpless. Old Mowitsch had come to believe that, after all, the men intended him no harm. But Mowitsch, being merely a wild creature, could not reckon with the unforeseen.

Before the first snowfall, old Ep White and Jim Travers were back in the hills once more at the head of Glacier Creek. They had a good outfit, for they intended to spend the winter running a trap line and prospecting on the side. It was old Ep White's idea that they should take plenty of grub.

"For the reason that we're not goin' to have much fresh meat this winter, Jim," he explained. "Yuh know I've sworn that I'm never goin' to kill a moose again after the two of us were saved this summer by strikin' old Mowitsch's trail to the river. We'd fooled around in the hills too long then with a light outfit, figurin' as we did on gettin' plenty of moose meat. But we can't count on that this winter because we're not goin' to kill any moose."

Travers grunted.

"Chances are we won't have to, with all this outlay of grub we've got," he remarked sourly. "It's cost us a heap of money just because of your fool notion that we can't kill moose. We've got plenty of vegetables, and maybe we can pick up a young bear or two before the snow comes. Yuh haven't any fool ideas about not killin' bear, have yuh?" he inquired with mild sarcasm.

Old Ep shook his head.

"No, I can't say that I have," he replied. "Not much sentiment where a b'ar is concerned. I once had a grizzly jump me when I was pannin' a sand bar. I wasn't harmin' him, but maybe he thought I was after fish, the same as he was. Anyway, he charged me without warnin', and if I hadn't dropped him with a lucky shot I wouldn't be here now.

"Again, I met one on the trail when I didn't have any gun, and he put me up a tree, so I'm perfectly willin' to eat b'ar meat, but no moose. I'm not ungrateful, and I can't forget what old Mowitsch and the rest of his kind did for us last summer."

Yet it was apparent that Travers did not share his partner's viewpoint concerning the killing of moose; if a man was hungry, he took food where he found it. No sentiment about that. So the matter rested.

When the first blizzard came, the partners had a well-laid-out trap line, and had also started a prospect hole on a gravel bar in the near-by creek, where they had obtained a promising showing of coarse gold. It was agreed that while one man ran the trap line the other would drive the prospect hole down to bed-rock, where gold might be found in abundance. Travers, being younger and the more active of the two, took charge of the trap line, while to old Ep fell the duty of keeping the work going in the shaft.

Before that first blizzard, however, the meeting with old Mowitsch came about in a way which strained the truce to the breaking point.

Indian summer had come to the Northland. The deciduous trees, such as willows, birches, aspens, and cottonwoods, were marvelously beautiful in soft-toned pastel shades, with here and there a broad splash of crimson or ochre. The nights had a bitter chill which forewarned of winter. Yet by noon of each day the sun beat down with surprising warmth, crisping the fallen leaves which had already become banked in the windrows until the woods were what Travers termed "noisy." Morning and night along the edges of marshy lakes in the great muskeg flats could be heard the challenging bellow of moose bulls, and now and then the rough, but not unmusical reply of

moose cows. There were tremendous thrashings and flailings in the thickets as some pugnacious bull vanquished an imaginary enemy; there were, too, battles which were anything but unreal. Giant bulls fought vindictively with one another while the mild-eyed cows looked on with interest, but no fear. Time after time, Travers, laying out his trap line, building various "cubbies" for marten and lynx, planning "blind sets" for fox and wolf, and judiciously placing a few otter traps in pools of waterways which would not wholly freeze over during the coldest part of the winter, could have killed a moose with ease. But he forbore to do so because he realized that old Ep was peculiarly averse toward harming any of the antlered clan whose trail had saved the two men the previous summer. So Travers avoided the bulls, who were unquestionably truculent and full of fight at this season.

Late one afternoon Travers was studying the shore of a small lake which was almost entirely surrounded by willows, with here and there a lone spruce. He was looking for the lake's outlet, the indications being that the body of water had been formed by a great beaver dam built many years ago. If that were true, it was probable that beaver still lived in this large pond, and there would be many of them. During the winter and spring, when their fur was at its prime, he would add their pelts to his catch of fur.

He had found one end of the beaver dam at last, and had carelessly put down his gun with the intention of walking out upon the interwoven mass by means of a pole to keep his footing, when he heard a crashing of brush directly behind him. Whirling, Travers found himself face to face with a giant bull moose. He knew that this was old Mowitsch himself.

Throughout the day, Travers had heard the bellowing of bulls, but had paid no attention, being absorbed in his work. He recalled now that he had been hearing a deeper and more resonant bellow, undoubtedly the call of old Mowitsch as the shaggy monarch approached the lake. Carelessly enough, Travers had allowed himself to be cornered here by the beaver dam.

At the moment the bull appeared, Travers' gun was standing against a tree some thirty feet distant. Realizing instantly that he was in dire peril, Travers made the mistake of jumping for the weapon. And at that instant, old Mowitsch charged!

Travers, cursing, saw that he could not reach the gun in time. A near-by spruce offered sanctuary. Turning, he leaped for the bole of the tree, and climbed as quickly as he could. He was six feet off the ground when, with an angered roar, Mowitsch went charging beneath.

Pivoting on four feet, when he saw that he had missed the man, the great bull came back. But Travers was already out of reach. Mowitsch fell to butting the tree savagely; and at last he stood on his hind legs, while he sought to hook the tip of one antler in the man who clung to the trunk just out of reach.

For an hour thereafter, old Mowitsch raged back and forth beneath the huddled man. The great bull roared defiance, urging the man to come down and fight; he butted the tree savagely, and actually succeeded in tearing off large splinters from the trunk. With his strong, yellow teeth, he ripped at the bark, as though hoping that he could pull down the tree. He pawed the ground, bellowing his hoarse challenge.

By and by, as though tiring of the sport, he left off and moved sulkily away in the brush, while Travers, breathing a prayer of thanksgiving that the bull had not located the gun standing against the near-by tree, prepared to descend. Travers was no more than

halfway down the trunk, however, when Mowitsch came charging back; and the man quickly sought safety among the limbs again.

Some time later, the bull once more apparently gave up the siege, and stalked majestically away. But it was only a ruse, as Travers quickly learned. Again Mowitsch came hurrying back, hoping to catch the man at a disadvantage.

By this time, Travers was not only thoroughly angered, but he was also worried. He knew the habits of these giant bulls, and recalled that a friend of his had once been treed all night. It began to look as though he might undergo the same ordeal. Then it was that he hit on a plan.

He would have shot the bull, regardless of old Ep White, if he had possessed the gun. But he was weaponless. In his mackinaw pocket, however, was a pouch of smoking tobacco. The next time Mowitsch came snorting under the tree, and reared in an effort to get at his quarry, Travers was ready for him.

Travers had powdered a quantity of the tobacco, and this he carefully dusted into the nostrils of the bull!

The effect was astonishing. With a resounding snort, Mowitsch dropped forefeet to earth, and sneezed violently. There followed sneeze after sneeze, as the astounded bull, gripped by paroxysms from the stinging tobacco in his tender nostrils, sought to rid himself of the stuff. But the irritation of it grew. Thereupon, seized with sudden panic, the bull fled ingloriously from the spot, while Travers nearly fell out of the tree in uncontrolled laughter.

A few moments later, Travers was on the ground, and with the gun in his hand once more, he set out directly for home. Although the incident still made him chuckle, he had declared a feud on old Mowitsch. The next time they met, Travers vowed that he would shoot to kill, no matter whether his sentimental partner liked it or not. Travers considered that he had been unjustly treated by the big bull.

But he saw nothing of Mowitsch; and at last came the first heavy blizzard of the season. A week after that snowfall, fate struck savagely at the two partners who proposed to winter in their cabin at the headwaters of Glacier Creek.

Travers was away on the trap line when the thing happened, while old Ep, as usual, was busy in the shaft down on the gravel bar. Carelessly, the old man had left the door of the cabin partly open. When he returned at dark, and lit a candle, a sight of desolation within the cabin met his eyes. Everything was strewn topsy-turvy. Grub was spilled over the floor, some of it partly eaten, the remainder defiled. The atmosphere was strong with the horrid taint of that wilderness fiend, the wolverene!

Almost overcome by what he saw, and at the significance of the thing, old Ep weakly sat down on a stool to ponder the situation. It was the kind of blow which the partners had never expected. Ep knew full well the habits of wolverenes, knew that there were plenty of the cunning beasts in the country, but it had never occurred to him that one of them might visit the cabin while it was unguarded.

"We're sunk!" old Ep exclaimed aloud after a moment. "Not a blasted thing left. We're snowed in, miles from civilization, and not a blessed thing to eat. That cussed wolverene sp'iled it all. What will Jim say when he sees this!"

He got up to make a closer inspection of the wreckage. A rather large, square can caught his eye, and he smiled in sudden triumph.

"A can o' bacon, by cracky!" he exclaimed. "Enough there to keep us goin' for several days. Mebbe we can get out of here after all. We've got our

snowshoes, and with that can o' bacon, we can make it to Bob Latimer's cabin at the mouth of Glacier Creek."

A noise outside caused him to turn. Standing there in the doorway was Jim Travers. Even in the dim glow from the candle, old Ep could see that his partner's face was white and drawn, for he, too, realized what the situation meant.

"Waal, anyway, we've got a can o' bacon left," remarked old Ep at last. "That danged wolverene couldn't get at it—the tin was too thick. I'm hungry, too. Reckon we'd better start a fire and have a mess o' bacon, anyway."

Travers strode forward. "Gimme that can," he said. Old Ep handed it over. With the back of his hunting-knife blade, Travers cut out the top of the can, and sniffed at the contents.

"*Rancid,* just as I expected!" he exclaimed. "I opened a can of bacon the other day, and it was the same way. That trader at Telegraph Creek sold us bacon that isn't fit to eat!"

Old Ep sniffed at the bacon.

"A mite sour, all right," he admitted. "Still, I've eaten worse. Anyway, that's all we've got, isn't it?"

Travers turned on him.

"Not all the meat we *can* get," he retorted. "I'm goin' out at daylight tomorrow, *to get a moose!* Hear me? And it's goin' to be that cussed bull who treed me a few weeks ago. I know the swamp where he's yarded up. If I hadn't been so busy with the trap line, I'd have settled matters with him before this!"

He glared at his partner as though expecting protest, but got none. The disaster which threatened them was too imminent. Old Ep sighed.

"Reckon yuh're right, Jim," he agreed after a time. "I plumb hate to break my word, though, and old Mowitsch saved our lives last summer——"

"And tried to kill me later!" interjected Travers.

Ep shrugged. "Old Mowitsch was crazy, then," he pointed out. "He didn't know what he was doin'. Right now he's sane again, and bent only on protectin' his band, wherever he has 'em yarded up. Too bad we didn't take the trouble to get a b'ar before they holed up, like we'd planned. But it's too late for that now. Anyway, Jim, *I* can eat that there bacon, even if she's a mite high and racy."

"Well, *I* won't!" retorted Travers. "Moose meat for mine, and no fool idea of sentiment is goin' to save that big bull this time!"

Before dawn, he was under way.

The day was cloudy and rather warm, for snow had fallen during the night and the air was still murky. Travers, wearing snowshoes, and with his carbine in the crook of his arm, set a straight course for a distant swamp which was considerably off the usual route he took in going over the trap line. But he had reason to believe that the monarch of all moose in this region had taken up his abode in the place, for the man had seen a well-marked winter trail of moose, with the great tracks of the antlered king plainly visible, headed in that direction, and he surmised that the swamp was the destination of the band. That had come immediately after the first heavy snowfall. Since then, the band had remained sheltered in the swamp, and there they would stay until spring.

In the fresh snow, many other tracks were apparent to Travers. These, however, belonged to the predatory clan—the weasels, fishers, foxes. Once he paused for a long minute to study the big imprints of timber wolves. The thing which interested him most about the wolf tracks was that the gray marauders had evidently banded together, for there were imprints of different sizes. He cursed softly as he thought of how the accidental loss of their grub

had spoiled what promised to be a wonderful winter's trapping. Fur was in abundance. But the thing to do now was to get meat—moose meat, at that—and get out of the country. Without a variation of diet from that of straight meat, Travers did not dare chance a winter in this region. He went on presently. It was mid-afternoon when he came out at the mouth of a steep-walled canyon, and saw, just to the north, the swamp wherein he believed he would find old Mowitsch and the moose herd.

During the summer, a stream poured from the canyon, and this kept the swamp in a semiliquid state; but now the stream was frozen at its source. At the bottom of the canyon was a mass of windfalls, the crisscrossed trunks forming an almost impassable tangle. Yet Travers knew that he would have to get across, somehow, for he wished to enter the swamp from the opposite side.

A single tree which had fallen diagonally across the canyon offered a seemingly easy solution of the problem. Careful of his footing, for the upper side of the tree trunk had a light coating of snow, Travers set out.

Each step he took was well thought-out before he essayed it, for a slip might mean death among the windfalls below. Cautiously, like a tight-rope walker, he went ahead. He was nearly over when he felt the tree sag, as one end, lodged against the opposite bank, settled slightly. Fearing that it was about to fall, he took a chance and leaped for a solid footing but a few feet away.

But at the same instant, a piece of loose bark slid from under his right foot. Before he could help it, his other foot went off the log, and he was rolling and plunging toward the bottom of the canyon.

He struck with a stunning impact, yet the depth of the soft snow, which cushioned the windfalls at the bottom, saved his life. Nevertheless, he was knocked out, and lay there moveless, one ankle twisted oddly askew.

It was perhaps half an hour later that consciousness returned, and with it the most excruciating agony, so that he had all he could do to keep from crying out. Indeed, the pain was so acute that he feared the ankle was broken.

Where his gun had fallen, he could not see. Probably it was not far away, and he could retrieve it without great difficulty. But he could not bear weight on the injured foot. He could crawl, it is true, but that would be a desperate way to get himself out of this place and back to the cabin. Travers realized that the killing of old Mowitsch would have to wait; the important thing now was to save his own life.

He believed that if he could whittle out a pair of crutches, he would be able to hobble back home. With his knife he set to work.

Yet this was not so easy as it seemed at first. Limbs which were suitable for crutches were hard to find; those within his reach were too small or too crooked. He was compelled to inch himself through the snow until he found branches of suitable size. Thereafter, came the task of whittling them into shape.

He worked on without thought of passing time. The afternoon was waning when he had fallen, and for some time he had been unconscious. Every indication was that it would be dark before he finished his work and got out of the canyon. Yet he manfully set himself to it.

The immutable silence of the wintry wilderness was unbroken. Just to the left of him was the swamp wherein old Mowitsch had a yard. Behind, ahead, and to the right rose the snow-covered hills, ghostlike and breathlessly white. But Travers had no eye for the sheer, wild beauty of it; he was concerned solely with the thought of getting out

of here before the weather changed and another storm arrived.

The early twilight of the Northern winter was at hand when he had completed his task.

The crutches were makeshift at best, but they would serve his purpose. The difficulty lay in using them in spots where the snow was deep. But as he could not stand the pain of putting weight on his injured foot, he knew that he would have to manage to get through despite the difficulty of it. He had lifted himself, and began looking about for his gun, when a weird sound caused him to freeze in an attitude of listening.

The howl of a wolf! It came from a ridge beyond the swamp, perhaps half a mile distant, but almost immediately it was answered from a point much nearer. Travers listened further, and for some reason which he could not readily define, he found himself slightly uneasy. Perhaps it was because he was accustomed always to having his gun while he was out in the wilds like this. But he heard the wolf call no more. He concluded that the eerie summons and answer had been voiced by members of the pack whose trail he had seen earlier that day.

Where was his gun? Hobbling forward on the clumsy crutches, he scanned the vicinity carefully, but evidently the weapon had fallen muzzle downward and had become buried in the snow. However, he was convinced that he could find it with a little patient searching. Suddenly, one of his crutches gave way under his weight, and he plunged face downward in the snow, his head striking a half-covered log. The shock of it dazed him, unsteady as he had been from the previous fall. It seemed, then, that he heard another wolf call, but he could not be sure.

To his ears, however, came very clearly the sound of somebody moving through the swamp, for he could hear the swish of snow-laden brush being pushed aside. Still he lay there in the snow, trying to collect his thoughts. Another wolf call, and he knew that whatever was moving down there in the swamp, was coming closer. But at last it stopped, as he raised himself, and he could not make out what it was.

Rather worriedly, he resumed the search for his gun. By dint of much patient prodding with his crutches, he at last located the spot where it had gone down between two windfalls. This meant that he would have to dig through the snow and then work it out of the brush into which it had lodged. He was about to do so, when a movement on the opposite rim of the canyon caught his eye.

A wolf! A great, gray fellow stood there, regarding him without fear. Doubtless, the tall beast sensed with intuitive cunning that the man was injured and harmless. As Travers watched, with growing concern, the first wolf was joined by another; then two more. Four of them stood looking down at him curiously. Then from down in the swamp came the wolf call again!

The beasts at the rim of the canyon turned statuesquely to face the direction whence came the call, but they gave no answer. Suddenly, Travers gasped—for the biggest of the four had started down into the canyon, with an intention which could not be mistaken. Leading the others, who dropped in behind, the wolf was coming directly toward him!

Panic-stricken despite himself, Travers resumed his efforts to get at the gun. Frantically he dug down through the snow, until he could nearly touch the butt of the weapon with his hand. As he worked, he tried to keep watch of those shadowy, ghostly figures weaving through the windfalls toward him. Evidently the beasts feared to walk logs, being unlike any of the great

hunting cats in that respect, but were content to fathom the intricacies of interlaced limbs of the fallen trees. Yet they were coming on.

Suddenly, the crashing of brush in the swamp was renewed, and from the fastness of spruce there emerged a moose herd—four cows, two yearlings, and old Mowitsch himself! Travers knew then that the four wolves he glimpsed were but part of a band which had split to round up the moose in the swamp. While several of the wolves "drove" the swamp, forcing the moose out of it, a quartet of the marauders had swung around to head off escape. Had the four not been attracted by Travers' plight, they would have already been down in the swamp, ready to cut off retreat on the part of old Mowitsch and his herd. As it was now, the moose were coming out.

Travers saw the giant bull with mingled feelings. Mowitsch still carried his wide spread of palmated antlers, and would do so for at least two months yet. As he moved along at the rear of the little herd, guarding against attack from the wolves he knew to be lurking behind, old Mowitsch carried his antlers close to his shoulders, which kept his nose proudly high. It was apparent that along the side of the canyon where Travers lay, there ran an old moose trail, now covered with snow, but one which the moose evidently knew well, and which would take him out of the narrow confines of the swamp. On more open ground, the moose herd might successfully withstand attack by the wolves.

But the coming of the moose had changed the situation for Travers. The wolves regarded the moose as legitimate prey, whereas the man, helpless though he appeared to be, might be dangerous after all. As a long-drawn-out cry came from the members of the pack drawing the swamp, the quartet of gray marauders turned away from Travers and closed in swiftly to head off the moose herd.

With startled whistlings, as they saw the wolves, the moose stopped, and old Mowitsch, hackles lifted ominously, came hurrying up. Bellowing his anger, he flung himself forward and, silently, the bloodthirsty wolves began to close in.

Back and forth across the snow at the edge of the swamp the battle raged, the wolves seeking to cut out one of the cows or a yearling, while old Mowitsch, in his fighting prime, was here, there, and everywhere at once. He struck with heavy forefeet at the shifting, gray ghosts who hung about the herd, and who were reënforced when the other wolves arrived. In magnificent style, he covered all fronts of the enemy at once, and no strategic move on the part of the wolves misled him. Two of the wolves he killed outright, catching them with astonishing quick side-swipes of his great antlers; but the attackers likewise counted coup. One of the yearlings was badly gashed by their cutting fangs; nevertheless, he managed to keep on his feet, and with head down, hold his place in the embattled ring. For minutes the fight went on, while the twilight deepened, and the canyon echoed to the horrid sounds of strife.

Suddenly, the clash of antlers, the vicious snarling, and the occasional bellow which was the battle cry of old Mowitsch, was cut through with a whip-like report. One of the wolves, in the very act of hamstringing the old gladiator, leaped in the air, to fall kicking in the snow. Travers, having recovered his gun and blown the snow out of the barrel, had taken a hand in the fight.

Again the gun spoke, and another wolf fell. Even as the gray attackers, awed by the death-dealing agency which the man had invoked, melted into the gloom, a third bullet, cutting through a clump of willows, took vengeance for

many slaughtered wild things. With three of the wolves shot down, the others were gone with miraculous abruptness.

Then, for the first time, old Mowitsch saw the man crouched there among the windfalls; and the fighting king, whose muzzle was flecked with foam and whose chest had been laid open in a dozen places by the slashing fangs of his foes, blew a defiant blast, while he regarded the man suspiciously. Indeed, he moved a pace forward, while the other moose, trembling in the presence of man, watched in fascinated curiosity.

But Travers did not move, nor did the rifle speak again. It was apparent to old Mowitsch that the man did not wish to do battle. Suddenly, then, the spell snapped, and the old monarch turned about to lead his little herd back into the spruce glooms.

By noon of the following day, Jim Travers, worn and haggard, but still able to keep going, reached the cabin on Glacier Creek. His ankle injury had, after all, proved to be only a sprain, and within a few days would be as well as ever. As he limped up to the cabin, old Ep White greeted him, with evident relief.

"Just on the p'int of startin' out after yuh," he explained. "See any moose?"

Travers nodded, as he set his gun against the cabin wall, and sank gratefully into a chair.

"Saw old Mowitsch himself, and his herd," he replied. Then, as though changing the subject:

"I'll be ready to start for the outside by to-morrow mornin', if my ankle isn't any worse than it is now. We'll reach Bob Latimer's within a week."

"Yuh shot old Mowitsch, then?" queried Ep doubtfully.

Travers looked at him as though surprised. "Me?" he asked. "Why, no. I changed my mind. If he hadn't come up when he did, I reckon a pack of wolves would be quarrelin' over my bones right now. I figger that if *you* can eat that bacon until we get to Latimer's, why, I can, too!"

EXIT THE WILD HORSE

THE broomtail pony and the wild burro are rapidly vanishing from the Western plains, says a recent report from Santa Fe, New Mexico. The reason for the wholesale onslaught against these animals is largely economic, since conservation of grass has been advocated by bankers and professors at agricultural colleges who have studied the problem of making semiarid land produce an income.

Inauguration of this policy of economy necessarily sounded the death knell for numbers of wild horses. In fact, the value of horses in the West has been steadily decreasing, since the truck and tractor have taken a prominent part in ranch and farm life. As a consequence, many horses have been turned loose on the open range. They have multiplied rapidly, but the stock has deteriorated. Many ranchmen have not bothered to brand their colts, because they do not wish to pay taxes on animals having little market value.

These horses wander at large, eating grass which would feed somebody's valuable cattle. Montana was the first State to legislate against these "abandoned" animals. And Wyoming was quick to follow its example in passing a law requiring the round-up and sale of the wild horses. Now the New Mexico Cattle and Horse Growers' Association is legislating to clear the ranges in that State.

The horses are driven to "reduction" plants, where they are sold for a very small sum. So the lands which supported almost worthless beasts is turned over to cattle worth at least fifty dollars a head.

West of the West

By George Gilbert

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

TIRED of the monotony of life on the BQ, Phil Byers and Cindy McGlone start for the longhorn country. They help Mercedes and Aloise Rounsell, who are vainly trying to rope a bull and, despite the enmity of the numerous Rounsell clan, are taken on by "Long John" Rounsell. He warns them to expect work and trouble.

The partners start to see if the Blanders of the B Star are rustling R Cross cattle. Aloise warns them that she and Mercedes are friendly with Ossie and Teke Blander. Rather dampened by this announcement, the partners determine to see what fate has in store for them, and ride toward Mystery Canyon.

CHAPTER IV.

MYSTERY CANYON.

THE way was upward for the most part. Here and there the riders came across bunches of long-horned cattle, big of eye, wide of forehead, lithe of build, quick of action. Some of the bulls bellowed and seemed about to charge. Two or three did charge, but the nimble cow ponies of the two riders took them out of harm's way. Phil and Cindy laughed at the sullen-fronted old bulls and viewed with pleasure the friskiness of the pretty dun calves, lively as lambs in a fenced pasture. It was a natural cow country they were traversing, with good grass and mottes of small timber to shelter the beeves from the sun and the most persistent of the flies. Toward noon they began to notice that the tracks of cattle had a tendency to bunch and head toward the notch in the sky line that they knew for the place where Mystery Canyon broke over the mesa rim. Later, they found the reason—a north-and-south sink appeared, and in it was water. Down its sides angled cow paths to the pools. The bed of this sink lifted and became even with the land in general; then it was just the bed of a little stream coming from Mystery.

The canyon showed by its dark color that evergreens grew in it, and away up at the top end of it the blue of spruce appeared. The canyon widened below its *bajada* into a huge natural pasture of slightly rolling land, with mottes of little timber, and piles of rock, and false beds of old streams, showing where the canyon's discharge in cloudbursts had torn up new channels in other decades, leaving them now

grass-filled hiding places for wild animals or cattle almost as wild as the mountain elk.

It was here, at the beginning of this big natural pasture, that Phil and Cindy jumped their first small bunch of R Cross stuff. They saw the cattle go scudding away behind some scrub growth and went after them, then saw the brand on them and let them go. The two were heading toward the end of the canyon when Phil jerked his thumb down to indicate something new, and Cindy rode over. A wheel of stick ends showed, with a burned-out spot where the spokes of the wheel had centered.

"Some one heated a runnin' iron right he'e, and not so long ago," Cindy said, and Phil nodded.

"Say a couple—or possibly three days ago."

Cindy nodded in his turn.

They rode away, keeping a careful watch.

"Might not've been crooked, at that," Phil remarked.

"No, they brand in the open out this way."

"Still——"

"What's that?"

Something was stealing away behind some thick shrubs to the right. They started their horses with a rush and crashed through the thicket. On the other side, they saw a yearling going like a rocket. They lifted their ponies to a high lope and the mounts responded, for this looked like business to them. Phil was first to get within fair distance and he made fast to the neck. The young longhorn at once began a war dance out at the end of the rope, head toward the horse. His eye rolled and he tried to bawl. He put down his head and started to charge, but just then Cindy's lass rope hind-footed him and he rolled over, stretched out between two loyal cow horses, each keeping a rope taut. Cindy and Phil alighted and went to inspect the brand on the yearling.

"Made over," Phil said.

"And a good job, too," Cindy agreed. "That extra loop, makin' R over into B, and those extra strokes makin' that cross into a star were only made day or two ago."

"Most likely at that fire, whe'e we saw those burned sticks."

"That's just it."

They went back to their horses after they had eased up on the ropes. The longhorn yearling came to his feet with a bawl, hostile and pop-eyed. He charged first one, then the other of the pair. Then he went grumbling off into another motte of small stuff.

"He seems quite a nuisance t' himself," Phil commented.

"He sure does."

They were laying their ropes smooth and snug into place, when their horses snapped their ears toward the canyon mouth.

"I guess we're goin' t' have visitors," Phil said.

Cindy curled his left leg around the horn of his saddle and eased over to stand on his right foot in the stirrup. Phil sat easily, watching the canyon end. Presently, with ring of bridle chain and tinkle of spur, two men rode out into view, straight toward the two waiting punchers. They were straight-backed riders and their saddles were center-fire and their outfit generally "on the pretty." Silver showed on bridle and saddle, and they wore high-steepled hats with unusually flashy bands.

"They're probably shadow-watchers, fond of their resemblance to themse'ves," Phil remarked.

The two came silently on, reins held high, bodies swaying, left hands at hips. Their guns were big. Their eyes were black and prominent; their faces were olive tan, and each had a straight line of hair across his lip. Down their

backs rippled a cascade of wavy black hair, falling to the shoulders.

"Watch they don't get us between them," Cindy warned.

"Pretty boys; they look alike."

"They'll be those Blanders that Aloise spoke about."

"Pretty lads, t' sing serenades and smile at girls."

The newcomers came on silently, firmly holding their glances on the two young punchers. They were about of an age—twenty-five or twenty-six, Phil hinted to Cindy, who nodded agreement.

No word was said as the two drew closer and closer. The steady *clip-clop* of the hoofs of their horses was all that broke the silence. Alazan and Sombrio eyed the mounts knowingly. Phil and Cindy each had his bridle reins half taut, ready for anything.

The right-hand rider said something in a low voice. His companion moved away. Phil's voice crossed the intervening space ringingly:

"Keep comin' *close t'gether, cowboys!*"

The two swung back together at once and came on again, smiling now and seemingly taking it all as a joke.

They drew up near the two friends and eyed them closely.

"What was yo' 'fraid of?" one of the Blanders asked.

"We're not afraid; we're only careful," Phil answered.

"Of what?" the other brother demanded.

"Don't be so foolish. We didn't want *t' get in between.*"

"Suspectin' us?"

"No, but respectin' our own hides. Now, yo' two rode up as if yo' had a bone t' pick with some one."

"We have. Yo' roped down a B Star yearlin'. We saw it, with a glass, from up the canyon."

"Yes, and yo' looked pretty well at the brand," Teke chimed in.

"We had a right t' do that li'le thing."

"Yo' ain't setting up as a brand inspector?"

"For R Cross, yes."

"Yo' two aren't Rounsells."

"We ride for them. We saw a yearlin' that looked queer. We roped him down and looked at the brand."

"What did yo' find?"

"That he had been R Cross and had been made over into B Star."

The faces of the two Blander brothers clouded with mounting anger. One said to the other:

"Ossie, this is pretty raw."

"Sure is, Teke."

They eyed the two friends with lowering brows.

"Scowls never scared us any," Phil said.

"If hard looks'd kill, we'd died long ago," Cindy came in.

"Yo' ain't hinting that we Blanders worked over an R Cross calf into a B star?" demanded Ossie Blander.

"Some one did. I never heard of its being done by some one that didn't expect t' profit by it," Phil came back quietly.

"This is more than we can stand," Teke spoke sharply.

"We done hung up our story; now find fault, if yo' can," Cindy put in.

A whispered word passed from one brother to the other. Then Ossie demanded sharply:

"What did the Rounsells send yo' two over this way for?"

"It's none of yo'r business, but we was sent t' comb this end of Mystery and drive in what we found of R Cross stuff."

"Why didn't the Rounsells come themselves?"

"I'm not runnin' their business for them——"

"I'm waitin'!" Cindy crisply challenged. With magic swiftness, he had thrown his gun forward. The two Blanders drew their hands back from

their hips with speed that told of guilty consciences. Phil's gun seconded that of his partner.

"I guess that lets yo'-all out," Phil drawled. "Go back the way yo' came and don't make any mistakes with those saddle guns; we got a pair, too."

The Blanders turned their horses and rode back into the canyon mouth, muttering and at times turning back to scowl. As soon as they got at long-six range the two friends slipped their short guns into holsters and snapped out their rifles and sat with them ready. The brothers had disappeared into the canyon's mysterious lower winding trails.

"They saw us from some place up that slot; they may have a big eight-square Henry cached for long-range work," Phil reminded Cindy.

At a signal, the two whirled their ponies and vanished to either side, each taking shelter in a small motte of timber. No sooner had they started their horses than a heavy *boom* came from the canyon, and a big buffalo-gun slug whined down across the spot they had been occupying.

"Yo' guessed them out all right, pardner," Cindy yelled to Phil across the open space.

"Yes, and I see the smoke of that old eight-square," Phil replied. "And some one moving on a hoss. This rifle won't shoot that far on the dot, but I'm raisin' my sights away up and seein' what I can do."

The report of his rifle was followed by a yell of pain, and then Phil announced that the horses of their foes had bolted up the canyon, each carrying a rider.

"It was a chance shot," Phil explained. "I think he was merely nicked, as I could only see his arm and shoulder on one side. I didn't want t' kill any one."

"Well, when a man's throwin' buffalo slugs at me he'd better watch out, if I get a chance at him," Cindy replied.

"Yo're so fierce yo'll bite off yo'r own face some time. I'm goin' t' look-see what that canyon is like."

"They may be waiting up it a ways for us."

"Well, then, we'll take a chance."

Phil and Cindy rode for the *bajada,* a low mass of gravel and detritus against the west wall of the canyon's mouth. At the east side of the mouth, the water had sought egress from the canyon and that was the trail used by men and game and cattle in going up or down the canyon. Alazan and Sombrio cocked their ears at the dark shadows above and picked their way carefully. The sign of the two Blanders was plain in the bed of the trickle, coming down and going back.

"I reckon that that li'le shoulder of rock around this bend is a lookout place for them," Phil judged, pointing to the spot. They rode forward carefully now. They did not go at once to the shoulder indicated, but past it. There they found the sign of the two Blanders, after they had left the lookout, on their way back up the canyon trail. Some red drops showed that Phil's bullet had taken some effect. The partners swung from their horses and went up to the shoulder of rock. Behind it they found the old buffalo gun, which had been hastily thrust back under the rocks, without being wrapped in the oiled cloth from which it had been taken in the attempt to score a long-distance kill with it. From the rock shoulder Phil and Cindy could easily see everything out beyond the canyon mouth. It was a natural lookout spot. They rewrapped the gun and concealed it again. There were extra shells for it in a tin can.

The two friends then scouted up the winding canyon, and as they went, they could see that the two Blanders had gone, at a rapid pace, toward home.

"I guess they'll keep on goin'," Cindy admitted, after Phil had said several times that the brothers evidently had decided not to remain and fight.

By this time the two friends were far into the canyon. They had passed several very steep side troughs, leading into the main canyon, but had not seen anything that looked like a real branch that could be used as a trail.

"I wonder if there's a real mystery about this canyon, pardner."

"I don't rightly know, Cindy. By the Alamo, it sure looks mysterious."

"I think it's a lot in the name."

"It got the name somehow, though."

They turned back. They had penetrated perhaps two miles into the canyon, and now were at a point whence they could see the upper notch of it come out onto the mesa top beyond.

No sooner had they turned than their horses walled their eyes, snapped back their ears, and began to snort. Twin yellow orbs glowed a moment at the base of a big wall of rock. There was the whisking of a long tail, the fleeting sight of sleek dun sides, and then the animal was gone, disappearing at the west side of the canyon base.

"Cougar!"

"By the Alamo, he melted right into the rock."

"Cougars don't melt that a way."

They had snapped out their guns almost unconsciously. They rode forward slowly. Neither Alazan nor Sombrio wanted to go close to where the scent of the lion was so thick. They started back, snorted, walled their eyes and snapped their ears back into fighting position time and time again.

"He must've had a hole under these rocks," Cindy said.

"Look out yo' don't come onto a pair of them in a den with young."

"I guess yo' don't know that a she-cougar don't let her mate come near the li'le cougar kitties, because he'll eat them if he can get t' them."

"Yo'r lecture on natural history won't save yo'r hide if yo' come onto a she-cougar with young."

"I'm goin' t' have a look-see, anyhow."

Cindy alighted, catlike, before the place where the big cougar had disappeared. The rock wall loomed high, for there the canyon turned upon itself rather sharply. There were vines, close hung, making a curtain that started at the rock foot and serpentined far above.

Cindy poked his gun into the place where the big lion had gone in. Alazan was dancing at the end of his bridle rein, which Phil had secured to make sure that the pony would not bolt. Sombrio, too, had his ears cocked at Cindy, showing by his snorts that he disapproved of thus trying to come at close grips with a mountain lion.

"Big hole in that place," Cindy grunted, pulling himself back out of it, "and it smells too fresh t' be a lion's den."

"How big is it?"

"I'm goin' t' find out," and he began to pull aside the vines, revealing a big entrance into a slot between the rocks.

"Tie that vine curtain back with ropes, and cows would go into that slot, if pressed," said Phil. "It's got a good bottom, too, regular rock bottom."

"I wonder," Cindy said, "if that's the beginning of the side branch they never found out, the one that makes this Mystery Canyon."

"Those vines might not always have been over that slot. They might've been planted by some one that wanted t' cover up a good opening for a small bunch of stolen cattle or hosses t' be drifted into."

"That's just it. Those vines are just a natural screen, or were planted t' make a natural screen, over that slot. Let's go down it a ways."

The two horses objected a great deal, snorting and blowing, but they finally rode through. It was single file for

them now, and they found the way clear before them in the little rock slot. It wound around through the range, finally taking a down grade and becoming wider.

They heard the song of the canyon swift, and once they saw an ousel flick out of sight among some débris below them.

"He wouldn't hunt far from water; those li'le birds live right in the spray of falling water generally," Phil said.

"My guess is that water appears down this slot a ways, and that it becomes an independent canyon, makin' out on the west side of the big range."

Suddenly the trail seemed to plunge downward and they could hear water. They drew back and listened.

"Another slot gives into this, bringing water. Hosses and cows could come and go in this, so far's I can see, pardner."

"We better turn back now. I think we've solved the mystery of Mystery Canyon."

"Do we tell about it?"

"We'll wait and see. We may need a few mysteries our own se'ves, t' get out of these parts. What between the Rounsells and the Blanders, we don't seem t' have any particular friends, except old Alazan and Sombrio."

"And our Colts and long guns, pardner."

"Now yo' said a lot, cowboy."

They turned back. They had been so busy while coming down studying the slot itself that they had given only casual attention to the possibilities of sign. Now they rode with heads bowed, studying the way over which they had ridden down the slot. They could not make out any fresh man or horse sign. The velvet-footed cougar would not have left a sign on those rocks. They did not see him again.

Arrived at the beginning of the hidden slot, they passed the vines without materially disturbing them. Alazan and Sombrio expressed their relief at being in the main canyon again by emitting lour snorts and playfully biting at each other.

"We'll ride down below and comb that natural pasture at the end of the canyon for what R Cross stuff we can find," suggested Phil.

"And if they're all as salty as those we've seen, we've got some cow hunt on our hands, pardner."

"I was just thinkin' of something."

"Hurt yo'?"

"No, natural with me t' think; I don't have t' strain at it, like yo' do. Now, do yo' think those Blanders worked that yearlin' over?"

"We didn't see it done. We saw the calf, and the remains of the fire. The calf was worked over several days ago, and the fire was not made this day or the day before, by the looks of it."

"No, that's sure so! No one's been up that secret slot, either, lately. Who but the Blanders would work over R Cross stuff?"

"We may find that all out later. Now, let's get back out of this canyon, eat, sleep, then to-morrow we'll have a li'le private round-up of our own. I wonder how many longhorns we two can drive back t' R Cross?"

"I wonder! Well, we'll find out right soon after we start working the bresh and hide-outs down below the *bajada*."

So they rode down to face anew whatever adventure their trip into the country beyond the Mokiones might bring to them.

Phil began to hum.

Cindy interrupted: "What yo' goin' t' tell Mercedes about shootin' that Blander boy? Those girls didn't want their pets touched, yo' know."

Phil broke off whistling at once.

"I dunno what I'll tell. No use boastin' a lot."

"No. We keep silent on solvin' the mystery and on salivatin' Mercedes' pet

Blander. I guess we'll have silence all around us and a lot of it, too, from now on."

"Maybe it was Ossie's hide I burned," said Phil, smiling widely. Now Cindy looked uncomfortable. Phil went on:

"That Aloise girl, that's big enough t' spank yo' if she tried, will be right angry when she finds yo've shot up her pet. Her pet don't know who shot him, and if I don't tell, she may suspect yo' did it, yo're so fierce lookin'."

"I guess we better keep mighty mum, Phil."

"Till we get reasons t' talk."

"Sure. Get out of this place. Sombrio, old sticks!"

Cindy called for speed from Alazan, too, and they went at quickened pace out of the canyon.

CHAPTER V.

WILD ONES.

AFTER a pleasant sleep in the open below the canyon mouth, Phil and Cindy had breakfast and then got organized for the day's work. They had heard cows bawling in the brush earlier. A band of elk had come down the canyon, showing that it was still a natural game path.

The two looked well to their cinches, ropes, spur straps, guns, and gun belts. They knew they were in for a task that would try them, their horses, and their equipment to the last degree of endurance.

Last of all, they covered the embers of the breakfast fire with loose earth, to make sure it did not send sparks which some twist of the wind would cause to fire the range. Much of the grass was partly cured, although other stretches of it were still green. There was little danger of firing the range, but the two plains cowboys, with the fear of wide-sweeping fires drilled into them, took no chances.

"We're haided about south; yo' take the west, and I'll take the east," Phil planned out their little drive. "This natural pasture is about three miles wide up at this north end of it. We'll comb it and start everything we want and keep them goin', if we can."

Cindy McGlone wasted no time. He was honing to try out his skill and endurance against the famed longhorns of the R Cross. He started west to begin his circle, heading for a big clump of short, brushy stuff that looked like the hiding place for cattle that had grazed early and gone into the brush to chew the cud. Phil started east.

Alazan knew the game! He cocked his ears forward and went tiptoeing toward that motte, his eyes focused forward and his nostrils flared widely. Cindy rode slackly, eyes fixed on the scrub.

Then he caught a drifting, shadowy something moving silently there. Alazan saw it at about the same time. The pony needed no word. He just tucked all four feet under him and began to go. They split that motte like a ship under full headway, and out of the other side of it bolted a small bunch of longhorns.

Alazan was right after them. They tried to turn and twist and get behind him. Cindy's rope was out. He held the coils lightly and slatted it against the faces of the longhorns when they were minded to charge back. He fanned them with his big hat. He yelled and turned them. They gave up and began to trot south. Alazan gave them a good push and then pivoted, knowing that he had done fairly well so far. Cindy slapped him on the neck and Alazan crow-hopped, to show he was still full of life.

"Get a-goin'; they'll think yo're just a common bronc," Cindy told him, and they started back toward another bunch of brushy stuff. They drew a blank. But in a little sink on the other side

of it, they jumped two cows with calves and a yearling that looked familiar to Cindy.

"That's that made-over yearlin'; we'll take him along for proof that some one's too busy on Mystery," he told Alazan. Cindy kept these animals going till he saw them join the first bunch. At the same time Phil sent a small group of cattle out to join the others. They now had twenty cattle in a small group in the open.

"I'll hold them; yo' fan some more out," Phil said, and Cindy nodded. With these cattle in sight, the ones sent out would go to them, acting under the herd instinct to bunch when alarmed or under any sort of human pressure. Cindy disappeared in the broken land toward the canyon; Phil watched the bunched longhorns. One big bull walked toward him belligerently. Phil rode at him and waved his looped rope right across the beast's face. The bull snorted and walked back, grumbling. Suddenly he turned as if mounted on a pivot and came at Phil wickedly. Sombrio barely got away from him. At the charge, as if it were a signal, all the others scattered, but in a southerly direction. Phil started Sombrio after the bull, got close enough to reach over and get his tail, wrapped the brush of it around his saddle horn, and veered Sombrio sharply. The bull went keeling over, end for end, coming down with a crash. He got up slowly, shaking his head foolishly and grumbling. At the same moment Cindy came hurtling out toward Phil, pursued by a bull with tremendous horns. Cindy veered Alazan; the pursuing bull could not turn and so crashed at once into the one Phil had tailed down, and they at once locked horns, each accepting the other as an antagonist.

"Go it, brothers!" Phil yelled. "Go it, yo' ornery brutes!"

"Whe'e's all them cows I drove out?" Cindy asked.

Phil looked about as if surprised.

"Why, they done took a walk!"

"I thought I left yo' holding herd on them."

"I ain't got a word t' say."

"We'll begin all over again."

Just then Phil's bull turned tail, Cindy's chasing him.

"I done picked a winner," Cindy yelled, whirling Alazan around as on a pivot. "Lookit him chase that fool bull yo' picked!"

"Let 'em alone; they're in the right direction."

They headed the bulls down where they had had the cattle under herd so short a time before. The two winded beasts remained quiet now, except that they eyed the horses angrily from time to time.

Cindy agreed to hold the two bulls. Phil started out to rout out some more cattle. No sooner had Phil gone than down below a cow began to bawl. The bulls pricked up their ears and started. Cindy tried to turn them. They brushed him aside as if he were a toy and went toward the bawling cow. The cattle that had eluded Phil were down there, in a bunch. The bulls walked into the bunch and they were stilled. Cindy scratched his head:

"Alazan, they cain't be crowded like white-face stuff. They're too dawg-gone fast right now, without crowdin' any. Here comes some more."

Phil now came, with several heavies ahead of him. He yelled something derisive about "Whyn't yo' hold them prairie drags in herd for me?"

"I didn't notice yo' did it, when yo' had the chance, pardner."

Phil shoved his band down to the others. He took off his hat and fanned himself.

"My guess is that we won't have any hosses under us by the time we get through with this end of the job. We'd look nice walkin' and tryin' t' drive those dun brutes back t' R Cross afoot."

"I got an idea," Cindy cut him short with.

"If yo' have, I'm Cristóbal Colón."

"Sure, just hatched it! Lookit, Phil, these cattle are different from those big whitefaces we been raised on."

"Sure of that? I thought they was the same."

"Quit sassin' yo'r pardner now, Phil. Yo' can push those tame whitefaces, but these big longhorn wild cattle are different. My hunch is that we drift them, not drive them. Use patience and keep after them step by step."

"Why not put salt on their tails?"

"I would, if it would get them back t' R Cross."

"Say, Cindy, maybe that idea's got sprouts on it. We'll try it."

Phil turned back. Cindy kept the small bunch in sight, but did not attempt to press them. Alazan kept jigging back and forth between them and the canyon mouth. The cattle huddled, broke apart, huddled, began to walk uneasily south. Just then Phil came out with another small bunch, working them along slowly. As soon as they saw the held bunch, they bawled and started for them. Cindy got Alazan off to one side and let the newcomers join the herd without interference. Phil yelled encouragement, and turned Sombrio back for more. He started away over to the east this time. Cindy kept pretty well away from the mossy horns and let them think they were free, but he was always between them and the canyon mouth, did one or more of them start to work back toward the north. In half an hour Phil came back with quite a bunch of drifting red duns, among which they picked out, by eye, two yearlings evidently worked over from R Cross to B Star. Cindy now had a bunch big enough to attract newcomers easily. Phil started back to comb the farthest east group of mottes. Cindy lolled in the saddle. The held cattle grazed a bit. Yet from time to time they lifted their heads and eyed Cindy and Alazan spitefully.

"Yo'-all wasn't raised pets," Cindy yelled at them, and then they cocked their ears at him and bawled. A big bull made a half-hearted charge, but went back to the herd again, as Alazan eluded him. Phil sent out a dozen other longhorns as the result of his last combing and they, too, joined the little herd.

"We'll have a sweet time cuttin' out the market stuff," Cindy remarked mournfully, as Phil joined him and they looked at the wild-eyed herd.

"Maybe we made a miscue driving them all together, pardner."

"I guess we better start those heavy steers and bulls down along by themselves. I'll try cutting one out."

Phil started Sombrio toward the herd. The longhorns faced him till the last moment. The coiled rope brushed across their very faces, however, put fear into them—fear recalled from calfhood when a rope first burned them and put the elemental fear of man in them. They gave ground. Phil picked out a bull and started Sombrio for him. Sombrio went after him gleefully, nipping his flanks and sending him out toward Cindy, who shunted him off to one side in a little cleared spot, where he held him in check by skilled managing of Alazan. The bull still wanted to join the bunch, which became more and more uneasy as Sombrio worked thorugh them, pushing a heavy steer out toward Cindy's side of the herd. The steer came out, bawled, turned, and the whole bunch began running, scattering like a lot of quail. All the satisfaction the two had for their hard work so far was the knowledge that they had scoured the upper end of the natural pasture and had all the cattle in it drifted away from the canyon mouth. Even Cindy's bull had taken unto himself wings and gone silently,

while the two had been holding a lodge of sorrow and telling each other what they thought of longhorn perversity.

"Next time we cut out market stuff, nothin' else," Cindy said.

"If we can."

"We drew down top wages from Bar BQ."

"That was in tame country, back East. Now we're away west of West, beyond the Mokiones."

"Uh-uh, I'm not forgettin' that! Even the girls out this way are supposed t' be fierce."

"And even at that they don't want yo' t' harm their pets that live over the range."

"Even, I s'pose, if those same pets use a buffalo gun t' show their feelin's toward yo."

"Now, I'm tellin' yo' that my Sombrio hoss has had enough exercise for a li'le while. I've rode him ten miles already and haven't got a hoof t' show for it all, either."

"Alazan isn't no weaklin', but he's had enough of this aimless pursuit of cows' tails, too. They might about as well sent us up he'e t' catch a lot of white-tailed deer, as ask us t' fotch back a lot of these longhorn cattle. They're not only longhorn, but longgear stuff, I'll tell a man, pardner."

"Yo' said it, then, Cindy."

So they sat and smoked and talked over their troubles, working up steam for another try at the agile cattle of the country west of the Mokiones.

"We didn't stand so bad back East," Cindy again reminded Phil, who merely grunted his disgust with that statement.

"What yo' was back East don't count; it's what yo' *are* right west of the Mokiones, that counts."

"Uh-uh, but we might get a wiggle on us that would count us up!"

Meanwhile, Sombrio and Alazan were glad enough to stand and gather up reserves of strength for the next effort called for by their masters. Phil and Cindy finally alighted, tightened cinches, and discussed what should be done next. Phil offered an idea:

"I've heard the old-timers tell about how they hog tied a few beeves, leavin' them in an open place, and that then the others would stay with them, till a herd was formed t' hold. We could try that, fannin' out all cows and calf stuff."

Sombrio and Alazan suddenly threw their ears forward. Almost at the same moment horses below whickered. Then cattle came stealing from motte to motte toward them and disappeared from view.

"Some one's hazin' all those cows back, pardner."

"Sure, Cindy. Who can it be?"

"We've got a bone t' pick with them."

"We'll see who it is right now."

Several riders rode into the open down below there, big men.

"Mosley, Eckers, and three other Rounsells, by the Alamo!"

The Rounsells came forward compactly, eying the two friends hostilely. Mosley and Eckers were chuckling, as at some good joke. They drew up before the two friends with insolent assurance.

"Well, we've had a lot of fun watchin' yo'-all gather cows and then turn them loose again. Doin' it for practice?"

"I suppose that's what yo've been doin' with that pair of big glasses?" Phil asked icily.

"Sure, Mike! We all had a look," and they laughed in unison.

"Laugh; yo've got a laugh comin', we admit," Cindy said quietly. His eyes were steady and his voice calm.

"We've got the laugh comin' and goin'. It sure was a fine sight t' see those cattle get away from yo'-all." Again the newcomers laughed loudly.

"We done heard that before," Phil cut short their laughter.

"Yo'll hear something else, too," Mosley said sharply.

"What's that? We don't want t' hear too much," Cindy put in.

"We didn't altogether take yo' on trust when yo' came t' R Cross. We've been watchin' yo'-all."

"Yo' might better've come t' us and he'ped us comb this piece of range and get those cattle yo'r boss wanted," Phil said quietly.

"We might've done a lot of things, but we didn't. Now, listen t' me," Eckers fairly snorted in his mounting rage. "Yo've worked a day and a half. Yo've got enough grub and ammunition t' pay for that, and so that makes up yo'r time. Get off R Cross range!"

"That come from 'Long John'?"

"Yes. He told us t' watch yo' and see how yo' handled cows and—well, other things. Yo' had a li'le run-in with those Blanders yesterday, as we saw. They got away. Yo' let these cattle buffalo yo'. We don't want men that cain't produce results, so ramble!"

"I guess that lets us out, pardner," Cindy said.

"I guess so," Phil replied.

Without a word, they kneed their horses around and rode back toward Mystery Canyon, pursued by the laughter of the Rounsells. Mosley yelled:

"Watch and yo'll see how men round up cattle! We'll comb this bit of range."

"Yo've got enough men t' drive a herd t' Montana; yo' ought t' be able t' comb this li'le pasture," Phil threw back at them.

But they only laughed the more. Mosley yelled loudly: Look out that those Blanders don't use yo' for whippin' posts. They're a fierce lot."

The two friends did not reply.

"I guess we're in the discard," Cindy said to his friend, after they had gone well up the canyon.

"Sure are. Now what?"

"I move we ride up Mystery, take that side slot, and see what it leads us t'."

"Suits me. It may fotch us some real excitement. Life's been too tame since we got west of the Mokiones."

"Sure, pardner."

"By the Alamo, Cindy, I think if we'd had time, we'd got those cows and bulls and steers and calves winnowed out and the beef cut started for R Cross, don't yo'?"

"Why, of course! We just didn't get t' study them out, that's all. We was able t' rope them down, and we hawg tied two yesterday. We was able t' haze them into a bunch and all around the open."

"All we lacked was ability t' put the finishin' touch onto them."

"Yes, and I'd like t've done that with a gun, pardner," said Cindy gloomily. "Say, that buffalo gun those Blanders left under that overhangin' rock and that we didn't touch, after we'd made out what she was."

"I'd rather use an army cannon."

"Well, come t' think, that would be an improvement, pardner."

CHAPTER VI.

ESCONDIDO.

NOW they were at the place where the big cougar had vanished against the wall of rock. They went through the vine screen, the horses taking to the hidden slot this time without fear. Then, too, there was not fresh cougar scent to frighten them. They emerged into the small slot and worked their way along it until the side passage became wider and soon they were well down to where they had turned aside and returned the day before. They were careful this time to watch for any fresh sign on the canyon floor, but none was to be seen. They came to where the trail plunged down in a steep grade to where water talked as it came in from a small side gash, opening out

to the north again, the direction of main Mystery. So far as they could judge, they had traveled about west from the big canyon.

They gentled Sombrio and Alazan down that steep grade, really a succession of steplike layers of differing strata of the mountain ribs. At the foot they found where the water came into the big branch canyon they were using, but saw no sign of a man or any heavy animal having been that way. Water had guttered the bottom of the smaller canyon, washing away all sign earlier than the last big rain on the higher ranges draining down into Mystery.

They went forward, water on either side or under foot, as the good going for the horses swung to right or left as they progressed. Then the walls drew in on either hand and they seemed to be running into a blank end, with no way out. But just as they were discussing turning back, they saw that this blank end vanished as they rounded a last shoulder of rock and pierced a very heavy vine screen; then they had a fairly broad space before them, with a gentle, downward grade. A side branch, from the north, came in here again, and this time it had a real, practical trail in its bottom. And it carried plenty of sign, too, of horses and cattle, though none recently made. But Cindy's sharp eyes saw the brassy glint of a .45 shell. He leaned over, got it, and tossed it to Phil for inspection. Phil whistled.

"No tellin' how old she is, exactly, but I'd say not over a month."

"No, not over that. Say, lookin' back at that last screen of vines, we came through, it sure makes a good coverin' for those prominent rocks, pardner."

"It would be funny if a lot of folks have been comin' up this canyon and turnin' aside up that new side branch we've just found, and not even knowin' that that hidden trail through the range exists."

"Too funny! I think some one around these parts knows all about these trails."

"Then whyn't they use them?"

"Maybe they do. Not often, but once in a while. Meanwhile, all their sign would be washed out in the cloudburst season."

"It's sure a funny layout Nature gave some one in Mystery."

"What'll we do now?"

"Well, me, I'm goin' t' see what's at the end of this mysterious trail we're ridin'."

"Me, too, pardner."

They started Sombrio and Alazan westward again. The way became easier. The sun had slipped over on their side of the range now and was looking down into the canyon. The water had disappeared, except for pools, showing that bed rock was below surface now. Over the shaly rock appeared a carpet of thin soil that grew darker and richer as they worked their way downward.

"Say, where do yo' s'pose those cattle go and come from, that go up that branch leadin' north?" Cindy asked.

"They'd be apt t' come onto Red Mesa, I'd think."

"That's what I was thinkin', pardner."

"And that main canyon leads right up onto Red Mesa on the other side of which is the Blander hangout?" questioned Phil.

"Sure, pardner."

"Say, even if a man didn't know the solution of Mystery, he could drive cattle up main Mystery, along Red Mesa, down that side branch from Red Mesa, and so get t' the place this twister ends down below on the western bottom lands."

Cindy did not reply, save for a nod. They rode silently for some time. Then they discussed a place to warm

up something for dinner and this they did in a cozy elbow, with the sun shining warmly down on a pool of cold water without a ripple in its rock basin.

Mid-afternoon saw them winding northwest, the hard grades all behind them, the canyon having taken on the character of a gently sloping pass at the end of which something huddled. As they approached, this something was seen to be a collection of shacks and corrals and sheds. Some men listlessly lounged against door jambs and eyed them stonily as the two friends rode toward the largest building. Over its front door was the legend, "Escondido."

"They named it right, pardner. 'Hidden,'" said Cindy in a whisper.

"Sure! Concealed. Don't step on yo'r bridle while we're he'e."

"The watchword is 'pronto.' When yo' hear it, use yo'r haid."

They alighted, threw their bridle reins over a tie peg, and went to the door of the place. Inside, they viewed a long counter at the far end of the big room, benches along the walls, a few chairs. The room seemed vacant. But right behind them men closed in, having been standing just inside the door along the wall, and a bulky fellow appeared behind the counter. Phil and Cindy seemed not to notice that they were escorted by the men who had appeared thus suddenly. They marched right to the counter. The bulky man there had a hat well slouched over his forehead. Long dark hair hung over his ears. His extremely light eyes were seemingly unwinking.

"I'd like something soft, and my pardner the same," Cindy said.

"Soft?" the bulky man asked whisperingly.

"Sure," Phil replied.

"How soft?"

A round of chuckles behind them told that the escort were enjoying this talk of which the two were butts.

"About as soft as yo'r haid," Phil jerked out.

"Which ain't very soft"—whisperingly again.

"And some grub," Cindy suggested.

"We don't feed strangers."

"Funny; any rancher'll give a passin' wayfarin' man a meal."

"I'm not a rancher," the bartender whispered.

"We aren't ridin' chuck line." Cindy jingled some coins.

"That don't interest me."

"We thought this was a hotel."

"It's just the place I live in and at. A few friends hang out with me, that's all"—icily.

"Can we buy some grub in this town?"

"No!"—almost explosively.

There was a shuffling of thick-soled boots behind the two friends. The big man behind the counter made a sign with his hand that Phil and Cindy did not catch, but they did sense the subtle thrill of peril that pervaded the entire room.

"How came yo' into town down that trail yo' used?" the big man asked.

"That's our business," Cindy replied.

"I guess not."

"What's wrong about that trail?" Phil asked.

"That's our business."

A roar of laughter followed this reply. The sound of it proved to Phil and Cindy that a semicircle of humanity hemmed them in from the rear. The bulky man spoke again, leaning over the counter:

"And I'll take those guns, if yo' please."

"Why for?" Cindy asked.

"No matter; turn them in. We don't let strange men swagger around totin' weapons like yo'-all're doin'."

"I don't see any one else that isn't well heeled," Phil objected.

"Oh, they're all citizens. But with pilgrims, it's different."

"Pilgrims! We're not from the East"—explosively.

"Well, strangers, then. Come, ante in those guns."

"Pronto!" Cindy shouted. His left hand swung up and came down on the neck of the big man, slamming his face forward against the counter. The hand, thus planted on the big man's neck, became the support for Cindy's slim, steel-strong body as he vaulted up and over. Phil wheeled, guns out like magic.

The hard-bitten men gave ground as Phil faced the half circle determinedly. Cindy's leap had carried him clean over the counter. The force with which he had slammed the big man's face forward onto the counter had dazed the latter momentarily. He roared, pawed along the counter. Cindy, on his feet behind it, slid his hand under the counter to where he expected to find a gun in a cubby-hole. He swung the gun out and down once, and the big man was still, for the time being, toppling sidewise to the floor at Cindy's feet.

"I guess we've got things our way now," Cindy said, lining the counterman's big gun on the onlookers to reën-force the threat Phil held out with his guns. "Just come up t' the counter, one by each, and leave yo'r weapons. If it's against the law in this town t' carry a gun, we all might's well be on an equality. Pronto!"

Phil put his left-hand gun onto the counter, pivoted, leaped, and grabbed the gun. He was on the counter now, looking down on them, guns lined up again. Grumbling, they came forward and laid down their weapons at Phil's feet. Behind the counter the big man breathed stertorously. The pile of weapons grew, as knives were added, at the suggestion of Cindy.

"Don't miss any bets, gents," the slim, alert puncher said mockingly, "and leave a weepon on yo'r persons that later may lure yo' into startin' an argument with us. We're he-wolves from over the big range, and we don't want any back talk from pulin' li'le fellers like yo'-all."

The last man having made his contribution to the pile, the crowd was forced to the left side of the corner, where there was a small space closed in with a swing shelf that, when raised, let them through, a man at a time, behind the counter. As they passed behind it, Cindy eased himself onto the counter, and then he and Phil got onto the floor, outside the counter.

A gunny bag was on the floor, at the counter's base. The weapons went into it, under the eyes of the scowling gang. The partners backed to the outer door and through it. Several men were coming toward the place hurriedly, led by one who was yelling:

"I saw it, through the front door. It's a holdup; they've held up Wespen's joint."

The two friends looked for their horses. Phil had the bag of captured weapons.

The horses were gone.

"Lookit, pardner," and Cindy pointed down the trail, toward a low, shedlike stable.

"Say, we didn't get out only just in time," cried Phil.

The chestnut rump of Alazan and the dun one of Sombrio were just disappearing around the corner of that low shed.

The advancing men called on the two friends to halt. Phil and Cindy pivoted and ran, throwing several high shots back to warn them to keep away. Out of the Wespen joint a crowd of yammering men burst, fists clenched on high in their excitement. Lead whined after the fleeing punchers, who whisked around the corner of the low shed just as the crowd got their wits together enough to begin to shoot with a purpose. The walls of the shed were of adobe, giving ample protection for the

moment from hostile lead. A Mexican was trying to get Alazan and Sombrio into the shed through a low, wide door halfway down the shed's length. Phil and Cindy leaped for him. The horses scuttled inward just as they got to the doorway. The partners leaped through, into the cool darkness of the place. They could hear the yells of angry men on their way to discover what had become of them after they had turned the corner of the stable.

The Mexican spluttered in amazement at the invasion as Phil swung the wide, thick door shut and let the bar fall into place. Cindy's gun was inducing the Mexican to moderate his phrases by now. Phil dropped the bag of weapons to the ground.

"What yo' doin' with our hosses?" Cindy demanded.

"But my freend, Señor Weespen, he say get them whan you come."

"He seen us comin', eh, and ordered yo' t' take the hosses?"

"*Si*, señor"—shiveringly.

"After we'd gone inside the Escondido?"

"*Si*, señor."

"Without our orders?"

"Señor Weespen, he give thee order een Escondido."

"What's he got against us? We never saw him before."

"Quién sabe, señor. Ah'm not knowing to dat."

There was a dim light in the stable, even with the door shut. It came from the top of the walls where the beams came down to rest on the adobe, leaving air spaces all along under the thatched roof of bear grass. A confused murmur came to them, showing that the eager crowd had advanced close to the stable.

"Had rain lately? That thatch damp?" Phil demanded.

"*Si*, señor."

"I guess, with the guns we've got, we can stand a fight," Phil said to Cindy. The horses had begun to nose around on the floor of the place—a floor of firm-packed earth.

"They'd soon cut a hole through this adobe with spuds and picks," Cindy reminded Phil.

"Sure! This one-door fort isn't what it might be. If we only had some way t' see what they're doin', it wouldn't be so bad."

The Mexican leaned against the wall, seemingly helpless in fright. Something heavy crashed against the door. A rifle cracked, and the ball from it thwacked into the wall opposite the door, showing that the gun had splendid penetration. Men yelled, and some one began to give orders:

"A lot of yo' get that log again and jam her against that door. We got t' get those hombres."

"Sounds like our friend Wespen, without the whisper," Cindy laughed. "He sounds as if he was plumb down on the world, pardner."

"Being's he's nursin' a pretty sore haid, he's got a right t' be sore at some one," agreed Phil.

They heard the rush outside. Phil jerked his saddle gun and let drive through the door. They heard a yelp of pain, the sound of men stumbling and cursing, then the fall of the log came to them, showing that the attackers had thrown aside the battering-ram for the moment.

"Plenty more left!" Phil yelled at them derisively.

"I guess we'll put yo' out of harm's way, Aztec," Cindy said to the trembling Mexican. They bound him with his own belt and cast him down in a corner, with the injunction to keep still.

"It looks as if we'd run right into a pocket," Phil whispered, and Cindy nodded.

"Next time I get into a one-door jack pot, let me know."

"We can fight and fight, but they've got the open and can start things; all

we can do is t' try t' figure out what they're doin' and stand it as long as we can."

"I'm not goin' t' play their hand for them, though, pardner."

"What's the idea?"

Cindy did not reply. Instead, he began to walk around the stable, while Phil listened at the door for anything that would give him a clew to what the next move of their enemies might be. Cindy clucked and held up a fence maul.

"I thought I'd find something that could be used t' hang a bluff with. I'm goin' t' make a noise like poundin' a way through this adobe on the back end."

He strode back there and swung the maul. A shower of loose adobe rattled down under the impact.

"Don't hit too hard, Samson, or yo'll knock a hole out that they can use t' fire inward," said Phil, warning him jeeringly.

Outside, all was silent now. They could hear an occasional whisper. Again Cindy smote the wall, showering down the loose adobe. The hard core of the wall he had not disturbed as yet.

Cindy let the implement fall, and himself went to the wall and laid an ear against it. Phil came to him stealthily.

"They're out on this side now, tryin' t' dope it all out; now's our time, if ever," Phil whispered. "Yo' played a pretty good hand then, I'll say."

They crept back to the horses. Phil got the bag of guns, put half in each end of the bag, and dropped the double-weighted bag over the saddle, just behind the horn. Sombrio snorted and Alazan displayed an ambition to kick, but a word from their masters steadied them both. Cindy softly drew the bar and swung the door open slowly, and when it had started back he leaped for the saddle, as did Phil.

Their horses tucked their feet under them and leaped, coming down outside with all the vicious swiftness of a cow pony called upon for sudden action. Men bobbed up before them, to be bowled over. Guns roared, rifles cracked. They could hear Wespen shouting orders. Lead whined over them as the good horses whisked them around the stable shed, and they were in front of it again. Phil took the lead, turning west, along the main town trail.

"Hit?" he asked of Cindy.

"No."

"Neither am I. Didn't feel Sombrio wince as we ran that gantlet, either."

"I think Alazan is O. K., too. They didn't throw so many shots as they would have, if yo' hadn't most of their weepons, pardner."

Behind the partners, the town roared. They dashed into the late afternoon shadows of trees down below the town, turned a corner and then drew the horses to a saner pace.

"What's that?" Cindy asked, sniffing.

"Like a slaughterhouse or hide-house."

"Sure. Lookit those buzzards all over that daid stub."

"I'm goin' t' see what all this hostility means around this dawg-hole of a town."

"Me, too."

They turned their horses aside into a little arroyo and went up it.

As they did so the sun vanished; the sudden Southwestern night came. They were in the silence of the little secret pocket they had chosen. It was almost dark in there immediately. Down the arroyo there came to them the rank odor.

"Well, it could be worse. I saw grass as we rode in; that will do for the nags. We got some grub for ourselves, and we'll talk it over and see what's our next move," Phil said thoughtfully.

"Sure, pardner. But I'd feel healthier if that smell wasn't so strong. Listen at them poundin' along past the end of this arroyo after us. They're takin' a lot for granted. Probably figure we wouldn't stop so close t' their dawg hole of a town. They'll read sign in the morning when they get wise that we've fooled them and they've got light t' do it by."

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

ROPING LIONS FOR A LIVING

ONE thing that Bob Snow, of Raymondville, Texas, will be spared in his new job with the Denver Museum is boredom; for Snow has been appointed professional hunter, on an expedition to catch, alive, wild animals in Mexico. Snow's specialty is catching Mexican lions, or panthers, for there are more panthers around Raymondville than in any other place along the lower Rio Grande border. However, other varieties of wild animals are also desired, so Snow, with three Mexican helpers—all expert with the lasso—will accompany the expedition into Mexico.

That Snow is no novice at catching wild beasts alive is eloquently affirmed by R. Bona Ridgeway, who recently hunted panthers in the vicinity of Raymondville under the guidance of Bob Snow and his brother, Sheriff Luther F. Snow, of Willacy County, who is equally apt at the hunting game. They succeeded in capturing two live panthers in one day.

The first panther was treed after a long chase. The beast stood on a limb about twenty feet from the ground, and Luther Snow followed boldly up the tree for about ten feet and began throwing for the animal. There was a tense moment when the maddened beast turned toward Luther and crouched, ready for a spring. It contented itself, however, with catching the rope, which Luther continued to hurl upward, in its mouth a few times. Finally, the noose fell around the panther's neck. As the beast hit the ground, the noose, which Snow had fixed so that it would not choke the animal, slipped off.

Excitement was centered below then, as men tried to avoid, and tied dogs tried to reach the escaped panther. Eventually, it was treed again and roped securely. This time its feet had to be tied. The two hind feet, Bob Snow tied with little difficulty, but he was forced to cover the beast's head with his hunting jacket, before he could proceed to tie its front feet. The enraged beast bit the heavy jackets full of holes before the operation was completed.

From this example alone it is plain that the roping of wild beasts is fraught with constant risk and peril; yet hunting is no pastime to Bob Snow, it is his career.

What Made the Pinto Jump

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Shorty's Squealers," etc.

IN the office of Marshal Pete Williams, in Gunsight City, sat Sheriff Joe Cook and his deputy, "Shorty" McKay. The sheriff, jingling a pair of handcuffs, wore a pleased expression, but Shorty's face was downcast. The marshal was speaking in a triumphant tone as he eyed his two visitors.

"Yessir, soon as I got that circular from yuhr office in Monte Vista, describin' that fancy dude cowboy as yuh wanted fer swindlin' the bank over thar outta eight hundred dollars," said Marshal Pete Williams, "I remembered this here George DeNue has jus' lit in our town with a roll o' dough; an' by doin' a little bit o' mighty clever sleuthin' I proved to myself that George was the hombre yuh wanted, an' I jailed him an' sent fer yuh, sheriff!"

Sheriff Cook offered the marshal a fat, black cigar.

"Marshal, yuh has put over a good piece o' work," said the sheriff warmly. "As soon as yuh sent us the picture o' this DeNue yuh has in jail here, we showed it down to the bank, an' the cashier an' the teller both identified the mug as that o' the smooth talker as had done 'em outta the eight hundred dollars on a piece o' worthless paper which they thought was a draft. If we had more marshals like yuh in Colorado we'd ketch more crooks."

The sheriff struck a match and held it forward while the marshal lit his gift cigar. The marshal was pleased at Sheriff Cook's praise, but the black look on the face of the deputy worried him. Shorty did not appear overjoyed at the situation.

"Deputy," said Marshal Williams, and he puffed thoughtfully on his big cigar, "yuh look kinda glum, seems to me. I hopes that third piece o' pie yuh had fer lunch ain't disagreein' with yuh?"

Shorty shook his head quickly.

"I—I'm jus' kinda sorry yuh grabbed that DeNue bird, marshal," said Shorty frankly. "I was hopin' I could land him myself. He seemed so danged smart in puttin' over that bum draft on them slick bankers an' then makin' such a

clean get-away that I figgered it would be quite a feather in my cap ef I could nab him. I was workin' on several clews to get him when yuh writes in that yuh has him, so——"

"Waal, o' all ungrateful words," cut in Sheriff Cook indignantly, "them take the prize! 'Stead o' complimentin' the marshal here that he saved us the trouble o' ketchin' that crook DeNue, yuh has the nerve to complain about it! Yuh was plannin' on a lot o' excitement an' gun play an' newspape publicity, I reckon, an' the marshal here jus' beat yuh to it! Sour grapes, Shorty, sour grapes!"

Marshal Williams was not angry. He chuckled softly.

"Yuh two birds may have plenty o' excitement yet with this DeNue hombre," he suggested, sighing. "He's a blamed slick article. He ain't nobody's fool. An' he as much as told me this mawnin', when I informed him that yuh was comin' after him to fetch him back to Monte Vista jail, that yuh might not succeed in gettin' him thar at all, an' ef yuh did get him thar he might not stay long!"

Shorty's sombre eyes glowed a bit at that, but Sheriff Joe Cook laughed and pounded the desk with a clenched fist.

"Marshal, no crook ever outsmarted me, an' none ain't goin' to do so at this stage o' the game," said the sheriff, with pompous pride. "An' now, ef yuh don't mind, trot out that prisoner an' we'll start fer Monte. We brung a extra hoss along fer him. I'll snap these bracelets on him, an' we'll go by-by."

"I'll fetch him," said the marshal.

George DeNue was a smart crook, no question about that. No sooner had Sheriff Cook and Shorty laid eyes on him, when the marshal brought him in from the jail, than they both realized that DeNue was clever—and dangerous! Tall, square-shouldered, with a thin, hard face, DeNue looked to be made of nerve. He swaggered a bit as he came in with the marshal. He gave Sheriff Cook a contemptuous stare and he ignored Shorty altogether. The sheriff spoke up rather crisply then.

"Here, yuh, hold out yuhr hands! That's it."

Click! The handcuffs were in place. The prisoner's head went a trifle higher, that was all. The marshal, who had been taking no chances with his tall charge, holstered his gun. DeNue was the sheriff's prisoner now, and the marshal's worries were over. Sheriff Cook did not like the look in DeNue's cold, gray eyes.

"DeNue, ef that's yuhr real name," said the sheriff, "I jus' want to say this much to yuh afore we start outta here: Yuh ain't tryin' no nonsense on the trip back to Monte. I'll bore yuh at the fust sign o' foolishness. Yuh might as waal make up yuhr mind now that yuh're goin' to swaller yuhr medicine!"

DeNue's eyes glittered—that was all.

"Yuh understand, hombre?" asked the sheriff.

DeNue's head went higher. He did not answer.

"Yuh ain't dumb, are yuh?" cried the sheriff peevishly. "Yuh heard what I said about any funny stuff, didn't yuh?"

All DeNue did was to draw his thin lips into a tighter, straighter line. And at that Marshal Williams remembered something.

"Aw—er—sheriff," stammered the marshal awkwardly, "I—mebbe I'd better explain that—that Mr. DeNue here—waal, he's kinda sore that he was caught, o' course! He tol' me this mawnin', when I informed him that yuh was comin' fer him, that he'd have nuthin' to do with—with yuh; said he was goin' to have no words with yuh at all, that he was innocent, an' that he wasn't goin' to—waal—to—to lower hisself to talk to no sheriff or deputy sheriff."

Sheriff Cook's face went purple with suppressed rage.

"Oh," he exclaimed finally, "so that's it, eh? Waal, I reckon I kin keep my health even ef a crook won't talk to me! I ain't particularly anxious to carry on no conversation with a blamed swindler, after all. Yuh, DeNue, git out an' git on that roan hoss out thar—an' no foolin', either!"

They rode out of Gunsight after the sheriff had gone over the prisoner and satisfied himself that DeNue had no concealed weapons. The sheriff had taken that precaution after the marshal had remarked that a girl had visited DeNue in the Gunsight City jail the day before. But DeNue had no weapon on him. DeNue lifted his chin a bit higher after the search.

"All right, 'Mister Highhat!'" grunted the sheriff, trying hard to control himself. "Yuh jus' be as far upstage as yuh wishes, an' see ef I cares a dang whoop about it! Let's go, Shorty!"

They went. The sheriff rode out ahead, smarting with anger. It was the first time in his long career as sheriff that any man had ever refused to talk to him, and now a mere crook was doing just that. The nerve of that fellow! Well, let him keep his mouth shut if he wanted to! A good wallop on the chin, or a bit of third degree in the Monte Vista jail, or a diet of bread and water, might bring the fellow down off his perch, decided the sheriff.

"What do I keer ef he don't talk?" thought the sheriff, as he rode. "It's nuthin' to me!" But the sheriff did care. It *was* something to him. He would have liked to question DeNue about the eight-hundred-dollar transaction, wring a confession from him, perhaps, before reaching Monte. If the prisoner would not talk that could not be done, of course! The sheriff fumed, and then, at the sound of a voice behind him, he swung swiftly in the saddle—to catch Shorty trying to make up to the sullen prisoner.

"Shorty, what yuh doin'?"

"Nuthin'," said Shorty. "I was jus' suggestin' to the gent here that he shouldn't be so clamlike—that he had better talk."

"Who wants to hear him talk?" demanded the sheriff hotly. "I'll knock him outta that saddle ef he tries it! Ef he's so uppity-uppity, let him stay uppity-uppity—that's all! Let him play oyster!"

"Yessir," said Shorty gloomily.

But a few minutes later the sheriff heard an outburst of laughter. He looked back over his shoulder to see Shorty convulsed with mirth. The sheriff slowed up immediately and waited for the other two to pull abreast. When Shorty and DeNue arrived, the sheriff glared.

"What's the joke, Shorty?"

"Nuthin'—exceptin' I was tellin' DeNue here a funny story I heard in Cheyenne," said Shorty, "about the steers as had to drink muddy water to cast any shadders at all, an'—an'——"

Sheriff Cook scowled.

"I told yuh to leave the prisoner be," said the sheriff angrily, "an' yuh insist on tryin' to entertain him! Yuh're a fool, that's all! He's tryin' to make fools outta both o' us, an' he is makin' a fool outta yuh! He don't want to talk, so let him alone—it shouldn't make us mad ef he won't be sociable, yuh galoot!"

And then the sheriff rode on, madder than ever.

But it was a long way to Monte Vista and Shorty was not inclined to ride all that distance in silence. The sheriff, riding out ahead, was sore as a hornet, Shorty knew. And all because this smooth DeNue hombre was remaining aloof. The sheriff was easily angered, and DeNue's superior antics had turned the trick. But Shorty was not angry. He was just talkative. He spoke in a whisper now—spoke out of the side of his mouth—and with an eye on the sheriff ahead.

"Ef that ol' bird ahead had to rely on hisself to hold the job o' sheriff, he wouldn't last a minnit," muttered Shorty sociably to his silent prisoner. "He's a bluffer, that ol' bird is! Ain't got the nerve o' a chicken! I remember once when we was out after a rustler an' surprised an' sneaked up on him, an' the rustler was startled an' yelled 'Hello!'—the fust word as came to his tongue—the sheriff put up his hands in a jiffy, thinkin' the hombre had told him to reach fer the sky!"

Shorty looked expectantly at DeNue, but the prisoner never batted an eyelash, He was staring straight ahead, lips tightly clamped.

"Ef it wasn't fer me ridin' here alongside o' yuh, brother," went on Shorty, "yuh could prove to yuhrself jus' what I told yuh that Cook is a ol' bluffer. To hear him talk or to look at him yuh'd think that he was full o' fire, but he ain't. Ef I wasn't here, all yuh'd have to do would be to ride up a little closer on him an' shout 'Hands up!' an' he'd elevate them so quick it would take yuhr breath away. Then yuh could ride up an' snatch a gun out of his holster an' yuh'd be master o' ceremonies afore he had time to figger what was comin' off. That's all thar would be to it. It's a mighty good thing fer him that I'm his deputy—they say I'm the smartest deputy west o' the Missouri River, hombre, an' danged ef I don't believe it!"

DeNue gave Shorty a queer look. Sheriff Cook swung in his saddle again. His sharp ears had caught a sound.

"Shorty, yuh talkin' ag'in?" he asked angrily.

"Kinda hummin' to myself—that's all, boss," said Shorty. "I was hummin' 'Dixie' an'——"

The sheriff turned his back on the deputy and the prisoner, apparently satisfied with the explanation. DeNue now cast appraising eyes on Shorty, but he said nothing. Shorty spoke again—cautiously—eagerly.

"I reckon thar's been more prisoners got away from Sheriff Cook than from any other sheriff in Colorado," said Shorty, "that is, afore I joined him as deputy. No prisoner ever got away from me. I'm good, that's all! I'm a real deputy. I kin shoot an' ride a hoss better'n any one in Monte Vista. I reckon I should ought to be sheriff myself 'stead o' Cook, but he's got 'em all bluffed. Nobody knows what a coward an' four-flusher he is but me. I tell yuh——"

The sheriff glanced back again, and Shorty paused.

"Yuh still hummin'?" called back Sheriff Cook.

"Some," admitted Shorty.

"Huh!" snorted the sheriff wearily, turning away again.

"Yessir, it sure would be a good joke ef yuh got away from him," went on Shorty, slapping the prisoner affectionately on the back so that latter coughed and then flushed angrily. "An' yuh could do it, boy, jus' like I said, ef it wasn't that I was along. I'm a dangerous guy to monkey with, but I hands it to yuh, hombre—I hands it to yuh! Yuh got the sheriff sore by not talkin' to him. He thinks yuh're uppity-uppity, as he says. Yessir, yuh're some smart hombre, ol'-timer, some smart hombre!"

And Shorty pinched DeNue's arm playfully. but DeNue only jerked away and bestowed another glare on the talkative deputy.

"Speakin' o' hosses," said Shorty, changing the subject abruptly. "Yuh got a mighty good roan thar. He kin travel all day an' all night without quittin'. We use him in a lot o' bandit chases. This pinto I'm ridin' is a good hoss, too, but kinda unreliable. He's liable to jump out from under yuh any minit. The sheriff kain't ride him. The sheriff has to have a big ol' plow hoss to ride because he ain't a good rider. Now me, I'm a real rider, I am. I kin ride anything. I——"

The pinto gave a sudden lunge to the left and Shorty, taken off his balance, made a grab for the saddle horn. He missed. He lost a stirrup, and the next second he thudded to the ground. He landed on his head and one shoulder, apparently, and he sprawled there motionless. DeNue stared in surprise for half a second—he noticed that Shorty had fallen on top of his holstered gun. Then DeNue stole a quick look at the sheriff. That dignitary was riding on ahead, quite unaware of the mishap that had just befallen his bragging deputy. DeNue lifted his handcuffed arms. He brought his hands close to his face for a second as he kicked the roan in the ribs. The next instant he was flying after the sheriff, riding on the sod, out of the road, so that the hoofs would not thud so loud.

"Hands up—yuh!" he roared at the sheriff's back.

Sheriff Cook looked around in dismay at the sudden shout. It had taken him by surprise. He saw the wild-eyed DeNue riding down upon him, but before he could see whether the outlaw had a gun in his hands to back up his order or not there was another whoop.

"Hands up, DeNue!"

DeNue did not hesitate this time. He lifted his manacled hands above his head. He knew that voice—the voice of the bragging deputy! Shorty must not have been so badly hurt as he had figured. Without a gun, DeNue knew his bluff was called.

Shorty came galloping up.

"Waal, this is a purty game!" burst forth Sheriff Cook wildly. "Yuh're supposed to be guardin' a prisoner, an' fust thing I know he's right on me, whoopin' fer me to put up my hands! I didn't know whether he had a gat or not. A nice mess! Yuh went to asleep in the saddle, I reckon——"

But Shorty's eyes were aglow with excitement.

"Yuh heard DeNue yell, boss?" cried Shorty. "Yuh heard him holler to yuh to put yuhr hands up, didn't yuh?"

Sheriff Cook flushed a deep crimson.

"I ain't exactly deef, Shorty" he snarled. "I heard him plain enough. But what I'm interested in hearin' now is how come yuh let him pull a trick like that. He might have very easily got away——"

"No chance, boss!" yelled Shorty, riding up to DeNue and jerking something from one of the latter's hands. "I jus' made up my mind I was goin' to make this hombre talk, that's all! In spite o' yuh an' him both! I got suspicious that he wasn't talkin' to us jus' to be uppity-uppity. I figgered he had a deeper reason than that. I decided to make him talk——"

DeNue spoke again now—suddenly, and profanely!

"Yuh blankety-blank——" he snapped at Shorty.

"I slapped him on the back, an' I pinched him," said Shorty, "but he wouldn't talk. Then I told him lies, boss, a pack o' lies. I told him yuh was a coward. I told him I was the best deputy in Colorado. I let him think yuh was a fool. I told him he was on a fast hoss—one he could git away on easy. I kinda told him how to sneak up on yuh. I told him I had a mean hoss, an' yuh had a slow hoss—an' then I fell offen my hoss!"

Sheriff Cook stared in unbelief.

"Yuh went to sleep, then, as I figgered?"

"Naw," said Shorty, "I jabbed the pinto an' made him jump, an' I pretended to be unseated an' I fell off. I made believe I was bad hurt. Knocked unconscious, in fact. But I saw to it that I lit on my gun so he wouldn't git off an' help hisself to it. He had believed all I told him about yuh bein' a coward, and when he saw me down—an' out, as he thought—he jus' made up his mind to try the plan I had suggested to him; so he rode down on yuh, shout-

in' 'Hands up!' just as I hoped he would——"

The sheriff's eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"Waal, why let him try a trick like that?" he asked.

"Because," said Shorty, "I wanted to see ef I couldn't make him talk. I did. He talked when he shouted 'Hands up!' at yuh, didn't he? Waal, that was all I wanted. After he looked at me an' thought I was unconscious an' then started fer yuh I lifted my head an' watched him. Fust I saw him bring his hands up to his face kinda funny; next minute he shouted——"

"What of it?" asked Sheriff Cook. "Ef he was so uppity-uppity he wouldn't talk, thar was no use goin' to such trouble to make him talk, was thar? Ef he wanted to be high-hat——"

"He wasn't high-hat, an' he wasn't uppity-uppity," said Shorty blandly. "He wasn't talkin', because he had something in his mouth all the time! Something we didn't find when we searched him in Gunsight City. Something that gal that visited him in jail over thar yesterday must have slipped him, and he worked out the plan o' keepin' it in his mouth an' pretendin' to be too proud to speak to us. He couldn't talk with that in his mouth—he had to git rid o' it afore he could shout at yuh. I saw him drop it into his hands as he started for yuh. An' I jus' now took it away from him. I got it here."

"What is it?" asked Sheriff Cook curiously.

"A set of little lock picks which might be used to pick open them handcuffs we got on him, or to pick open the locks on our jail doors," said Shorty proudly. "That's all—but I guess he ain't near as smart as he thought he was, after all!"

The sheriff grinned broadly.

"Yuh may have told him a awful pack o' lies about me an' the hosses an' things," said Sheriff Cook, "but yuh never told him no lie when yuh said that yuh was the best deputy sheriff in Colorado, Shorty. That ain't no lie—that's a miracle! Yuh look dumb, an' yuh act dumb, Shorty, but yuh can make the other feller speak, all right!"

ANCIENT RELICS FOUND IN ARIZONA

NOT all the old things come from the Old World, by any means, as one might be forgiven for imagining after reading press reports and seeing photographs of the pomp and circumstance of ancient kings and mummies of long ago. When it comes to a display of ancient civilization, and circumstantial evidence thereof, good old Arizona is prepared to show that the East has nothing on the West. The dean of the University of Arizona, who made an examination of some ancient earthen jars found by workmen engaged in excavations for the city streets there, gave it as his opinion that these relics were more than two thousand years old.

These useful ornaments of long ago were attributed by the dean to the Pilhouse people, the predecessors of the Pueblo tribes who built the Casa Grande. While it is not established that these jars were used for ornament, it is safe to suppose that they were, for not only did they contain the bones of the prehistoric race, whose civilization they recall, but the exteriors of the earthen receptacles are decorated with many strange designs, primitive drawings of birds, centipedes, and snakes, which doubtless have some grave significance.

These earthen jars are said to be the oldest relics yet disinterred in Arizona, with the exception of those of the cliff dwellers which were discovered near Flagstaff.

Silver Trail

By Max Brand

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

HAVING killed a man in self-defense, John Signal goes to Monument. Here he runs afoul of Langley of the Bones gang, whose rivals are the Eagans. Signal gets the name of "John Alias," and is appointed deputy by Sheriff Ogden. While declining to join either gang, Signal prefers the Eagans; the sheriff favors the Bones.

Young Pancho Pineta reports an attack on his brothers' mule train, which has resulted in their death. He wants vengeance, as does also the lovely Esmeralda Pineta, their cousin. Signal admires Esmeralda, who is engaged to the famous Henry Colter, prominent in the Bones gang. Colter has been befriended by Signal, however, and likes him. Polly Noonan, the pretty, witty waitress at his boarding house, attracts Signal. While in his room there, he is shot at from without.

CHAPTER XXII.

BEFORE THE CAT POUNCES.

WELL healed of all dreaming, then, John Signal went down from his room to the rear yard as a cat goes down after a mouse. Around the house he flashed, found the rear gate of the yard locked, and, still catlike, over it he went and came to a horse shed, where a weary-faced man, with a prodigious yawn, was saddling a pinto mustang in the stall next to Grundy.

Grundy, at least, was safe!

"Stranger," said Signal, "you heard a rifle fired around the corner, here?"

"Yes, sure," said the other. "Somebody potting a rabbit, I guess."

"You guess?"

"Yep. And must've hit it. I heard him run off afterward as though he aimed to pick up what he'd plugged."

"And who was it?"

"I never seen his face."

The tired man turned slowly to Signal and added: "What's the matter? Was it *your* rabbit he was shootin' at?"

And, as he said this, an odd light glimmered into his eyes and instantly passed out again. It made Signal consider him through a silent moment, staring steadily, and the longer he stared the more uneasy the other became. His weariness left him. He grew tense, and seemed poised on tiptoe, either for flight or for attack. Remorselessly, Signal stared at him, and the pressure of that young and brilliant eye began to rob

the other of his color. His face grew white and hard. His nostrils quivered. He seemed about to make some desperate start when Signal said: "You know who that was!"

"How should I know?" gasped the other.

"Who are you?"

"Me? What difference does that make?"

"I ask you who you are!" shouted John Signal.

The other leaped back as though a bullet had torn through him.

"Name of Pete Graham!" he said. "What's the matter?"

"Is that your rifle that's leaning against the wall?"

"Maybe it is."

"Is that your rifle?" roared John Signal.

"Yes, yes!" stammered Pete Graham.

Signal picked it up. He had little fear that the other would attempt a sudden attack upon him. Pete Graham was almost demoralized. His glance could not hold still for an instant, but wavered from side to side, and his color was most sickly.

So John Signal opened the rifle and made sure that no bullet had been fired from it. He dropped the gun back against the wall and stared again at Pete Graham, curiously and savagely pleased to mark the disintegration of the man. It was almost like seeing a figure constructed of sand dissolve in water.

"You didn't shoot," said John Signal. "But who did?"

"How should I know? I ain't got eyes everywhere!"

"No. You only have eyes in your head. Who shot at me?"

He advanced a half step. Pete Graham, with a faint groan, drew himself back against the manger and set his teeth.

"I'll see you hanged before I tell!" said he.

"I guessed that you knew!" said Signal.

Pete Graham started to answer, but only achieved a writhing of his lips. He had begun to tremble violently. With all the bitterness of fear, he was tasting death.

Signal dropped a hand upon his gun.

"I'll wait till I count three on you," said he. "Then I want that name out of you."

Pete Graham closed his eyes. He hung by his elbows on the manger, looking ready to faint.

"It was Langley!" he breathed. "Lord help me! It was Langley!"

Signal turned on his heel and went out from the horse shed. He was filled with cold rage at Langley, and a peculiar mixture of cruel satisfaction and pity as he thought of Pete Graham. Perhaps that had been a brave fellow, or brave enough to pass; but now he was dissolved, and he could never be much of a man again.

It reminded Signal of a young giant who had gone forth from Bender Creek to conquer the pugilistic world and who had risen with a dizzy suddenness, until he met the champion. The result of that fight was a crushing defeat, and when the giant came home, he had altered to a weak pulp of a man; he could hardly look a child in the face.

So it seemed to have happened with Pete Graham, all of whose strength had disappeared. And he, John Signal, had been the burning glass which had focused on poor Graham!

So, if pity was in him, that same cruel pride was in him, too. It had been a terrible experiment; it had been a wonderful thing, as well.

He walked around the house to enter it again, and so doing, he encountered a gasping, hurrying, little man whose eyes seemed popping out of his head.

"Hey, John Alias!"

"Well?" said Signal with disdain, for he recognized the same little fellow

who had been apparently spying on the sheriff, outside that official's door.

"Sheriff Ogden sent me up to find you. He says for you to look out. He says that Charley and Jud Bone are both in Mortimer's saloon swearin' that they're gunna get you, and get you good, and get you to-day. He says, you better lie low for a while!"

Signal compressed his lips to keep back the first retort, which was: Why did the sheriff send such a warning, instead of putting under arrest the men who were threatening the life of a peaceful citizen in good standing—so far as Monument was concerned?

But he merely said: "You know Charley and Jud?"

"Sure I know 'em!"

"You hear me?"

"I hear you, Alias."

"Go to Mortimer's saloon."

"It ain't hardly safe!"

"Isn't it safe for you?"

The other moistened his lips. He looked with ratlike eyes upon Signal.

"Maybe I'd chance it," said he.

From his pocket, Signal drew five dollars and dropped them into the ready palm of the other.

"You go to Mortimer's saloon. Is there a crowd there, besides Charley and Jud?"

"It's packed to the doors! They got about a hundred men in there, and Charley and Jud are tellin' what they're gunna do! They're all heated up, and ready for a kill!"

"You've seen 'em?"

"I've seen 'em!"

"Go back to Mortimer's saloon and make a little speech to the whole crowd, or else talk to Charley and Jud so that everybody can hear. Say that I'm sending them word that I hear that they're after me. That they want to run me out of town. Is that it?"

"They wanta run you into your grave, Alias. That's the short of it!"

"Tell them that in a half hour, I'm going to leave this house and I'm going to walk straight down to the sheriff's office. I'm going to be armed and ready for trouble, and if they're men and want trouble, they can stop me on the way. I'll have nobody behind me. I'll be tackling this game alone. If the pair of them have any nerve, if they're men, tell them that I expect to be met!"

The messenger leaned against the picket fence very much as Pete Graham had leaned against the manger in the barn. Then he rallied.

"I'll go as fast as I can," said he. "I'll go down there and tell the boys in Mortimer's saloon about everything that's been told to me. Aw, say, there's never been nothing like this, even in Monument!"

He looked at Signal for a single instant, with a grin of horrible joy; and then he turned and fled. Signal looked after him with a peculiar interest. In all his life he never had seen such a repulsive creature. There was no manliness in him; he was nothing but a negation, except that he loved trouble and lived upon it—the trouble of others! He was the tool who brought fighting men together and watched them destroy one another. Like the most detestable jackal, he lived upon the scraps of danger thrown into his path when the giants clashed. Now, watching him running down the street, his feet shambling, his rounded shoulders working, Signal knew that the most dreadful greed was driving this pariah.

He stared after him in interest. Pete Graham recently had dropped a long distance. Would he ever drop as far as that? And if Graham had dropped, what had forced him down? The impact of more fierce and savage personalities—like his own, like John Signal's?

What passed through the soul of John Signal then, as he reflected keenly

on what he was and what he had done? There should have been shame that there was in him such power over his brother man; there should have been remorse and regret, of gigantic proportions. But in truth, since the truth we must have about him, although there were some faint shadowings of these more humble emotions, all was overridden by a great pride that rose in him like a pillar of white fire—pride, utter self-confidence, and a willingness to lay down his life struggling to maintain his czardom over the wills of lesser men.

He went up to his room and there he took up his rifle and began to unload it, preparatory to cleaning and oiling it, so that all would be in perfect readiness for his march into the throat of danger. He could have burst into song; in fact, he was humming softly to himself and regardless of the fact tnat his door was open, when the voice of Polly spoke from it, saying:

"I've always heard that a cat purs before it pounces. But I never heard the cat before now!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

WERE THERE TWO CATS?

HE looked up at the girl with a keen interest. She had shown before that she could look deeply through the ideas of men. How deeply would she look through him?

"Cat?" asked he.

She nodded. She half closed her eyes and scanned him from head to foot.

"Big, sleek, soft, happy pussy," said she, "about to jump on a mouse. Or a pair of mice," she added.

"Hello!" said he. "What's all this about?"

"Oh," she answered, "Crawlin was here."

"Who's Crawlin?"

"The rat that was looking for you."

"What did he say to you?"

"The same he said to you. That the pair of 'em were looking for you. He was so scared about it that he was happy. 'Maybe they'll all be killed,' says he—the rat!"

"He *is* a rat!"

"When they took a shot at you, they didn't scratch you?"

"What shot?"

She pointed at the chip taken from the window sill.

"It kept on traveling up," said she. "It went through the floor of my room upstairs and nearly took the heel off my shoe. I came down to find out—and you'd sashayed out to ask questions, I suppose?"

"Langley shot at me," he said.

He had been working at the rifle while he talked. Now he paused and looked at her with luminous eyes.

"The murderer!" said he, softly.

"Aye," said she. "Langley's a murderer. Everybody always has known that. Indian kind of murder. That's his long suit. But there's other cards in the deck than the aces, such as you play. A straight flush beats four of a kind, Johnny."

"Meaning what?"

"Why should you be so hard on the murderers?" she asked him.

"D'you want me to praise 'em?"

"I'd sort of expect you to."

"Would you?" he asked icily. "What sort of a man d'you take me to be, Polly?"

"A dog-gone dangerous one," said she.

His swift, well-accustomed hands already had finished with the rifle. He began to slip the bullets into the magazine.

"That's fine and friendly," said he. "Dangerous to who?"

"Why, to pretty near anybody. Man or girl, old man or old woman. Dangerous to everybody, down to the babies in the cradle. That's what you are, Johnny."

"You don't say that seriously, Polly."

"Don't I just!"

"How d'you mean—dangerous even to babies?"

"A baby has to have a father, don't it, to keep earning money, and what not?"

"And I'd kill the papa, eh?" He laughed angrily. "Why, Polly, you're talking crazy!"

"Perhaps I seem to be. I'm not. You're going to run amuck right now."

"What d'you mean?"

"Instead of lying low, like the sheriff wants you to, you're gunna prance down the street and soak the two of 'em full of lead."

"That Crawlin told you everything, did he?"

"Sure. He tells everything, and then some more."

"I'll give him something else to think about, the next time I see him!" said Signal.

"Sure," said Polly. "You'll get down even as low as taking a crack at a worm like Crawlin."

"Say," cried he, "are you trying to get me all heated up, Polly? What's the matter with you? What have I done to you?"

"Made me like you," said Polly, "and that's the worst thing that's happened to me in a long time."

"Humph!" said he. "Like me! And you come in here and call me—why, you call me a murderer! Like me!"

He repeated it, very bitterly.

"Oh, I mean it all," said she. "But you fellows who live by the gun are so single-track you can't carry two loads at once. You've given me a bigger thrill than a roller coaster."

"I wish you'd stop kidding and talk straight to me," he complained.

"I'm talking nothing but," she assured him. "Never anything like it since an actor I seen on the stage, once. He was mighty cool and slick. He had long white hands. He never raised his voice. He had a slow sort of a smile, and all the girls in the play were always falling in love with him. He made my heart jump right up in high C. But the next day—I hadn't slept all night—I seen the wind blow off his hat when he was going down the street, and it took off his wig, too. He was about fifty-five, the old liar!"

She laughed at the memory.

"I'm a faker like him, am I?"

"You're a lot worse. He never would make any widows, except through the divorce courts. But you'll make a plenty before you're done."

"You think that I'm a low gun fighter!" he exclaimed.

"No, I think you're an ace-high gun fighter. I'd put you right up there with the classy ones—with Colter and Fitz Eagan, even! And now that you've got me all in a fuss about you, you're gunna——"

"Look here," cried the boy, "I won't listen to you, the way you're carrying on to make a fool of me!"

"Bah!" answered Polly. "You make me tired. *I've* practically fallen in love, I think; and here you're walking out to get yourself all shot to bits."

"I won't be shot to bits!" said he. "I think the shoe will be on the other foot. I'm not going to miss, I can tell you!"

"That's pretty," she nodded. "You ain't gunna miss. You bet you ain't!"

"But look here, Polly! The other thing—— What I mean to say is—you know—speaking about you and me—Jiminy, Polly, of course you're just making a fool out of me!"

Polly regarded him with a bland, blue eye.

"I got an idea," said she, "that you're tryin' to say something kind to me. Is that right?"

Young John Signal turned the brightest of bright reds.

"You're pretty hard," said he.

"To say nice things to?" she inquired. "Not a bit. You try me!"

He gnawed his lip. The more he looked at her, the more delightful she appeared.

"Polly," he said with a sigh, "you're just badgering me."

"If you want help," said Polly, "I'll help you out if I can. *Do* you want to say that you're fond of me, Johnny?"

He perked back his shoulders.

"How could I?" he demanded of her. "You start right in by calling me a cat; and then you say that I'm a murderer! And then——"

"You take things pretty hard," she said. "You're mighty nice, Johnny, but I don't think you'll ever be much use!"

"You're just a nineteen-year-old girl," said he. "What right have you to talk so grown up? You're only nineteen. You're just a baby, really!"

"Am I?" she asked, smiling. "I wish I was! Oh, how I wish I was!"

"I don't pretend to be anything very much," he went on, furiously hot with wounded dignity and spoiled vanity. "But you don't think that I'll ever be any use!"

"Not once you've really gone wild. You was raised tame, eating out of the hand and getting used to the halter and the bridle right from the beginning. But once you bust loose—well, the hardest outlaw hoss is the one that's come out of a corral, not the one that's always run wild!"

"I wish that you'd get away from horses and get down to men!" he said.

All at once, she threw out her hands toward him, and the softest of music was in her voice.

"Oh, Johnny," said she, "you're such a good boy—in spots! You could be so grand! You're so terrible good-looking, too! Why won't you be nice?"

He hesitated. There had been so much banter that he dared not take all for granted, but he was irresistibly drawn closer to her. He took her hands. They were ridiculously soft, and they quivered, and her fingers squirmed, but really she made hardly an effort to get away. She tipped back her head a little.

"You're laughing at me all the time," he stammered.

"I'm not! I'm not!" she whispered. "Johnny, say that you like me a little, because I know that you do! D'you think that I would've dared to talk this way to you if I hadn't guessed?"

He held her with one arm; she laid her hands upon his shoulders, with her face still raised to his, without the slightest trifle of defense.

And still he hesitated. His poor young brain was whirling wildly. Music rang in his ears, red joy floated before his eyes. But he was held back by a silken string of criticism, his mind still acting, no matter how imperfectly.

"Polly," he said, "I know that you'd never come in here like this except that you had some bigger reason than just caring for me. You wouldn't tell me so quickly. You'd hold off. You could see me going to pieces about you. What made you walk in and let me hold you like this?"

"Will you kiss me, Johnny, and be talkin' about it afterward?" she said.

"Aye, Polly, if you'll tell me what it is that you want."

"Only a small thing—that you'll stay here and not go prancin' off down the street like a fool for them to shoot at you. Only for the promise of that," she said.

He began to straighten a little, so drawing away from her.

"Cannot you see, Polly, that I've got all my honor pledged to walk down to the sheriff's office in the middle of the street, so's to give the pair of them a chance to meet me?"

"What is honor worth? What's that kind of honor worth, honey? Look at me, Johnny. Don't go starin' at yourself in the street! Monument can see

you other days, but you'll be stayin' home here with me to-day, will you? *I'll* make you happy. I'll make you forget the rest of them—the gun-fightin', murderin' rascals! Oh, Johnny, it ain't only that you might be killed—it's that you might kill one of them! And that'd be the finish of you. Oh, honey, will you listen to me?"

He stepped back from her, white of face, his forehead beaded.

"They've hired you to try me out this way, too!" said he. "They'd do anything to shame me!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE CAT SCRATCHES.

HE saw Polly drop into the nearest chair, with one arm fallen over the back of it, and he felt that he had struck her down, and that he was a brute.

Was he wrong, and had grief unnerved her, and horror?

Was he right, and had fear and shame struck her?

But he said to himself that the time had come—that he was overdue—that Monument waited for him to make good his boast.

And so he snatched up the rifle and went out from the room with long, swift strides, like a hunter on a trail.

All the way down the hall he was desperately drawn to whirl about and run back to her and take her hands and beg her to tell him the truth. But when he had passed the first turning of the stairs, it was easier to go ahead, and when he stumbled out into the heat of the sun, she danced back into the rear of his mind, until he could hold her at arm's length and remember that her nose *was* ridiculously short, and that she had freckles.

So, with every step up the street, he grew more certain. His enemies would do anything to break his spirit and shame him before Monument's eyes. And what more natural than for them to use this clever girl, this perfect little actress!

He gritted his teeth, now, seeing that she never could have been drawn to him so suddenly. True enough that he had been swept halfway toward love the first minute he was with her. But that was a miracle. She was hard, quick, sharp, bright; she could not have been involved in the same manner!

So said he to himself, and striding up the street, the action of walking, the heat of the day, the burning brightness of the sun—all acted upon him and enabled him to become his own man again.

Nothing was important except the rifle which he carried over the crook of his left arm, his right hand grasping the trigger guard and the trigger. Revolvers were quicker, it was true, but surety was the grand thing. And he wanted to be sure!

He shortened his step. He was coming into the center of Monument; he was turning into the main street itself, and now he saw that all the doorways and the windows were jammed with people, and that the street before him was as naked as the palm of his hand. No, yonder a runabout drawn by a trotting horse came in, but some one ran out from the pavement and headed the driver away.

It was as though the street were being kept open by tacit consent for the passage of a procession. And suddenly he realized that his own approach was that which was so expected!

Crawlin must have advertised the coming event with a town crier, for every one understood, and all were present for the show. Constantly, new faces were crowding into the doorways and into the windows. Somewhere, Charley Bone and his brother would have to be waiting.

And he smiled with a cold and savage content.

They were not out in plain sight, walking toward him. They were waiting with rapidly beating hearts, wondering how this affair would turn out—no doubt cursing the stage which had been set for them. For in this battle there was no glory for them whether they won or lost, only the shame of possible defeat, the even greater shame of victory, two against one. But he, whether he won or lost, was glorious. He had faced great danger with equanimity.

Only one shadow troubled his brain. When the bullets tore through his body would he be able to keep on fighting to the end, or would he weaken at the last, and would pain bring from his lips some involuntary cry of agony?

He set his teeth hard. No sound should come from him, except words of scorn and insult!

Thus he thought, as he walked in the middle of the street, slowly, his eye running to the right, and to the left, under the lines of pillars of the endless arcades on either hand. But still the two armed men did not appear. He had covered two blocks of this long gantlet.

And then he heard occasional voices which called out to him words of encouragement.

"You'll be our next sheriff, John Alias."

"That boy has the right stuff."

"We're with you, kid!"

They were with him—in their doorways and their windows, but who was with him in the flesh, walking with weapons in their hands, to face the criminals who waited somewhere for him?

Cool contempt for the speakers and their words possessed him. And his scorn grew, and he went on with a heart of iron, and an eye of fire.

Perhaps each of them would appear upon a different side of the street. In that case, he would put in his first shot to the left—Luck send it straight home! Afterward, whirling to the right to bring his gun in line, he would drop upon one knee and shoot again.

So he planned it.

He slowed his pace yet more. He must give plenty of time to them to appear. Perhaps they were weakening. Perhaps the strain was telling on them, as it had told upon Pete Graham. Perhaps, even, they would not come out to face him at all!

And then he saw two men bearing rifles step out from a doorway and pass from the shadow beneath the arcade into the sunlight.

They were seventy yards away—point-blank range. One was Charley Bone, and the other was Jud, his tall, massive brother. The crimes laid to the name of Jud Bone would have filled considerable space in a newspaper, even if merely mentioned and not given in detail.

And now John Signal thought of two things. One was that the brothers had come out side by side because they needed the reënforcement of their mutual presence. The other was that the first moral victory was upon the side which forced the other to begin the shooting.

There they stood, side by side, rifles ready—fine-looking men they appeared, Charley like a brilliant picture, and Jud with his long hair flowing, trapper fashion, over his shoulders. But their fineness was apparently not appreciated by the crowd, and voices called out angrily, loudly:

"Two to one! Is that Western fighting fashion? Two to one! Where's the sheriff? Stop this butchery! Give the kid a fighting chance!"

Sweet music to the ears of the boy, John Signal. Bitterest poison to the ears of the brothers as they stood before him. He paused, and allowed those voices to grow in volume. He saw Jud jerk his rifle to his shoulder—then lower it again.

Shame must have compelled that change of mind!

And John Signal smiled again. He began to understand. It was as though a voice were speaking into his ear exactly the thoughts in the minds of the two. To Charley it was a horrible affair; Charley was naturally the sort of fellow to want to fight fairly, without odds on his side, but he had been dragged in by Jud, no doubt. And there was Jud, crushed by the scorn and the hatred of the crowd, only to be justified—and thoroughly despised—by dropping the enemy.

John Signal smiled, and slowly, deliberately, he stepped forward, narrowing the space which intervened—with every step bringing death closer to himself, to yonder pair!

"Keep back, kid! You chuck away your chances by getting closer! Keep back!"

He heard the voices clearly, but they meant nothing. He knew his business! So he advanced, half a dozen, a dozen, strides, all slowly taken.

And then the rifle butt again leaped to the hollow of big Jud's broad shoulder.

That instant, Signal dived forward for the ground. He heard the clang of the rifle as he lurched. It must have looked, as he intended it to look, as thought the bullet had dropped him upon his face.

But, in fact, he heard it whistle, harmless, just above his head, and that escape made him feel armored with invincibility.

The thick white dust cushioned his fall and sent up a puffing cloud; some of it entered his eyes, which stung sharply. And, all in a moment, he had time to think several things—such moments as these allow the brain to work swiftly. He wondered if the dust in his eyes would spoil his shooting—if the mist in the air would spoil the aim of the enemy—and he marveled at the heat which the sun had poured into the street. He lay as in an oven.

In falling, he had thrown the gun forward, and now he lay with it trained steadily on the shooting pair, peering at them out of his natural entrenchment, as two more bullets hummed wickedly above his body; and again there was the satisfaction of escape, the sense of security unfathomable!

He was taking Jud Bone into the sights, taking him firmly, without haste, using all of a half second to be securely trained upon him. The body was sure, but a man shot through the body may be shooting as he falls, and shoot again as he lies prone. He used another half second to change his aim to the head. Then he pulled the trigger.

Jud Bone stood with a column behind him, and at first he did not seem to have been struck. He merely lowered his rifle, as though to observe what damage his fire had wrought upon the enemy who lay yonder in the street. But, after that, he leaned softly forward. He seemed to be bowing in acquiescence, and so fell dead beneath the arcade.

Already the aim of Signal had been taken on the second and more dangerous enemy. He fired. He saw the rifle flung up from the hands of Charley Bone and saw the latter go back a staggering step. Then, instead of falling, leaving his gun behind him, Charley Bone leaped sidewise into the shelter of the columns and was gone from sight.

John Signal rose, the dust streaming away from him, and the wind catching it and hanging it behind him like a blowing mantle as he walked calmly forward.

There were more bullets in his rifle, and he carried that weapon at the ready, for Charley Bone was very apt to open fire again, from shelter.

And as Signal arose, the whole street came to life with a shouting and hum-

ming of voices, and hundreds poured out to gather around the victor, and the vanquished.

CHAPTER XXV.

SEVEN STOPPED BY THREE.

WITH all that outward swirl of people, no one got into the path of John Signal as he walked up to the fallen body of Jud Bone. He turned the dead man upon his back and stared down at him with wonder. He had killed once before, but that had been in the heat of a sudden fury, but this was a premeditated battle, and the enemy had gone down. He kneeled and closed the eyes of Jud Bone, but he did it without a sense of pity. No gentle remorse disturbed him; he was keen upon the trail which he had started. So, springing up again, he said quietly to a man near by: "I suppose the family of this fellow will take care of him?"

"They will," said the other.

"Did any one see what way Charley Bone went?" went on Signal.

A panting, eager little man worked through the crowd, fighting his way. It was Crawlin, his face pale with eagerness; his eye more bloodshot and ferretlike than ever.

"I seen Charley Bone! He run down the street. He went into Mortimer's saloon. You would dare to go there, would you?"

Signal already was on the way with long strides, and the other trotted beside him, gasping interjections. But Signal, grimly in part, and part joyously, went forward, dimly aware of the faces about him, men stumbling and crowding to get from his path, shrinking a little as he went by, staring at him as though at a strange being dropped from another world. And he knew that his name had been written into the slender list of Monument's immortals. As for what else this day's work meant—why, he was only twenty-two, and that was enough excuse for a little shortsightedness.

Crawlin was still beside him.

"You ain't gunna go in?" demanded Crawlin, his voice shaking with joyous anticipation. "They'd—they'd shoot you to bits! Mortimer's is the Bone hangout! It's full of their men!"

Young Signal went on, unhesitant, turned the corner, struck open the swinging doors, and entered Mortimer's saloon. It was almost empty. Every one had gone out to join the crowd of spectators in the street except half a dozen grim-looking fellows and the bartenders; and all of these turned blank, astonished faces toward the deputy sheriff.

He could tell at once what they were. They were solid adherents, fighting men in the Bone cause. But he feared them not. In his hands was still the weapon, warm with the death of one man, and the routing of another.

"I want Charley Bone. He came in here," said he.

"He went on through," said the nearest bartender. "He went on through the house, I suppose."

"Which way?"

"Back that way!"

He knew that it was a lie; he knew that he could not find Charley Bone. But what he wanted was the glory of having bearded the lion in his den. So he went on into the back rooms, and walked rapidly through them, opening many doors. There was no one to be found, except a pair of resolute gamblers, weary of eye; perhaps they had been playing since the night before, and certainly now they were blank to the outer world.

He came back into the barroom, looked up and down the line of threatening, dark faces, then turned his back upon them and, without undue haste, stepped out onto the street.

It had been simple enough in the execution, but he felt as though that

pilgrimage into Mortimer's place had been far more dangerous than the actual fight against Charley and Jud. But the second victory was dependent upon the first. Other things still would flow naturally out of this day's work. And the sun was not yet down!

So thought John Signal, walking back up the street toward the spot where the dead man had been left lying. And, as he went, he saw Crawlin darting here and there before him, anxious, eager, every hungry for dangerous news, ever feverishly spreading what he knew, and pausing here and there to discharge a few volleys of facts which he had learned of the invasion of Mortimer's. He disappeared in the crowd, far up the street. And Signal came back to Jud Bone in time to find that unhappy man being raised and carried into the nearest store. They laid Jud Bone upon a counter and brushed the dust from him. Signal himself composed the hands of the dead man upon his breast.

Then a furtive voice beside him said: "I'm from the *Ledger*. We'd like a statement, Sheriff Alias."

"I'll make this statement," said the boy. "Those fellows let the whole town know that they were looking for me. So I came to look for them and warned them of it. I stand for law and order. I've taken an oath. And I'm going to live up to that oath. That's all I have to say!"

He looked about him as he spoke and noted that all eyes shifted away from his glance. They did not believe him. They could not believe him. He spoke of law and order, but they wrote him down as a mere gun fighter, who killed for the joy of seeing the other men fall.

He went back onto the street. This pot had begun to boil, and the cookery was not yet finished, he could guess as he saw the congested knots of people here and there. And then a familiar shuffling figure squirmed through one knot and came hastily toward him—Crawlin, his face fairly purple with excitement. He looked like a glutton faced in time of starvation with a table groaning under an Olympian weight of delicacies. He clutched the arm of the boy and hung there a moment, gasping in his wind again.

"The whole bunch!" he finally managed to ejaculate. "They're coming for you. About a dozen of the Bone outfit. They're all coming. They're gunna get your scalp. They've sworn to get it. Old man Bone—and Charley Bone is back with them with blood on his face—and—I never thought that I'd see such a day. There's gunna be trouble in Monument!"

But it was not horror that made his eyes flash. It was hideous, consuming joy.

Then a dry voice said near by: "If you're standing for law and order, you'd better go and arrest that bunch of murderers, John Alias!"

It was an old, withered man who spoke, fixing his keen blue eye upon the boy.

"And do you think that I'll run away from them?" asked Signal.

He never had dreamed of standing against such odds as Crawlin reported, but now that he was challenged, his heart leaped into his throat and forced the answer.

"You'll run your own business," said the old man. "But don't be a young fool! The heroes of Monument won't be remembered many days after they drop!"

He said this with a sarcastic smile, as though he had read the very heart of Signal, but the boy answered hotly; "If they come for me, they'll find me. Not sneaking in the crowd, but out where I can be seen!"

And he went straight out into the center of the street, and stood there, leaning upon his rifle, and watching the

sudden stre king of all the rest to cover; while, far down the street, a dust cloud burst upward, and rolled away across the tops of the northern houses.

There was the enemy. By the first glance of that cloud of white rising, he knew that he could not stand against any such onrush as that. Fortune, a little nerve, and a clever maneuver in the battle had won for him against Charley Bone and Jud. But fortune could not favor him twice so overwhelmingly. And yet he could not budge from his place.

Excited voices called to him. They bade him not be a fool. They told him that he had done enough for one day. They even cursed him for his rashness. And then a pair of miners lumbered out toward him. They caught him by the arms and made as if to carry him away, but he twisted from them.

"You fellows mean well," he told them. "But this is my place, and here I'm going to stay."

"We'll stand by you, then!" said one, with a liberal enriching of Irish brogue. "I wouldn't be after runnin' away from a man like you, Alias, when the pinch come!"

But Signal smiled upon him and shook his head.

"You fellows have one pistol between you. This isn't your business. I've started it and I'll finish it, and I don't want help. You go back where you'll be safe!"

They hesitated. Then the Irishman was seized by his friend and dragged away, protesting. Out of the dust cloud down the street men were riding, not any dozen as Crawlin had declared, but seven bold horsemen, armed to the teeth, their rifles flashing, balanced across the pommels of their saddles. In the van and the center rode the father of the family, his white beard divided by the wind of the gallop, and blowing back over either shoulder. He came to avenge the death of a son, and he came fast.

John Signal raised his rifle, braced his feet, and waited. Prone upon the ground would again have been a better position, but seeing that his case was hopeless, it seemed to him, somehow, a better thing that he should meet death standing, rather than be trampled under foot by charging horses.

He took his place firmly, therefore, and then he saw the charging cavalcade draw down to a trot, to a walk. They would not unsteady their aim by the motion of their horses. They were not thirty yards away—and still no bullet fired!—when from the corner of his eye Signal saw a form move out upon the sidewalk.

He looked again. It was the tall, slender form of Major Paul Harkness, as dapper and calm as ever, but carrying now in his hand a double-barreled shotgun, sawed off short. He came out from the arcade and waved his hand cheerfully toward Signal; then he faced the oncoming brigade.

And Signal, confused by the shouts which began to ring out on either side of the street, turned in the other direction, and there he beheld the mighty form of Fitzgerald Eagan, with a revolver in either hand. One of those guns he waved toward Signal, and nodded.

Suddenly the heart of the boy leaped higher than ever. It would be no useless stand against numbers. He could not have found by combing the world two better fighting men than these who now flanked him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WILL THEY BE ALIVE TO-MORROW?

NOW as he listened more closely to the uproar about him, he understood that it was the apparition of the added pair which the crowd commented upon. They had been watching to see

the death of a very rash and very young deputy sheriff. Now they changed their minds. It was simply a battle of the first magnitude to which they would be witnesses. Among the columns of the arcade lingered Crawlin, halfway between the two forces, so that he could not be suspected of favoring either, in an agony of terror because so much danger was about him; but, while he wrung his hands in that chilly ecstasy, the attraction proved irresistible, and he could not go back from his place of peril.

The forces of the Bone faction, in the meantime, saw their purpose necessarily checked for the moment. At least, it was one thing to beat down one rash youth; it was another to march in under the converging fire of three warriors, all of whom had proved themselves to be desperate fighters. The horsemen halted. They flung themselves from their horses, but still they tarried at about twenty-five paces.

Suddenly, old Bone walked forward, a hand raised in signal above his head.

He went straight up to the city marshal, Fitz Eagan, and exploded in the following manner:

"Eagan, I take it uncommon low and mean of you to step in here like this! The kid deserves killin'; he's been askin' for trouble, and now he's gunna get it."

"What's he done?" asked the sheriff.

"He killed a man; he gets killed in turn. Ain't that fair?"

This naïve argument did not disturb big Eagan, who replied: "He killed one of a pair; and the pair was out lookin' for him. How does that sound to you?"

"It was my boy Jud that he killed, and you dog-gone well know it."

"Wasn't Jud looking for him with a gun, and wasn't Charley along with him?"

"What do I care about that? Ain't I Jud's pa?"

"I suppose you are."

"What kind of a skunk would you write me down if I didn't try to scalp the gent that murdered Jud?"

"I don't deny you got a right to be heated up for losing your boy. But Jud wasn't shot from behind."

"It was the darn low trick of fightin' out of a cloud of dust. How d'you get around that?"

"You're mad and you're sore, dad. You see this thing all crooked."

"I don't see it crooked at all. This kid is our meat, and you know it, and still you come hornin' in. Is this here gunna be the end of the truce between us all that the sheriff has been workin' so hard to keep up?"

"This has nothin' to do with the sheriff," insisted Fitz Eagan. "The kid played a good, square game. He's got too much nerve to run away even when seven of you come for him. He don't shoot from behind walls, either!"

"What d'you mean by that?" shouted the other, apparently touched in a sore spot by this reference.

"You know pretty well what I mean. Now, dad, you'd better let this job drop. The kid's all right, and you ought to know that he is. He's never looked for trouble from you and your gang. You know that, too."

"He never looked for trouble? How did all the trouble start, then?"

"Who stole the kid's horse?"

"Who says that I did?"

"I don't. But don't Langley belong to you? Ain't that Sim Langley over there right now?"

"That's Sim, and I'm glad and proud to have him," said Dad Bone, deftly shifting the point of view. "What I say is: Are you gunna undo all the good work of the sheriff and chuck Monument back into a dog-gone civil war the way that it was before he come in and took sides?"

"I'm not here because I'm against you," said Fitz Eagan, with a good deal

of conciliation in his voice and manner. "I'm here because I'm the city marshal."

"Aw, quit that kind of fool talk," groaned the old man. "Don't speak like that to me, Fitz. You're too young. And I'm too old and know too much about you. That's the fact of the matter."

"It's not the fact. I'm telling you the truth, and you're aching to dodge it. The kid's a sworn officer of the law. So am I."

"And so's Major Harkness, yonder," sneered Dad Bone.

"Every good citizen ought to stand behind the officers of the law."

"Then they's a lot of yaller hounds that I can see from down here!" exclaimed the old man, glaring around at the crowded windows which overlooked the streets.

"Leave the rest of them out of it," retorted Fitz Eagan. "Am I town marshal, or am I not?"

"I suppose you are," said the other. "What has that got to do with me?"

"You've come here with six more to get John Alias, and you've admitted it in them words. Well, as town marshal, I ain't going to let you commit that murder under my eyes, and I order you to disperse and go home!"

Old Bone fairly sputtered with rage for a moment.

Then he roared, so that the bellow echoed from wall to wall: "This here is the end of the peace in Monument, young feller! This here is the undoin' of all the sheriff's good work, and this old town is gunna be painted red before many more days! You hear me talk?"

"I hear you talk," said Fitz Eagan earnestly. "Now you hear me. There are six more with you. That's seven, by any man's counting. There's only three on this side. Why don't you lead on in and start something? We're here to be finished. Finish me and the major off, and there'll be no danger of that there civil war that you talk about so much. I make you my offer, dad. You take it now, or show the world that you and the rest of the Bone tribe are a pack of sneaking cowards, and odds of two to one ain't enough for you!"

Dad Bone recoiled a little, burying both his hands in his magnificent, snowy beard. It did not seem a sign of age in the old man, but a sort of token of reverend iniquity and hardy, seasoned vice of all descriptions.

"Three of you out here in plain sight," he shouted, "and thirty more of you lyin' away behind the windows. You call this a fair fight, do you? It's a trap!"

"It's no trap!" answered Fitz Eagan. "It's no trap at all. There ain't a man laid away in hiding. There's three of us alone, and if anybody else joins in on this here scrap, I'll call him a skunk, and go for him myself, afterward. Lemme hear you talk to that?"

"I don't want to talk to it!" shouted Dad Bone. "And I've done my last talkin' to you, young Eagan. You've been livin' pretty high. You've been lording it over Monument. I ain't cared. I wanted nothing but the peace. Fitz Eagan is just a young fool, says I to myself, and let you have your day. But that time is finished, and I'm gunna tear you to rags, Fitz Eagan. You hear me talk?"

"I hear you talk, and I know when I'll be torn," said Fitz Eagan. "I'll be shot full of holes the first time that you and your ratty crew can shoot at me from behind a wall, the same as you've shot down better men than yourselves before me!"

Dad Bone waved both his clenched fists above his head in furious indignation, but, no words coming, he turned and half ran, half stumbled, back toward the rest of his party. Halfway there, he wheeled about and delivered a few tremendous oaths at the head of the marshal. Then he went on, and

the ranks of his men instantly closed around him.

Fitz Eagan called across to John Signal: "Don't you let up, youngster! Stand tight and keep your gun ready. Those rats are liable to turn and start biting, if they see that you're off your guard!"

But Signal had not the slightest idea of abandoning his attitude of care and watchfulness. He keenly eyed the milling group of the Bone adherents and waited to see if the scorn of the crowd would urge them on to battle, for frequent bits of comment were hurled at them from the windows and doors:

"Now you got the Eagans where you want 'em!"

"Put three each on Alias and Fitz; that leaves one for the major. Ain't three to one good enough for you?"

"You've showed your bluff. Now call it!"

These and much more insulting cries were hurled at the seven who, suddenly, mounted their horses and turned their heads down the street. But, at this, there was a great wave of derisive, mocking laughter and hate.

And Crawlin, overmastered by exquisite disappointment, in that no more blood seemed about to be shed upon this day, fell back against one of the pillars and beat his clawlike hands against his face.

But he rallied himself immediately, for fear lest any sight or sound of trouble should escape him, and stood against his pillar, turning his wicked head in birdlike activity up and down the street.

So the Bone tribe retreated in inglorious derision, with all Monument left laughing at and scorning them. And a host of congratulations were poured in upon Fitz Eagan and young Signal. Now the brutes of the town had been faced and had been shamed. Was it not the proper moment to strike hard in the interests of law and order? Was it not the moment to rally all forces and clean up Monument for good and all?

Fitz Eagan looked around the crowd and—lion that he was!—answered them to their faces: "You talk law and order. You know that you ain't ready for law and order, yet. You ain't shot yourselves out, yet, and your favorite judge is old Judge Colt. If you wanted law and order so bad, why did five hundred of you stand around and watch while one kid stood out there and faced seven murderin' demons?"

To this the crowd did not attempt the slightest answer, and the marshal turned away, wading through the throng of people slowly, with Major Harkness on one hand, and young John Signal on the other.

And behind them the cricketlike voice of Crawlin sang out: "Watch 'em! Use your eyes! Three finer fighting men never stepped together before. Do you think they will all be alive in the mornin'?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE SHERIFF.

NOW Major Harkness proposed a drink, but young Signal merely wrung the hand of each of his newly proved friends.

"I'd better see the sheriff!" he said. "I hope to heaven no trouble comes to either of you fellows for standing by me this way! And night or day, I'm ready to ride with you. Is that understood?"

"That's understood."

"Heaven forgive me if I ever forget," said the boy with fervor.

Even the cold eye of the major brightened and warmed a little as he stared at Signal. The major was dying of consumption, slowly and surely, and that, men said, was why he advanced into the teeth of danger with such calm unconcern.

He clapped John Signal lightly on the shoulder.

"Don't burn yourself up with too much gratitude," said he. "Fact is, Fitz was playing his own game as much as yours. He wants to put down the Bone tribe as much as you do!"

"Of course," said Fitz Eagan frankly. "You go and talk to the sheriff, if you can find him. He's due back in town in a short time."

So John Signal went straight to the sheriff's office, and found it empty. Peter Ogden had not yet returned from an expedition into the country. Signal therefore, sat at the window and watched the sunset colors beginning, and wondered if ever before a man had lived through such a thronged day as this.

Across the street stood Grundy, the roan, tethered beside the watering troughs in front of the Metropolis Hotel. It tickled the very cockles of Signal's young heart to see the people stop around that horse and point it out and nod to themselves as they discussed its merits, and turn away still in deep talk. Not of Grundy were their words, he knew, but of Grundy's owner.

And then, darkening in his mind with the day, he remembered the words of Polly. What had she said of guns and gun fighters? And what had she declared about him before he started for the fray?

"She's only a girl!" he said to himself, and then he heard footfalls in the hall. The door opened, and the sheriff in person appeared before him against the blackness of the hall behind. For the room was a sea of twilight; in the deeps of it pulsed the cinder at the end of the sheriff's eternal cigar.

He paused in the doorway, and then strode into the room, the flimsy floor quaking beneath his weight.

"You been having quite a party, I hear," said Peter Ogden.

To this, Signal returned no answer, for he could see that the way would not be easy before him.

"You been rousin' up the town, I hear," went on the sheriff in a voice more bland than before. "But I see how it is. You take, back in your own home town, you found things more lively than we got 'em out here. Things are pretty sleepy for you, and you had to stir up a little fun. Was that it?"

Young John Signal said not a word, but he shrank a little in his chair. He had no very profound respect for the sheriff, but superior years have a certain weight of authority and before it Signal bowed.

The sheriff leaned on the back of a chair and puffed at his cigar.

"Monument has a new hero," he went on at last, "and Monument has a new grave. Always gotta be that way, I suppose. One man can't go up without another goin' down!"

He added, heavily, "Me, for instance. Young John Alias, he goes up. And Jud Bone dies. Dies young!"

He poused. There was such an obvious injustice in this remark that anger wiped from Signal's mind half of his contrition and depression.

"And Monument has to go down, too," said the sheriff in continuation. "Monument that was beginnin' to float on an even keel, it's struck the rough waters, again!"

"I don't know," murmured Signal. "I don't see what I've done to put Monument on the rocks."

"You don't know—you don't see! No, you wouldn't! You ain't got the eyes to see that far or that deep into things. You're young!"

"I did nothing," said the deputy sheriff, "except what seemed to me to be my plain duty!"

"You done nothing except what seemed to you your plain duty," echoed the ironic sheriff.

He laughed, a great, harsh laugh.

"Your duty!" he said again.

"Look here!" protested the boy. "You know what happened? Sitting in my window at the boarding house, they took a shot at me. The Bone people did."

"You saw the man take the shot, did you?"

"No."

"Then how do you know?"

"I found a man in the stable and made him tell."

"You found a man in the stable—you made him tell," sneered the sheriff. "He knew, didn't he? He was able to look through the wall of the barn and see?"

"He knew," said the boy quietly, sure of himself.

"Who was he?"

"His name is Pete Graham."

"What!"

The sheriff was quiet for a moment. Then he asked:

"Who did he say did it?"

"Langley."

The sheriff exclaimed—and then growled: "The fool! The yellow fool!"

Signal continued: "When I got back into the house after running outside, I got word that Jud and Charley were in town saying that they were going to get me. I simply sent down word that I was coming to give them a chance. And they took their chance. And there you are! Wasn't that my duty?"

"Oh, hang your duty!" cried the sheriff. "You wanted to make a grandstand play! You wanted to get onto the center of the stage where all the boys and girls could see you and get to know you! Tell me the truth! Wasn't that it?"

And John Signal answered meekly: "Yes, there's some truth in that, no doubt. I'm ashamed of it!"

This confession seemed to take a good deal of the wind out of the sails of the sheriff. But he gathered strength again as he continued: "Then you smash everything that I've done! You throw in with the Eagans!"

"I didn't. They stood by me to keep me from being mobbed. *You* weren't there to help!"

"No," said the sheriff, "and thank goodness I wasn't! You know what I've been doing in this here town, don't you?"

"I know that you've been the sheriff for a while, of course."

"When I come here, what do I find? The Eagans and the Bones running everything. Every other stage that run out of town was stuck up. The silver couldn't be shipped out, the half of it. Everything was going to pot. Business was stopping. Two of the biggest mines was shut down, the owners waiting. There were three men killed—in self-defense!—the first day that I arrived here. Monument ate three men a day. Everybody packed guns! The honest men included. Well, what did I do? Kill and hang all the Bones and the Eagans? No, I couldn't do that. But I balanced 'em one agin' the other. I made 'em run the *other* crooks out of town. I got Fitz Eagan, the grandest fighting man in this world, made the city marshal. I cleaned up the gambling dumps. There ain't a crooked roulette wheel in this town! I made the saloons chuck the rotten bartenders that would feed booze to a man till he was crazy drunk. I had Monument started on the way to being a decent town. But—I didn't keep it fast enough and entertainin' enough to suit Mr. John Alias! I couldn't do that. And when he come along, he seen his duty plain, and he done it—with a gun in each hand. Well, kid, d'you think that I couldn't use guns, too? D'you think that I'm afraid of guns? I got my record. Look it up! But there never was a decent job done with gunpowder and lead, and there never will be; they're good for nothing but murder, and murder is what

you've raised up in these here streets again!"

John Signal was thunderstruck. He never had taken this attitude toward the sheriff; he never had heard people speak of him with any vast respect. It seemed generally admitted that, under his régime, Monument was a better and a quieter town than it had been ever before, but that was all. But now Signal could look a bit beneath the surface and see that everything that had been said by the older man probably was the truth. He was shamed and he was startled. He could see, now, that there might have been a halfway stand taken. The sheriff was right. The girl had been right, too; and the higher courage worked without guns.

So he sat dumfounded, while the sheriff exclaimed: "I want no more of you! You've smashed all my work. You've put the Eagans and the Bones at each other's throats. You've killed one. You've thrown the law in on the side of the other party. I wish I'd never seen you. I'll pay you a month's salary, and you can get out, and the farther that you get, the better for you —and for me!"

John Signal stood up in the thickening gloom of the office.

"Look here," he said quietly, "I've done wrong, perhaps. But I meant to do right."

He lighted the lamp. He wanted to see the sheriff's face, and he was rather relieved to find nothing but honest indignation on it.

"There's a place," said the sheriff, darkly, "that's full of gents that wanted to do right."

"It's not fair to fire me," said Signal, "and you know it. And how can you tell that your way is the best? You make the law a joke. People laugh at it. All they respect in this town are Henry Colter and Fitz Eagan. And you ought to drive them both out—and you know it!"

"You want to run the office for me, eh?"

"You swore me into this job. I'll stay."

"You'll stay? I fire you now—on the spot!"

"Do you? Then I'll walk down to the street and call every man in town together, and I'll tell them that I've been fired. And I'll tell them why. For killing Jud Bone, instead of lying low, like a scared coyote. I'll tell them that. Where will you stand then?"

The sheriff turned purple with fury. He could only glare for a moment, utterly baffled. Then he muttered: "You want to stay? You want to be kept busy, eh? I'll keep you busy. To-morrow you start out and collect the taxes outside of Monument. I'll tell you where!"

And he laughed, brutally, with triumph in his eye.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A TASK FOR THE DEPUTY.

THE minds of some men cannot be at ease unless their hands are occupied. And the sheriff, having delivered this ultimatum, smiled with grim triumph at his deputy; he took out of his pocket a little golden trinket and began to spin it into the air—not a coin but something the size of a double eagle.

"You'll go to Hanford and collect the taxes there," he said. "I've got the list here of all the payments due!"

He went to his desk and from a drawer he took out an envelope. "You'll find everything that you want to know about Hanford taxes in here!" said he.

And he smiled again at the youngster and spun the golden trinket a second time in sheer excess of spirits. However, he missed catching it in its descent. It slipped from his hand and rolled across the table, tumbling to a stop in front of John Signal. The latter stared at it hopelessly, as a man

will stare when his mind is troubled with problems to which he finds no solution. It was, he saw, no coin at all, but a group of two figures in gold—a man walking with a staff and carrying a small child upon his shoulder, the whole group embraced with a circling band. In another instant, he recognized the figure—that of a St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child—and suddenly his heart stopped.

From the dead brother of Pancho Pineta in San Real Canyon just such a trinket had been taken—the patron saint to which the smugglers had prayed in their journeyings! It was most unlikely that a second figure such as this should exist in one community. And the thought that came home with stunning weight upon the mind of the boy was that Sheriff Peter Ogden himself might have been a figure in the robbery and the terrible murder of the smugglers!

He closed his eyes. Monument, he felt, was growing a little too complicated for his understanding. He picked up the ornament and pretended to admire it.

"This is a good bit of work," said he. "I never saw anything better."

"You don't know the Mexicans," said the sheriff. He added with a careless gesture: "Take it along. Maybe it'll give you luck at Hanford! I'm going home. You lock up the office after you!"

He left the place, and the boy, as bidden, locked the office as he departed. He did not go straight back to the boarding house, however, but went first to the hospital by the side of the river, where he found young Pancho Pineta lying pale and still, but well beyond danger and promising a quick recovery, as the nurse assured him. Yes, he could speak with the Mexican for two or three minutes.

"Pineta," he said, standing by the bed, "do you know me?"

The youngster looked quietly up at him. "No, I don't know you."

"My name is John Alias. I'm the deputy sheriff——"

The other smiled in instant appreciation.

"I've been hearing nothing else all day, señor, except about what you have done. Jud Bone was a dog. A cruel dog! I am glad to see your face, señor, to remember a man!"

"Thank you. I've come to speak about San Real."

"So does the sheriff. Every one is willing to talk about San Real, but nothing is done, nothing is done until I can ride and shoot again!" His face flushed with angry determination.

"I've come to ask you a particular thing. You remember the figure of St. Christopher that your brother wore in his hat?"

"How could I forget it? My poor brother used to say a prayer to it, night and morning."

"Was there anything about it that could make you identify it? There might be other figures just like it!"

"There are, of course. But that one was marked. Once a bullet grazed the hat of my brother. St. Christopher saved him, of course, but there was a furrow left across the breast of the saint."

Signal took out the small image. Plainly across the form of the saint was the notch cut by the bullet.

"Is this the one?"

"Madre de Dios!" breathed the wounded man, and lay still, with eyes of fire.

"Listen to me," said Signal. "If you want that trail run down and the murderers caught, forget what I've showed you. Rub it out of your mind. Don't let yourself whisper even in your sleep, because if it's known that I've identified it, there will be an end to that trail. You understand?"

The Mexican held out his hand and

gripped that of Signal with surprising strength.

"I understand," said he. "My soul rides with you. Good fortune, Señor Alias!"

Signal left the hospital and stood in the cool of the evening by the river. In Mortimer's dance hall, behind his saloon, the orchestra was running over a new piece for the evening, and the music sounded sweet in the ear of the boy. From the gardens along the river front there was a fragrance of many flowers. The honeysuckle was blooming, and its breath came strongly upon the quiet air. For nothing stirred except sound and scent. All men were home at dinner; no horses clattered over the bridges; the wagons for once were still, with their far-heard creakings. Neither did the tall trees stir a leaf, and the golden faces of the lights along the shore fell with never a wrinkle upon the broad black water.

In the tumult of Monument, there was this pause, not for thought and reflection, but for bacon and eggs! And then it seemed to John Signal that a new sense of life poured suddenly in upon him. It was as though he had turned a corner, not long before, hardly knowing what he did, but now he found himself in a new street, and far from home. A beautiful street, let us say, of splendid houses, but none of them were his!

And then he knew that he had in fact turned out of the old way of his life and come to a new; he was no longer a boy. Somewhere between Polly and the slaying of Jud Bone he had left that lesser self behind him, and it was not a new world in which he stood; it was simply a new self that stood there breathing the odors of the flowers, watching the golden-barred river.

It sobered John Signal. He had galloped into Monument with little care. But suddenly he was crushed under a load of apprehension and of trouble; for it seemed that whatever hand he tried to play, all men were against him —even the sheriff, now, must be hunted down!

He, being of such stuff as should compose men, did not even contemplate giving up the battle, but he was daunted, and hurt, and mystified. It is harder to charge the enemy at a walk than at a gallop!

He walked back to the boarding house, the roan, Grundy, following at his heels, like a dog. Grundy, too, had changed since their arrival in Monument. He was no longer so apt to use his teeth or his heels. The demon in Grundy, by the demon in the town, seemed, apparently, to have been shamed into flight.

He encountered not a soul in the streets on the return journey, put up the horse in the shed, and went into the house for supper. It was already in progress—a dozen men sat around the table, and two waitresses served them as rapidly as possible with thin-cut steaks, and fried potatoes, and corn bread, and great cups of black coffee. When he came in, all heads jerked up or around and stared at him. When he said, "Good evening," there was a deep rumble of response. When he sat down, all men looked fixedly at their plates and went on feverishly with their business of eating.

Polly brought him his plate; Polly with a face of the utmost indifference, as though bored at waiting upon him.

He ate mechanically, slowly, his thoughts on other things—on the great tangle which made up this day's adventures—perhaps not yet ended! The others broke up quickly. Their last cup of coffee and piece of apple pie consumed, they scraped back their chairs and went out without saying a word. Their voices then sounded in the distance of the hallway. He was left alone with two rows of scattered, emptied plates and coffee-stained cups be-

fore him. Polly was clearing them away, taking out great armfuls.

At last he said to her: "Polly!"

She paused at the kitchen door, glanced over her shoulder, and then disappeared without an answer.

Polly, too, had disowned him!

And this, somehow, cut much deeper than all the danger in which he was living and all the hostilities which were grouped around him. She came back and paused, close to him.

"Well," said Polly.

"These fellows," said he—he would not speak to her about her own attitude —"these fellows—they all stopped talking when I came in. They wouldn't talk to me. Why?"

Polly canted her head a little to one side, as though thought unbalanced it there.

"Suppose a dozen house dogs are eating in the backyard, and a big wolf comes along and stands in among them?"

"I don't follow that!"

"No, you wouldn't. But just supposin'. Well, the first dog that started barking might have his head snapped off. Ain't that a fact?"

"I suppose so. Am I a wolf, Polly? Do I snap at people?"

"You're John Alias. You're the man from Nowhere. You're the gun fighter —the new one. What d'you think? Do people get chummy with dynamite?"

"I'm dangerous, am I?"

"Ask yourself. Be honest," said the girl.

"I'll be honest, then. All I see is that I've fought when I had to fight."

"You went out hunting trouble. You got it. But oh," said Polly, "*I'm* not gunna be your conscience! You can handle that for yourself. I—I gotta clear the table."

And she fell to work noisily, and went out with another staggering burden.

When she came back, he asked her impersonally: "D'you ever hear of a place called Hanford?"

"Of course, I've heard of it."

"What is it?"

"Hanford," said she, "is the headquarters of the crooks; Monument is just their playground!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

INTO A HORNET'S NEST.

THAT remark began to give point to the remarks of the sheriff in sending him out upon this mission.

"Do they pay taxes?" asked he.

"Taxes? Why should they? Who'd make them—except the United States army!"

"No one man could do it?"

"Except Colter. He could, of course."

He stood up, burdened with this fresh information.

"Polly," he said softly, "I want to explain about to-day. I had to go, I couldn't've called myself a man, if I hadn't. It didn't mean that I thought any the less of you."

"What did you think of me in the first place?" she asked.

"I liked you—a lot. I still do. I mean to take you down to the opera house for that singing, Polly. I mean to take you down there to-morrow morning!"

She merely answered sharply: "You'd better take yourself out of Monument. That's the best thing you can do."

She started to turn away, but he touched her shoulder.

"You're tired of the thought of me, Polly, I suppose!"

"Aw," said Polly, frowning, "can't a poor girl spend five minutes a day flirting without having to go to jail for it afterward?"

He drew himself up, taking the blow in quiet.

"Well," said he, "I didn't under-

stand. That's all. I'm sorry that I've been a fool."

She turned and laughed carelessly in his face.

"Say, look here," said she. "D'you suppose that me or any other girl would go nutty about you two minutes after seein' you for the first time? What sort of a guy are you, anyway?"

"A fool," said he, standing motionless and pale before her. "I'm a fool. It took you to show me how much of one I am. Good-night, Polly."

"So long," said Polly. "Sweet dreams."

And she went off toward the kitchen, and he saw her shoulders still quivering with inward laughter as she went. He, going up to his room, fell at full length upon his bed and lay there, hot with shame. He felt that he had revealed his soul to a stranger, and the stranger had laughed. But even this agony could not keep him awake, for John Signal was only twenty-two, and he was a very tired young man, and all the events of that day—from San Real Canyon and the broken horseshoes to the blacksmith's shop and the gathering enemies, and the trip to Esmeralda Pineta's house, and the arrival of big Fitz Eagan, and the cowardly shot which Langley had fired, and Pete Graham, and Polly, and the fall of Jud Bone, and the manner in which he had fronted the hosts of Bone, and the fury of the sheriff, and the cold cruelty of Polly in the end—drove through his mind like a herd of wild horses, all with trampling hoofs, and a sort of reverberation filled his mind like a hollow cave—and suddenly he slept.

When he wakened, he was not refreshed. It was the cool of the morning, but he got up with a heavy head, as though he had been drinking. His hands hung weightily at his sides; his eyes were dim. And all night long, though he could not recall a single dream, he knew that he had been fumbling with trouble and had found no solution to it.

He went down to breakfast before any one else in the house, and there he found Polly laying out the long table. She looked at him with a smile and a nod, as though all were perfectly well between them, and he, staring at her with hollow eyes, wondered at her, and at all womankind.

Yes, he could have an early breakfast. The cook had the coffee ready. It would take only a minute to fry bacon and eggs.

"And where does Hanford lie?"

"Straight west, in the hills. Ten trails in, and one trail out, they say. You know what that means! Are you going there?"

"I may."

She nodded at him cheerfully.

"That's the way with a lot of fellows," said Polly. "They make a break at staying on the side of the law. But when they get into a pinch, they see that they belong on the other side of the fence. Of course, you can make a lot more easy money working with Colter than you ever could working for the county."

That was her understanding of him, then!

"I'm to go out and join 'em, eh?" said he.

"Well, why else would you be going?" she asked.

He put that question aside with another.

"Which is Colter's hangout in Hanford?"

"He changes from one place to another. You never can tell, they say. But the big white barn—it's barn on one side and house on the other—is where you'd most likely find him."

He finished his breakfast.

"Are you paying your bill before you leave?"

"I'm coming back," said he.

She frowned, unable to understand.

"You're coming back!"

"Yes."

He went to the door, then her voice stopped him.

"Johnny Alias, why *are* you goin' to Hanford?"

"I'm collecting the county taxes," said he, and passed out through the door.

Footfalls pattered after him; the door was snatched open behind him.

"Johnny!"

"So long," said he, and went resolutely out from the house to where he had left Grundy, the roan, tethered at the hitching rack. He had half hoped that she would follow, but she did not. He was gathering the reins before mounting when a panting, shambling figure came up the street. It was Crawlin, worn out with effort.

"Ride hard and ride fast, and don't you come back, kid!" he urged.

"And why not come back?"

"Ain't you heard? Ain't you heard?"

The lips of Crawlin parted in a grin that showed his broken, yellow teeth, and his little rat eyes blazed with joy. He studied the face of the deputy.

"I've heard nothing. About what?"

"They got the news from Bender Creek. They got all the news. They know all about you!"

"They know all about me, eh?"

"About the gent that you killed there. Hampton was his name, wasn't it?"

"Hampton was his name," said the other quietly.

"They know it all. I guess that they'll have a warrant out for your arrest pretty pronto."

"And who'll serve it?"

"The sheriff, of course. Would you resist it, kid? Would you resist the servin' of it, Signal?"

"They know my name, eh?"

"Aw, they know all about you!"

"I don't know," said John Signal. "I might resist arrest, I might not—if I make up my mind in time," he added, "I'll let you know, Crawlin, so that you can be there to see the fight!"

He swung into the saddle.

Crawlin clung to a stirrup leather. He was wheezing and gasping with excitement.

"All right. You let me know. I tell you what, Signal, I've always been your friend. I never seen any man that give the town so many good shows in such a short time! I'm your friend. You remember that, will you?"

"I'll never forget," said the boy.

And he rode on out from Monument and took the western road.

There were ten long miles, up and down, between Monument and Hanford village; but the roan covered them in less than an hour, and the sun was hardly above the horizon when he went over the brow of the last hill and looked down into the hollow.

There could not have been a more peaceful place, in seeming, in the whole world. It was a pleasant pasture land, coming down smoothly from the hills all around and cut in two by a small stream that cut with arrowy straightness across it. Willows and poplars edged the stream. Bigger and more permanent trees grew in groups, here and there, almost screening the houses from view. And of those houses he made out a small cluster of half a dozen which were evidently Hanford proper, while half a dozen more sat here and there, deeply embowered in covert.

He took the first road to the left, and at the second bending he found himself looking up a gentle slope toward what seemed to be a great white barn, surrounded with lofty trees. From one side of the barn a chimney arose, and from the chimney poured thick puffs of white smoke. That, according to the description of Polly, must be the residence of the great Colter.

He went straight up to the place.

There was no real thought in his mind, except to go forward mechani-

cally with the duty which had been placed in his hands. He would go in among the men and read out the list of names of the delinquent tax payers. Henry Colter himself was one. Mentor was another. He would know those two faces, at least! And if he could collect from a single man in Hanford, he would have done far more than actually was expected from him.

He thought back bitterly to the sheriff—he who stood so strongly for law and order—and had in his own pocket some of the spoils of San Real Canyon.

But how to turn back, he knew not. Retreat was closed in the rear by the word which Crawlin had brought him. To go forward into the unknown he had no heart. It seemed better to enter that barn, that sprawling white barn where the outlaws nested like pigeons together, and there to come briefly to an end, in the name of the law.

In fact, the brain of young John Signal, confused and weary, could not find any solution except sheer action. So he bore straight up to the side of the barn from which the chimney arose, dismounted, and without announcing his arrival with a knock, he pulled open the door, and stepped inside of the barn.

He had left his rifle in the saddle holster. He had with him only the long Colt which weighted down his right leg, and in his left hand he carried the envelope which was filled with information about delinquents in taxes.

So he stepped into the interior of the barn, and there paused, slowly pushing the door shut behind him. For he saw that he had dropped headlong, as it were, into a nest of hornets. The very first picture that rose before his eyes was the long, white, divided beard of Dad Bone.

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

STEERS STAMPEDE IN KANSAS CITY

A NOVEL spectacle recently disturbed Kansas City, when fifty Hereford cattle stampeded through the streets, following the midnight wreck of a Santa Fe freight train. Nine cars were piled up when the locomotive left the tracks, and three cattle trains were torn open. The stock frenziedly availed themselves of the unusual opening presenting itself and scattered in all directions.

The police were soon deluged with telephone calls from excited citizens and went forth to stage an impromptu rodeo in the downtown district. Two of the steers were captured after they had fallen exhausted on the sidewalk, while several were herded into vacant lots, with guards posted to keep them from escaping. One of the animals, even wilder than the rest, dashed through a plate-glass window into a garage and horned several cars. And one of the panic-stricken steers was knocked down by a street car, but got to its feet apparently unhurt and escaped.

The area in front of the city hall was the scene for a bulldogging act in which twenty policemen vied with one steer. The animal was finally overcome, however, and tied to a pump. Hucksters at the city market joined late-going amusement seekers in capturing wild-eyed bovines in that vicinity, while one animal that created havoc by entering a drug store was more fortunate and, for the time being, escaped.

The confusion caused by the shouts of motorists and the sirens of the police cars added impetus to the steers' flight. But the climax to the excitement came when a truckload of hogs was overturned by the rodeo activities, and these animals added their number to the maelstrom. Eventually, however, brains won the day and the animals were, one and all, subdued.

My Pal

By Gerard Holmes

LEANIN' on the railin',
A-restin' 'fore I eat,
Lookin' at my ole cayuse—
The one with four white feet.

He ain't what you call handsome,
All spotted white and brown;
But, gee, I wouldn't swap 'im
For any horse in town!

Nothin' to that sayin'
'Bout throwin' to the crows
Hides of horses ownin'
Four all-white feet—I knows!

For he's always prancin'
From dawn till late at night.
If he's tired I'm fancyin'
He'd have a perfect right.

But he never shows it,
Don't ever want to rest,
So chuck-full of spirit,
That's why I like him best.

He just understands me
And knows when I am sad,
Whinnies when he sees me
He knows 'twill make me glad.

Blazing trails together
In sandstorm, sun, and heat;
No matter what the weather,
My pal, he can't be beat.

Turned to Stone

By Frank Triem

Author of "Put Him to Work," etc.

THE hands of the man in the bunk were thin and frail; like the talons of a bird, Terry Grimes reflected, as he sat on the inverted box and watched his companion die. There was something terribly pathetic in the way those hands fumbled with the fringed edge of the single blanket. Grimes studied with impersonal interest the face of his companion. Old Jep Howell was on his way, no question about it. The fact had been obvious to Grimes' experienced eyes for more than an hour.

In striking contrast to the gaunt, raw-boned Jep Howell, Grimes was small and rather frail. His face was leathery and brown. It was hardly a prepossessing face, for the nose was bulbous, and the mouth thin-lipped and wide. The well-shaped forehead showed its owner to be a person of some intelligence. His eyes were tired, disillusioned, cynical. He prided himself on his ruthlessness.

As he picked up the limp wrist of the dying man, something in the way his fingers closed on the pulse hinted at a half-forgotten skill. On the floor beside him stood a worn and much-scarred satchel of the type physicians and surgeons carry. Stamped in the leather in faded-gold letters were the words, "Terry Grimes, M.D."

The itinerant doctor's wide, thin lips moved. Far away, the dismal wail of a locomotive shattered the solemn hush. About them the naked sand hills danced through the blue heat-haze. Somewhere under the flooring of this abandoned hut rats were squeaking their alarm at the unusual intrusion above.

Grimes and Howell had met two days before. Old Jep, obviously on his last legs, had been in no condition to judge what manner of companion this was. His color had been bad, and the doctor had diagnosed a heart that was tired of an unequal struggle. The thing that had induced him to let the old man accompany him had been the sight of a ten-dollar bill which Howell had inadvertently displayed.

The pulse under his fingers was thready and rapid. A slight pressure

was sufficient to pinch it out altogether. Grimes shook his head and sighed.

The eyes of the dying man opened. They fixed vacantly on the little doctor's face, then slowly focused. Old Jep's glance became purposeful.

"You—been good to—me!" he said. A hint of color came into his flabby cheeks. Grimes, still holding that lean old wrist, felt the pulse quicken until it was racing too fast to count.

"An' I mean you should—should be rewarded!"

He gasped for breath. The other leaned forward. In the semigloom, the old-timer could not see the hungry gleam in the little man's eyes. He was too busy fighting for air, fighting that searing, rending pain in his chest and lungs.

"I—I got a pard—over in the mountains," said Old Jep, obviously making a last great effort. "Up past Clifford's Camp. Pete Harker, he is, an' he's the tightest man in the State. Proud of it, too. Him an' me struck it rich, mebbe a year ago. He kicked me out an' kept my—my half. I—you tell him I said fer him to give you my—my share—you take it if he won't——"

It was soon over. Grimes, staring down into the old face, saw there that curious calm that comes when the last great battle has been fought. Old Jep's expression was one of mysterious triumph. It seemed as if he were about to smile.

Three days later, the itinerant doctor swung off a freight train at the dilapidated row of buildings called Clifford's Camp. About him, desolate and forbidding in the last red light of sunset, loomed the mountains.

The caboose clicked by. The stertorous breathing of the locomotive receded in the distance. Carrying his worn satchel and blanket roll, Grimes headed up the sandy road between the two rows of half-decayed structures.

At a rambling old building bearing the legend "General Store," he inquired for Pete Harker's claim. The bewhiskered patriarch behind the counter blinked his rheumy eyes in surprise, and the four loafers sitting on apple boxes by the door turned to regard this unusual newcomer.

"Harker? Old 'Dime-a-day' Harker? Shorely I know him. He's got a claim about fifteen mile due south. Just stick to this here line of hills an' you can't miss it." The proprietor studied Grimes with childish wonder. "You ain't a book agent, now be you?" he continued. "Because if you are, yo're only wastin' time goin' out to see him. Harker's got a budget, an' he claims he lives on a dime a day. He's the tightest man in the county, an' the meanest in the State—no, by heck—the United States! You couldn't sell him a package o' chewing gum on the installment plan! An' mean? Boy! The screams o' women an' children is music to his ears!"

"He must be delightful," mused Doctor Terry. "Thanks for the information, old-timer. Reckon I'll ooze along southward!"

Grimes slept that night in an arroyo, a mile or so from town. Before sunup he was again on his way. It was around two o'clock of a blistering-hot afternoon when he saw, halfway up the side of a low, sandy hill, an adobe hut, from the chimney of which rose a thin curl of smoke.

A man was standing in the door, watching his deliberate approach up the sage-covered slope. From under the brim of his hat, Grimes' hard eyes studied the shriveled old prospector. As he came closer, he saw that Pete Harker—for it was he—was under the average size. His face was thin-lipped, avaricious, mean. It reminded Grimes of a steel trap.

Harker said nothing until the newcomer had introduced himself. Then

he spoke jerkily, as if he feared to waste even words.

"So Jep's dead, eh? That's too bad. You needn't have come clear out hyar to tell me. I ain't much given to entertaining strangers. You c'n come in, though, an' rest up a bit afore starting back."

Terry Grimes smiled.

"So kind of you," he murmured.

Standing just inside the door, the doctor stared about him. The single room was in a frightful mess; dirty dishes and pans were piled high on the table, and a miscellaneous assortment of boots, old magazines, mining implements, and the like littered the floor. There were two bunks, on one of which lay a few blankets. A blue-bottle fly buzzed industriously.

Grimes set his worn satchel and his blanket roll in the spare bunk. His shriveled host had also entered and was regarding him suspiciously. Grimes wanted to laugh. He disliked this stingy little man at sight.

Hours passed, and Grimes showed no disposition to set out on that return journey his unwilling host had mentioned. Harker cooked a meager meal, and the doctor ate three-fourths of it. After supper was over both men sat on boxes outside and watched the stars come out.

Around eight o'clock Harker spoke.

"Seeing you've stayed so long, you might as well spend the night hyar," said he. "Get a real early start in the morning——"

Once more Grimes wanted to laugh.

Next day he continued to linger. His now angry host and he sat around all morning, watching each other furtively. It was a case of dog eat dog, Grimes reflected. Harker was unquestionably a heartless old scoundrel, and the doctor prided himself on his own ruthlessness. He took vast delight in keeping his mission secret. By this time, of course, Harker knew he was up to something; probably suspected what it was. The prospector smoked the five cigarettes he allowed himself on his budget, and tried to borrow tobacco from his guest.

"I have to save my money," he said sullenly. "Folks call me stingy. I am, and I'm proud of it. Fellow doesn't get nowhere spending all his dust with them wolves at Clifford's Camp."

Grimes nodded.

"Quite right," he agreed.

He had been using his eyes, and it wasn't long before he became convinced there was a store of gold somewhere about. Harker would have it well concealed, of course. As the day wore on the tight-fisted host showed increasing uneasiness. Grimes ignored pointed hints. Harker became ill-tempered.

After the noon meal the two men were seated in the shade at the side of the cabin. Harker watched his guest for a time, and presently went inside. Grimes stood up and peered through the single small window high in the wall. He saw the prospector take a carbine from the corner behind the stove, and head for the door.

From nowhere in particular, an excellent automatic pistol had appeared in the little doctor's hand. He examined it thoughtfully. From the corner of his eye he saw Harker come around the cabin, holding the carbine ready, then halt and stiffen, as he glimpsed the Colt. The old man said something under his breath. He shambled forward and sat down. Producing a bit of cloth, he began to clean the gun.

"I used to be rather good with one of these little implements," said Grimes casually, patting the pistol. He picked up an empty bottle and got to his feet. He raised the hammer of the automatic, at the same time hurling the bottle high.

Three shots followed, so closely spaced as to sound almost like one; and the glass container was in fragments.

Grimes laughed. "It holds seven," he said thoughtfully.

Harker's little eyes were red. His face had flushed, and the corners of his mouth were twitching. Very slowly his thumb curled over the hammer of the carbine. Grimes swung around to face him, and held out his free hand.

"Just give me the nasty thing," he suggested. "I'm so afraid of guns—people are always getting careless, and then some one usually is hurt! I've taken quite a fancy to you and to this little place of yours. I'd hate to have to bury you in one of your own shafts."

Harker was trembling violently. He was waging a great battle with himself, trying to decide whether to surrender or fight. At last, with a choked imprecation, he handed the carbine to Terry Grimes.

Then the old man spoke, his voice quivering with rage. The doctor studied his distorted face with impersonal interest.

"I've hidden the gold!" said Harker. "It's mine, I tell you—mine! I did more than my share of the work, but Jep thought he was entitled to half. So I didn't give him nothing. Now you think you can come snooping around and collect, just because you buried him. I'll roast in the hot place before I hand you a single ounce. And if you think you can find it—just go ahead and try!"

"Your suggestion about the hot place isn't at all bad," Grimes told him gravely. "Perhaps if I staked you out, out there in the sun, you might reconsider. I could even make a sirup with some sugar, and coat your face and arms and chest with it. That would entertain the bugs—especially the ants." He was studying the old man with a cool, level stare. "But I'll give you a little time to reconsider. You can have until to-morrow morning."

That night Harker tried to sneak up on him and brain him with a chunk of stove wood. Grimes was a light sleeper. The creaking of a board awakened him just as the other came within striking distance.

From his bunk, Grimes drove his foot into the pit of the old man's stomach. Harker grunted and went staggering back across the room. He caromed into the table, almost upsetting it, and by a miracle came to rest sitting on the edge of his own bunk.

"Try that again and you'll really get hurt!" said Grimes through his teeth.

Next morning, Fate took an unexpected hand in the game. Harker opened a can of salmon and set it on the table. Grimes inspected it, sniffed briefly, and shoved it away.

"It's spoiled," he said. "None for me, thanks."

Pete Harker grunted.

"If you think I'm going to throw a whole tin of fish away because it's a mite old, guess again!" said he. To prove his independence, he ate most of the salmon.

By noon he was a very sick man. By evening he was delirious. His temperature had climbed high and it continued to go up with terrible rapidity.

Terry Grimes put his enemy patient into the bunk and, when necessary, held him there. Harker babbled and yelled and sang and cried. Grimes did what little he could with his inadequate equipment and let nature take its course. Along toward morning Harker sank into a coma, to awake, raving, a little after sunup.

Once or twice Grimes picked up words and phrases that puzzled him. Harker was chattering something about a letter.

"But they sha'n't have a single ounce!" he yelled. "It's mine, and I got it hid——"

Terry Grimes was silent. He studied the face of the sick man, and wondered who "they" could be.

Later in the morning, Harker dozed

off. His pulse was very rapid and Grimes did not particularly like the look of his patient. But this was an opportunity to do a little first-class prowling, and he seized it.

He went quietly about his investigation, which included a minute search of the hut and even of the surrounding hillside. He found absolutely nothing in the way of a hidden cache of gold, but he did learn the identity of the mysterious people who troubled Harker's delirium.

Behind the battered alarm clock the little doctor found a crumpled letter. Shamelessly he took it from its envelope, unfolded it, and read it through twice. The shadow of a smile played around his thin lips. It was from Old Jep Howell's wife, and it begged Harker to give her husband his share, or at least part of it. The last line made Grimes scowl thoughtfully. The woman wrote:

> We have four children, and Jep's working years are about over. We aren't asking you for anything that belongs to you; only a part of what we rightfully deserve.

He turned the envelope over and studied the return address. It had been postmarked from a little town nearly two hundred miles away. At last with a shrug he put envelope and letter in his inside coat pocket.

He went across to the bunk to take his patient's pulse and temperature. The latter had gone down slightly and Harker seemed to be sleeping normally.

As a matter of fact, that day marked the turning point in the old miser's illness. From then on he got steadily better. By the following afternoon the fever and delirium had left him.

Grimes sat by the bunk and studied his enemy.

"You're here, but that's about all!" he said evenly. "I pulled you through by the skin of your teeth—and if I do say so, you owe your life to me."

Harker was blinking up at him. His thin, pinched face was twisted into a sneering smile.

"If you think I'll hand you my gold just because of that, guess again!" he shrilled. Two daubs of color appeared in his leathery cheeks, and he emphasized his words with an emaciated hand. "I'll never tell where its hid—not even if you boiled me in oil! Neither you nor any of 'em will ever see an ounce of it!"

Terry Grimes shook his head.

"You may be right," he said, and his eyes strayed to his little satchel, standing in the corner by the door.

Three long days dragged by. Harker was tough as a boiled owl. At the end of that time he was apparently as well as ever. And on the third evening, while they were eating supper, Terry Grimes asked calmly:

"Ready to hand over my half of the gold?"

Harker dropped his fork, and his face was suddenly livid. He began to tremble all over. Terry Grimes studied him a moment.

"I—I——" Harker choked.

Grimes nodded. Before the other could move, he had flipped his .38 from its holster and had Harker covered.

Grimes shoved back from the table. He retreated to the bunk, knelt and reached behind him, fumbling beneath it. Next moment he had produced a coil of quarter-inch manila rope. He stood up and advanced upon Harker.

Skillfully the doctor tied his victim's wrists in front of him, afterward lashing them to his body with a couple of turns of the hemp. After that he secured the miser's ankles. Grimes then reholstered his gun and cleared the table.

Grasping his captive around the waist, he lifted him as he would have lifted a sack of potatoes and flung him down on the table. The remainder of the rope went to hold him there. When

Grimes was through Harker could scarcely move an eyebrow.

Neither man spoke. The throbbing silence was broken only by the ticking of the battered alarm clock as Doctor Terry turned up the lamp and brought his satchel from the corner. He drew up a box beside the table and set the open bag upon it. He took out his stethoscope.

Grimes unbuttoned Harker's shirt. The old miser winced but maintained a stubborn silence. For a full two minutes the doctor listened to his enemy's heart, then dropped the instrument back into the bag.

And now he produced a curious affair, such as the desert rat had never before seen. It was a cone-shaped arrangement of wire with a diameter at the base of perhaps nine inches. The physician set it down upon his helpless victim's face, and brought from his bag a small bottle with a glass stopper. As he removed the stopper, the overpowering odor of ether filled the room.

"For the last time, will you tell?"

"For the last time, *no!*"

Harker's voice rose in a shrill crescendo. Terry Grimes had taken out his handkerchief and draped it across the cone, completely hiding the miser's face. Skillfully he let the ether fall, a drop at a time, on the handkerchief, while his free hand closed down on his victim's wrist. His fingers rested on the now-racing pulse.

Slowly the rigidity went out of Harker's body. Grimes set down the bottle of ether, removed the cone and handkerchief, and studied the face. He lifted one eyelid and inspected the eyeball.

Harker began to mutter. The words cleared, became intelligible.

"The gold," he said. "I hid it——"

"You hid it," Grimes agreed soothingly. "Where did you hide it?"

A moment of silence. A breath of wind sucked in through the open door. The lamp flickered. Somewhere in the dim reaches of the night, a coyote yipped.

The flat, unearthly voice was going on. Under the spell of the anæsthetic, Harker's will-power was gone; and with it, his power to hold back his secret.

The little physician smiled a bit. Presently he removed the ropes from his captive. He carried Harker across to his bunk and covered him with blankets.

The doctor closed his satchel with a snap.

"It looks like this is going to be my busy night," he told himself.

It was around noon of a day nearly a week later when Terry Grimes arrived in a little foothill town some two hundred miles from Clifford's Camp. He was ragged and dusty and tired. Cautious inquiries sent him to a squalid shack on the edge of town. As he turned in at the gate and headed up a weed-grown gravel path, he could hear a child crying somewhere close by.

He dropped his satchel and heavy blanket roll on the porch. In answer to his knock a tired-faced woman well past forty opened the door.

"My name's Grimes," he informed her. "I'm a friend of your husband's. Jep told me to drop in for a bite to eat, some time when I was coming by."

She studied him with momentary intentness, then nodded.

"The children and I are having lunch now," she said. "Come right along. You'll have to take pot luck, though."

In the dingy room, four children were seated around an oil-cloth covered table. Their shrill voices were momentarily hushed as their mother set an extra place for the stranger.

Grimes was given a plate of corned beef and cabbage. While he ate, he studied his surroundings. There were evidences of want, he perceived. Jep

Howell's widow obviously supported her little brood by taking in washing. With a start, he realized that she must still be unaware of the fact that she was a widow.

When he had eaten his fill, he pushed back from the table and nodded toward the porch.

"I'd like to speak to you alone for a moment," he said.

She followed him outside. Grimes spoke gently.

"I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you," he went on. "Your husband has been terribly ill."

An uncomprehending look came into the tired eyes of the woman. Slowly her color faded.

"You don't mean—he's not——"

Grimes nodded.

"Old Jep has gone west," said he. "I'm sorry—truly sorry."

He left her sitting in a rickety chair on the porch, her rough, tired hands twining and untwining in her lap. She had not cried. In her eyes was the hurt look of an injured dog.

Grimes shouldered his heavy blanket roll, picked up his satchel, and went out the gate and down the road. One more chapter of his life was closed. He wondered vaguely where he should go now. He had the means for leisure and study; doubtless, with the contents of his blanket roll, he could buy himself a place in the medical world of some big city. That had been the dream of his youth.

And there lay the trouble, he reflected. For he was middle-aged, in the summer of his life, and the springtime fancies and hopes and fears were all behind him. He realized quite suddenly that he wanted to go on as he had been doing.

"You can't teach an old dog new tricks," he murmured absently.

He had turned up the railroad tracks. Town and valley were behind him. On every side the foothills raised their wooded crests. Ahead, the twin lines of rails danced through the heat.

Slower and slower went Grimes. Despite his utmost efforts, he could not put away the picture of the four hungry children; of the woman, no longer young, with the tired, hurt look in her eyes. And at last he turned and started back.

"A man's a fool to indulge in sentiment," he reflected. "I've made a fool of myself from the start of this business——"

Meanwhile, Pete Harker was thinking the same thing. Harker had come to, the morning after his show-down with his unwelcome guest, to find Grimes gone. He eventually mastered his nausea and sat up, wondering as he did so what had happened during the time he was unconscious.

He peered dazedly about him. There was no sign of Terry Grimes. It was some time before Harker recalled all the details of what had happened. For the life of him, he could not decide why his enemy had anæsthetized him.

A sudden horrible possibility occurred to the miser. He had read stories in which doctors performed weird experiments on enemies who had fallen into their power. Perhaps that was what Grimes had done! In a frenzy, Harker tore off his clothes. He examined himself from head to foot. There was not apparent so much as a pin prick.

And after a time he formed a theory. The little doctor had put him under ether to get him out of the way while he searched for the hidden cache of gold. Failing to find it, as he undoubtedly had failed, Grimes had given up and pulled his freight. Yes, that must be it. Harker relaxed, a smile on his pinched, narrow features.

"I'll just look and make sure he did not find my dust," he decided.

Harker looked. The eighteen little

buckskin bags were where they belonged. Satisfied, the miser set about cooking breakfast.

Several days later, the old man went to town. He was more than a little surprised when the storekeeper, who was also the post master, handed him a letter. It was not often that any one wrote to him. He studied the postmark, and a sneer came into his thin face.

He tore the envelope open, drew out the letter, and began to read. Those watching him saw a dreadful change come over his face. It turned blue; his eyes seemed to shrivel and recede deeper into their sockets.

A dreadful cry escaped him. Flecks of foam appeared on his lips. His knees buckled, and he went down in a heap.

The loafers crowded around him, and the old proprietor took the letter. He read it aloud.

"—bless you for your kindness. This morning President Park of the local bank came to me and told me a rough-looking stranger had deposited twelve thousand dollars' worth of gold dust in my name. Mr. Park said he refused to tell who he was and would say only that the gold was a gift from the desert; but I knew of course that it must have been you who ate lunch with me and afterward told me of Jep's death and deposited the dust. Thank you, a million times! Your kindness means that I can rest, after having worked so long——"

There was more of it, the outpouring of a heart overfull with gratitude. The loafers gathered around old Dime-a-day Harker eyed each other in petrified amazement. They stared unbelievingly down at the prospector, who was now beginning to twitch and groan.

"He couldn't stand the strain," said the old storekeeper sententiously. "For once, he's done something generous."

Harker got to his feet. His face was horrible. Snatching the letter, he dashed from the store.

Hours later, he reached his cabin. He went around to the back and then up the hillside to where, under a big rock, his gold was hidden—or should have been. Like a madman Harker dropped to his knees and began to dig.

Eventually he had the eighteen little sacks out on the ground. He opened them one after another; and as he did so, the little pile of smooth pebbles between his knees grew to the likeness of a miniature mountain.

HARDSHIPS FOR HORSES

IN the days of the old wagon train the most dreaded trail was that across the desert between Las Cruces and Fort McRae. Known as "The Journey of Death," its way is strewn with the grim memories of disaster and the more tangible graves of hundreds of pioneers, who succumbed to Indians and the ravages of hunger and thirst.

And now this tragic trail has again taken its toll—this time from the herd of wild horses being driven from the forests of the Black Range to El Paso. Of the thousand animals that recently started from the forest ranges, scarcely six hundred finally staggered on to the Jornado range reserve, and these were so emaciated and sick that they were scarcely able to travel.

Owing to the chuck wagon's having broken down and the driver's having become separated from the caravan, it looked for a time as though the trail might again claim its toll of human lives. After two days without food, the chuck wagon was located and the cowboys were again regaled with meals.

Rangeland Aristocrats
(The Aberdeen-Angus)

By Ira D. Mullinax
Author of "The Shorthorns," etc.

TO the shrewdness and bold initiative of two young Scotchmen the American live stock industry is indebted for the colorful rôle Aberdeen-Angus cattle have played in the development of its beef production. He who chronicles live stock history very quickly finds he must frequently begin with the genius of the Scotch for producing high-class animals, not only on their native heath but on this side of the water as well. Scottish cowboys, and drovers, and ranchers have contributed vivid and fascinating chapters to the cattle history of the West, none of it more romantic than the story of how this sterling breed of beef-makers first came to the range.

Northeastern Scotland is the native home of Aberdeen-Angus cattle, particularly the counties of Aberdeen, Forfar, and Kincardine. In the Buchan district of southern Aberdeen they were known for a long time as "Buchan humlies," while in that part of Forfar known as Angus they were called "Angus doddies." "Humly" and "dodded" are old Scotch words meaning "polled" or "hornless." Frequently, one hears these cattle called "Polled Angus" or by the name of "dod-dies."

Just how the breed originated is uncertain. Many years ago in Great Britain there were wild, white, hornless cattle, and the black Aberdeen-Angus may have descended from them as a sport. Some cattle historians believe the doddies sprang from a black breed with horns which formerly existed in Scotland. However that may be, certain it is that hornless cattle have been known there for at least one hundred and seventy-five years.

One of the two shrewd young Scotchmen who figured so prominently in the history of the breed was Hugh Watson, the first great improver of Aberdeen-Angus cattle. When about nineteen years old he became a tenant farmer at Keillor in Forfar. His father and grandfather had been great lovers of cattle and so, when young Hugh went to Keillor in 1808, he took six black cows and a black bull along. The place was part of a British lord's estate, but much of it was marshy, covered with brush and rocks. It was part of young Watson's job to build it up and make it fertile. Here, too, he did a bit of

pioneering in which he was notably successful.

Just out of college at Edinburgh, however, Hugh at first set out to have a good time. As a young blood of those gay days, none was gayer than he. He loved horses and dogs as well as cattle, and wherever conviviality and sporting pastimes were available there was young Hugh to be found. No doubt, in the West he would have been one of those numerous roistering, ripsnorting, young cowboys who later settled down to become big ranchers and builders of the cattle industry.

A builder of cattle he did become, one whose name is famous throughout the world. His ambition for better cattle was aroused by a visit to the shorthorn country in England, and about 1815 he began his notable work of improving the hornless cattle from the neighboring county of Aberdeen. Cattlemen everywhere were astonished at the results, the Watson beeves were so much blockier, heavier-fleshed, and matured so much earlier than any they had ever seen. Young Watson had contributed something new and wonderful to the art of cattle raising. How he did it is still studied and followed by successful breeders the world over.

Watson raised one of the world's most famous cows, the so-called Prima Cow, registered as No. 1 in the Scotch Polled Herd Book. At the Watson place she was affectionately known as "Old Granny." The records show she was the mother of twenty-five calves. Hugh's son, "Uncle Willie" Watson, who came to America and in Nebraska made a great reputation as a fitter of steers for the early fat-stock shows, always claimed that "Old Granny" had twenty-nine calves. She was thirty-five years and six months old and still going strong when killed by lightning in 1859. Hers is believed to be a world's record for long life and calf production.

Volumes have been written about Hugh Watson, the wonderful cattle he produced, and how he did it. He lived fifty-six years on the estate where he began his work. When he died, in 1865, at the age of seventy-six, he left a record of achievement which will long be an inspiration to ambitious cattlemen.

While Watson was experimenting with cattle at Keillor, another young Scotchman named George Grant left his home in Banffshire to seek his fortune in London. He had only sixpence or so in his pocket, but he had had experience in selling silk and soon found a job with a silk firm. Thriftily saving his money, he had enough in a few years to start a partnership with one of his fellow workers named Gask.

Like many other beginners, the new firm of Grant & Gask at first found business none too good. Then, one day in 1861, young Grant read in a newspaper that Price Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, was seriously ill. News bulletins revealed that the prince was steadily growing worse, a fact that was full of suggestions to the enterprising young Grant.

The whole British nation would go into mourning, the great city of London would be draped in black. George conferred with his partner, then got busy, and within twenty-four hours had bought up every available yard of crape on the vast London market. As was expected, the princely patient was gathered to his reward. Crape was instantly in great demand, Grant & Gask had a corner on it. They sold at their own price and made a killing that British merchants talked about for years.

Young Grant was on his way to riches. Later, a cleverly managed deal in silks brought another large sum. The enterprising Scotch lad now found he had enough money to retire from business and realize his dream to see America.

While traveling in this country in 1871, he crossed a stretch of Kansas prairie that vividly impressed him with its beauty and fertility. Near by was the town of Hays City and old Fort Hays. It was the period when "Wild Bill" Hickok was writing history with a six-gun at Hays, Abilene, Dodge City, and other Western towns, when Custer was fighting Indians on the plains, and William F. Cody was making himself famous as "Buffalo Bill."

Land could be had almost at one's own price. Young Grant's imagination was fired with a dream. What a place to found a colony of farmers and stockmen! Back to Scotland he went and there laid plans which led to the purchase of vast tracts of Kansas land. From the railroad and the government he bought a princely domain for a song. For some of it he paid no more than eighty cents an acre. At home he found plenty of ambitious Scotch lads and lassies ready to follow him into the wonderful new land where homes could be had for so little.

In April, 1873, a vessel left Glasgow for New Orleans with members of the party on board. "Victoria Colony," in honor of his beloved queen, young Grant had named his settlement. Arriving on the western Kansas prairies, the settlers were compelled to live in shacks and dugouts, to undergo countless hardships. There were droughts, prairie fires, swarms of grasshoppers to devour the young crops, and Indians still were to be feared.

But there were days and nights of merriment. Life was colorful, with dancing, racing, gaming, good food and good liquor. Ten miles east of Hays now stands the village of Victoria to keep alive the memory of that adventure. Grizzled old men and dainty gray ladies yet may be found who were part of it all, and many a tale they tell of mingled suffering and happiness.

Among the stories the old men tell is one of four splendid black bulls which Grant brought along to improve the cattle of the prairies. There was also a shorthorn bull from the royal herd at Windsor. That, and the naming of the colony, constituted a gesture which Grant hoped would bring the bestowal of a title by his queen. The title never came, but newspapers and convivial companions often called him "Lord" Grant, greatly to his delight. "Lord" Grant he remains to this day in the memory of vanishing old-timers.

The four Aberdeen-Angus bulls he brought along had a hard journey, across the ocean to New Orleans, up the Mississippi to St. Louis, and then by train to their new home on the western Kansas prairies. There they were pastured under primitive range condition. In 1875, as late as two years after their arrival, buffalo passed through Victoria on their way to northern feeding grounds.

Grant now decided to engage in the range cattle business. There were limitless acres of grass and other natural advantages. He bought a lot of old-time Texas longhorn cows for his foundation stock. By far the larger percentage of the offspring of these longhorn cows and hornless bulls were black in color and had no horns. A new and far better kind of beef animal now was seen upon the range.

Grant died in 1878, his money gone, his colony a disappointment. But the fact that he introduced a great breed of cattle to the West and to farmers throughout the country has left him an enduring name. Soon after his death the cattle were sold, and the good results noted by breeders of these hornless half-blood Angus cattle in the territory around Kansas City, Missouri, went a long way toward establishing the breed's popularity.

About this time herds of pure breds from Scotland began to be imported. The first to come to America was

brought over in 1878 by Professor Brown for the Ontario Agricultural College. Two years later, Findlay & Anderson of Lake Forest, Illinois, imported the first pure-bred Aberdeen-Angus herd to the United States.

In 1880, the first steers in America carrying Angus blood were marketed. They were raised by Joseph H. Rea & Son of Carrollton, Missouri, sold at Chicago, and shipped on to New York. This old herd still flourishes, and a visitor to the Rea home may see a photograph of those pioneer steers. Strange-looking cattle they were, differing widely from the Aberdeen-Angus of to-day.

The "doddies" were first introduced into the northeastern States in 1879, when F. B. Redford of Batavia, New York, made importations.

Two years later, at Independence, Missouri, whence so many pioneers started westward over the old Santa Fe Trail, Gudgell & Simpson founded a herd. These famous breeders are credited with being the first to really put Aberdeen-Angus cattle conspicuously on the American live-stock map. Gudgell served as the first secretary of the American Aberdeen-Angus Association. A few years later this firm engaged in the breeding of Hereford cattle and became internationally known for their success in improving the whitefaces. Outstanding success with one breed of cattle is sufficiently rare. To become famous for promoting two breeds is unique.

In 1886, the vast X. I. T. ranch in Texas began a thorough test of different cattle under range conditions, the Aberdeen-Angus among them. Up to 1892, five thousand bulls were used on the ranch, about fourteen per cent being doddies. George Findlay, cattle manager of the X. I. T., declared these black cattle hardy, good rustlers, good sellers, and entirely satisfactory under range conditions. He, like many other cattlemen, believed the hornless characteristic of the big blacks to be a highly desirable quality.

Solid black is the almost universal color of the Aberdeen-Angus. Occasionally, there is a male that is reddish in cast, and sometimes an animal with a noticeable amount of pure white above the underline. But they are not eligible to entry for breeding purposes. The cows sometimes have this red tint, as well as small white spots, on head, body, or legs, though this is so rare as to be seldom seen. While many Angus cows are excellent milkers, the breed is esteemed primarily for its beef.

To one not familiar with the doddies, their weight is deceptive. They are not quite so large as the Herefords or shorthorns, but they rank high in weight, bulls easily reaching two thousand two hundred and cows one thousand four hundred pounds. Some unusually large specimens have been recorded. A famous bull named Judge weighed two thousand eight hundred pounds, and he had a brother named Justice whose weight was more than three thousand. No other breed will place a higher percentage of beef on the block. The world's dressing record of 76 3-4 per cent was yielded from the carcass of an Aberdeen-Angus heifer. The extra high quality of its flesh is one of this breed's chief merits.

In the show ring, these glossy blacks have a long list of triumphs. Perhaps the most notable is the winning of carlot steer championships at the Chicago International Live Stock Exposition. Since the exposition was founded in 1900 this coveted honor has been won but four times by other breeds.

Some long prices have been paid for Aberdeen-Angus cattle by American breeders. In 1919, J. F. Roberts, of Atlantic, Iowa, sold at auction the bull Epistos for fifteen thousand two hundred dollars, and one of his daughters for six thousand fifty dollars. In that

same year Escher & Ryon, of Coon Rapids, Iowa, sold the bull Enlate to Colonel W. H. Cooper of Hedrick, Iowa, for the sum of thirty-six thousand dollars.

The following year, J. J. Donohoe, of Williamsburg, Iowa, sold the cow Blackcap Lassie to D. J. Leeney, also of Iowa, for fifteen thousand dollars. This is said to be the American record price for any cow of the beef breeds since 1873. In the Donohoe sale, fifty head of Aberdeen-Angus cattle were disposed of for two hundred sixty-five thousand one hundred dollars, an average of five thousand three hundred two dollars, the highest ever recorded in a sale of this breed. About the same time, Caldwell Brothers, of Missouri, sold the bull Blackcap Bertram at the reported price of sixty thousand dollars, the world's record for an Angus bull.

These fancy prices were paid for breeding stock with records of show-ring winnings. But fat Angus cattle at the big market centers when offered solely as beef animals command good prices every day. Frequently they bring the top, often they command a premium.

In the last twenty-five years, in the car-lot auctions of fat cattle at the Chicago International Live Stock Exposition, the Angus have averaged one dollar twenty-six cents a hundredweight higher than any other breed. Two years ago, when doddies again won the car-lot championship for fat cattle at Chicago, the prize-winning load sold at fifty-five dollars a hundred pounds, or five dollars and fifty cents a pound live weight, a world's record. The highest price ever paid for a single grand champion steer at any show in America was three dollars and seventy-five cents a pound for an Aberdeen-Angus at the Cleveland Fat Stock Show in 1926. This breed also holds the world's record as to price for a beef carcass, seven dollars a pound.

Highly fitted cattle of other breeds also have brought enormous sums at the big live-stock shows, where pride and competitive spirit run high. Large hotels and railroads with high-class dining car service usually pay these staggering figures. While the desire for publicity is a factor, it must be remembered that they are paying for the very choicest beef it is possible to produce.

Pure-bred cattle of this breed may be registered with the American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders' Association at Chicago. Judge S. C. Fullerton, who has a noted herd at Miami, Oklahoma, is president of the organization. Many other noted Western cattlemen have served as officers and directors. W. H. Tomhave is secretary. Since the association was formed in 1883, nearly four hundred twenty thousand cattle have been recorded in its herdbooks.

Herds of these big, glossy blacks may be found in twenty-seven different countries. Practically every State in the Union has its Angus breeders, frequently grouped into State or other local associations. For a number of years, Iowa has been the leading Aberdeen-Angus State. California leads the West in the production of doddies, and interest in that section is rapidly increasing. In recent years, more range men have begun to raise these cattle and are finding them profitable, according to Secretary Tomhave. Their future seems secure.

Looking back over their history, one wonders how time would have dealt with these splendid beasts had it not been for those two ambitious young Scotchmen, Hugh Watson, who so brilliantly improved them, and "Lord" Grant who had the courage to bring the first ones to the Western ranges.

You Can't Without Water

By Leslie Gordon Barnard

Author of "Due to Hang," etc.

THE heat was intolerable. The two men who moved across the vast, uncharted area of the sand seemed to each other to be distorted by a peculiar aura, as if the hot waves beat against them and fell back, shimmering and dancing from the contact. They spoke of this, once, complainingly; and curiously enough that was the last unrestrainedly friendly word that passed between them. It was as if the distortion threw their comradeship, also, completely out of focus.

A little area began to separate them physically. Terrill moved on ahead. Sorley, who was younger, watched the steady gait of the older man; the familiar swing of his slightly bowed legs, the lifting of the sand as the movement of his heels threw it up, was caught by the hot wind that crept close to the ground, and tossed like snow in a blizzard or like some spume from the crest of a sea wave. He envied Terrill his endurance. He envied Terrill his knowledge of this sandy desert; the sure movement of the man toward the goal that would lead them to civilization. He envied him, too, the guardianship of the little bag that held the promise of wealth, if they could get to where the right people would take it up.

Sorley called, pantingly: "What's your hurry there?"

At a second call, Terrill turned.

"Peterin' out?" he asked, grimly inclined toward humor.

"No—but——"

"Well, keep movin' then!"

The face seemed not that of Terrill, the comrade of this adventure in prospecting, but of a stranger, hard, grim, inexorable, sardonic. Sorley, moving on again, trying to keep pace with the figure trudging ahead, recalled the stories Terrill had told—at nights when the heat of the day was exchanged for a cold moistness, and they sat about a cheerful blaze that awakened memories. Then Terrill's tongue would be unloosed, and his eyes would mirror curiously the queer things, and the hard things, he had to tell. Strange adventures of men on out-of-the-way trails; extremes of cold that froze the milk of human kindness; extremes of heat that seared the soul. Tales of high traditions, too! But of these just now Sorley did not think. The heat seemed to push from him everything at last but one memory—a tale that told of a quarrel along this kind of trail, and of a

dark figure, still and silent under the merciless blaze, a drift of sand already competing with the plans of vultures swooping low.

He knew now that he had thought too much over it. He had let the story obsess him; at first with horror, and then with some new emotion, too ungenial to be given official recognition.

If Terrill had not grown away from him; if the distortion had not come; if the bite of the heat was not so intense that it drove a man to abnormal visions; if——

What kind of thinking was this? It kept the tongue and lips and roof of the mouth more parched than ever.

"Terrill!" he called.

The other swung about.

"I've got to have a drink."

Terrill had the water supply too; it was more precious than even the gold. Gold would let you perish out here, where water alone could save you. Every particle of sand might be a grain of gold dust, but precious little good it would be—for thirst. You could not barter it for life; it was good only when you reached the haunts of men, where gold bought things—luxury, power, indulgence——

"Not yet!" said Terrill.

"I can't go on without it. Just to wet my lips, Terrill!"

"No!" said Terrill.

He turned abruptly and moved on. Sorley tried to cry out, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. Denial had made his thirst a thousandfold worse. And suddenly he knew that the transformation was complete. He hated Terrill, hated him to the point of murder. Nevertheless, he must keep on, obedient to Terrill's wishes, beating his way through the merciless glare after the sturdy figure ahead, because Terrill had the two things Sorley most desired: water—and gold.

Slow night came out of the east, moved up across the inexorable arc, and shut out all light save the red, fiery promise of the sunset. Sorley, watching, had a queer idea that the sun was a superheated red ball dipping down into the sand to charge it into a new resemblance to the inferno. They moved on now at an increased pace, with the added guidance of the stars. The sand beneath still burned the feet; to Sorley it seemed to send hot waves up his spine and affect the nerves of his eyes. Lifting his glance once to the brightness of the stars in a steely sky, the universe swam above him, as if he stood not on the floor of the desert but on the deck of a ship reeling on an unsteady sea. He flung out his arms to balance himself, closed his eyes for a moment behind burning lids, and was restored.

They stopped to drink briefly—one pull each at the water under the jealous watch of the other; but the sharing of the precious fluid drew them together, and when they went on it was side by side again.

"My eyes hurt!" said Sorley complainingly.

"Didn't I tell you to lid 'em a bit, as we came along?"

"I tried to."

"Huh!"

Their way now was up a slight ascent, on the top of which Terrill said they would rest a space. Sorley threw himself down, jaded, beside Terrill, who sat straight as an arrow, as if fatigue had no meaning for him. The reproach stung the younger man. His lips twisted. Terrill fancied himself all right! Hang it all, he was an old-timer at this; Sorley was new to it. Sorley's place was in the city, jostling with crowds, where the tides of life moved under bright lights, and the conveniences and luxuries of life were at hand. In the city Terrill would look out of place, a hulk of a man with manners at which well-bred people would smile; there Sorley would have his

time. What did Terrill need gold for, anyway? His needs were simple compared with those of Sorley. It took breeding to spend gold to advantage. Terrill would probably toss it away for some coarse pleasure, and be off again to the desert to find more.

"Asleep?" said Terrill's voice.

"No."

"Want to see a sight for sore eyes? Maybe it'll cure yours."

Sorley raised himself on one elbow.

"See there? What's them?"

"Gad!" said Sorley eagerly. "Hills!"

The moon had just risen; by a trick of its light the distant mounds were visible.

"Funny we didn't see them before," said Sorley.

"We come up a bit," explained Terrill, "and that blamed glare spoiled our vision anyway. It's just the way the light falls; I've seen it once or twice before that way."

"It's not—a mirage?" suggested Sorley, in sudden fear.

"Not it, son! We can't miss it now. Only a blind man or a fool could miss the way now. Keep straight ahead and the canyon opens like a door for you."

They stared at it; it had at first a cooling effect on Sorley's burning eyes, but after a time the strain told, and he lay back again. Beside him Terrill, as if satisfied now to rest, stretched out, and the silence of sleep fell on both.

Now Sorley dreamed, and his dreams were of hard things happening in a world of sand and vultures, where men might perish and the outside world—where law moved in its processes—know nothing of it, save that the price of adventure was still being paid by intrepid souls. And he started up, shivering, with a sense of the devil or some devilish agency at his elbow—so vividly, that he threw out his arm, and woke himself fully with the feel of Terrill's boot against his fingers.

The old-timer was still asleep, sleeping, indeed, like a baby. So Sorley perched upon his heels in the sand and fought a battle against his heavy lids, which seemed now as stiff and unnatural as if they had been molten metal solidified; and then he gazed fully and curiously at his partner. The unreal light of a false dawn revealed the sleeping features, uncomely in the grip of slumber; mouth open to reveal yellow, broken teeth; the chin stubbly with promise of a beard; the cheeks and forehead deeply furrowed and tanned. A hard, grim old fellow—Terrill.

Sorley, watching, brooded, and in the unreality of the moment, had a fancy that Terrill was not lying there but sitting opposite him, in grim humor, saying: "I reckon I'll get mine in time. The vultures have marked me out more'n once, son, and I had to disappoint them. And the sand's almost had its way with me. I dunno—— I dunno, son, but what it's the best way in the end. I figger a sailor'd rather end up in cool, green water than ashore, and there's something to be said for the desert as against a bed—when you've been used to one more'n the other. I never had much use for bright lights, and soft pillows, and the chatterin' crowds!"

That was out of memory, of course; it had been around the camp fire Terrill had said that, but every word was pigeonholed and brought out now for Sorley's fevered inspection. Two days, three days ago, a sense of comradeship would have halted the wild flight of Sorley's madness; but the desert—the heat, and thirst, and the grimness of the old fellow—had broken that a bit. Sorley tried, but couldn't quite recapture it. So, not meaning to yield, he dallied with temptation. Terrill's shirt was open at the throat; the bag containing the earnest and the promise of wealth was hung from about the rugged neck. Very cautiously, Sorley's fingers

experimented. He had it shifted up, safely, slipped the knot; Terrill grunted once, but slept on; the thing was in Sorley's possession! He opened it and fingered this amazing promise of wealth. With it was a careful chart, and a description, by which one could stake a claim, and find it again. Wealth, properly handled! For one at least, if not for two. And Sorley had his doubts about Terrill; he had not listened without learning things to Terrill's tales of his former business deals. Terrill was like an inventor who never makes any money himself, but is exploited by men with heads for business. Terrill would probably mull this thing up too; he was pig-headed and would want his way; and neither of them would get much out of it. And what would Terrill do with the money anyway? No good to him.

Fear began to take possession of Sorley. He was afraid now that Terrill would wake, and find the gold in his hands. And he was still more afraid that Terrill would not wake; that this growing obsession, this hardness, this cruel lust he felt within him might find no check. He looked around upon the vast plateau upon whose surface they were only specks in infinity. The false dawn was dying; but he had caught again the glimpse of hills. Easy to find his way now alone. Any one but a fool or a blind man could, Terrill had said.

He would have to take the water, too!

That was worse than the gold. His hand, closing on the precious container, shook. He looked at it as if it were not his hand, but some alien thing doing an act beyond his own power of direction. Something of the immense cruelty of the desert seemed to have moved into him; perhaps the estrangement from his partner had left the door open, and this evil spirit had come in. He could not exorcise it. He had no real desire to. With every moment the thing seemed more easy, more plausible, less terrible. He was not doing this act himself; he was watching the movement of puppets on the stage, or of characters upon the printed page—and the deed lacked both justification and motivation. In drama or in fiction he would hate intensely the consummation of such an act, and despise the one who did it. But out here it was easy to do; the spirit of the desert bore one up.

One picked up the gold, secreted it; took the—the water—and moved out into the immensity of a desert over which slow dawn moved. Beyond, the hills beckoned, caught in the early light. Above, a vulture moved, and one watched it, unaffected by its sinister circling, until suddenly one ceased to be an automaton possessed and driven by an alien spirit, and became a human being caught in an evil mesh from which one strove to escape, not by retracing steps, but by plunging madly on into a desert slowly lighted by the glowing fires of the red sunrise.

Sorley stopped once to drink the tepid but life-giving fluid he had filched and then marched, with almost an agony of eagerness, upon the hills beyond. As he moved on, they seemed to retreat. Yet Terrill had said it was no mirage. They existed, but the measuring of space by the eye was tricky. As the sun moved up, they began to blaze in a whitish mist, to assume grotesque and unnatural shapes. This mockery he endured, pressing on.

The heat now became terrific. He had a feeling that since yesterday it had achieved a greater vehemence; and then he knew, with a peculiar certainty, that this was because he had no veteran ahead to guide and sustain him. He missed old Terrill.

He mustn't get thinking of him, though. The die had been cast. He must get on. Once, glancing back, he realized that whatever desire might be

in him to retrace his steps, there was small possibility left of doing so. Behind him lay only wind-swept levels and grotesque hummocks of sand. Any trail his own plodding feet had left was almost instantly sanded over. He stood, then, for an awful moment or two, stiffening against a sense of horror in that amazing accumulation of burning diamond dust. A puff of hot air, moving close to the ground, quivered in a heat haze that gave an odd impression —as if the misshapen hummocks were living monstrosities, from whom there rose the breath of life. The longer he looked, the more his vision assured him that they were moving, living creatures of weird shapes and monstrous proportions.

He remembered his eyes then.

"Keep 'em lidded well!" Terrill had said.

Sorley turned his back on the desert where he had left Terrill to—to die, and pressed on; and the blazing, retreating hills in the distance did not help his sight. The blasting heat withered him; seemed to suck the life juices from him. Lifting water to his lips, he drank greedily. The warm fluid tasted like blood. So it was, too! Terrill's! He must not think of that! Think only of the cities that lay ahead beyond that dazzling line of hills; of the things to be done there—with gold! That must be the incentive.

He tried to picture the life that lay ahead; cool, shaded streets, bright shops and pavements, the movement of people, the luxuries of life—food, water, music, the companionship of men and women. He told himself, fiercely, that when he got back to them, he'd sell his secret for what he could get and forget the burning desert that now tormented him.

This vision of the future became very real; pictures began to swim before him as he stumbled onward.

There was a country road down which he might some day walk to familiar haunts. And suddenly a little wind would lift dust from its surface and move in swirls upon him—and in it he would smell the desert! There was the movement of life on summer beaches, which he might join, as of old —and under the summer sun the sand would sparkle like diamond dust, and shift under his feet as it did in the desert—— Well, there would be night; cool, comforting night—for which now he longed most desperately—without this awful, pitiless glare. There would be the night: soft blackness—— Something moved up in his mind to bring not-unfamiliar words:

> If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me;
> Even the night shall be light about me.
> Yea, the darkness hideth not——

He lifted his eyes; the vast dome of sky held no stars—only vultures hovering, in idle circles—yet over it moved a veil of night. And suddenly Sorley stumbled over a hummock; he fell; the blazing sand seemed to reach up and seize him; he lay for a minute, then struggled up, his hands to his eyes. The eyes seemed to burn the hands. He took them away. Deep into his head ran pains like shooting flame.

Then Sorley understood.

He was blind! It was not night that had shut down. Rather, a temporary blindness, like that which comes to the traveler over snow in the great northern reaches. Not even a comforting darkness; his eyes seemed to be staring at a white, dazzling wall, blank, but full of a burning light. Fear sucked from him the last atom of endurance against the heat. At this crisis he must drink or die. Death was sure enough in any case; but for the moment he must satisfy the parched craving for water.

He felt for his supply. It was gone! In stumbling he must have lost it! A new panic stirred him into fevered action. On hands and knees, he began a

search; his hands reaching out encountered only sand. He expanded his circle of investigation. It could not be far away! He had sense enough to remain in contact with the hollow his body had made; this must be the axis of his outreachings. Carefully he put his feet in the mark and, flat on his belly, described a painful circle. It was maddening to think that he might be missing the thing by inches.

Nothing but sand! A sense of suffocation descended upon him. He must risk everything in extending his search. He began burrowing channels in the loose sand like spokes of a wheel. Along these he might creep, and still be able to return to his base. He moved cautiously out the first channel, made straight by the measuring of his body; there was nothing but sand beyond. He drew himself back in the same painful way, tried a second time, in the next channel. No luck. The third and fourth proved vain endeavors. He was panting now with his efforts, close down to the choking grains. Yet he was sure still that he had not lost his base, from which the water container could not be so far away. He moved out again with that careful measuring; somewhere in the distance a little puff of wind developed gusty proportions, swept down on him, choked him with loose particles, sanded over his poor markings, and danced away. Fighting for breath he lost all sense of direction. In a panic he began an incautious scramble—anywhere—vainly!

He floundered madly about, sobbing aloud his sense of terror. Childishly he began to shout out Terrill's name; a mad shrieking into infinity:

"Terrill! Terrill! For Heaven's sake, Terrill!"

He listened. He had, for a moment, a quick impression that something—some presence—moved near him. And then he remembered the vultures that had circled overhead. And, a new panic seizing him, he began to run in a crazy, sagging movement across the infinite expanse of sand.

Only Heaven could help him now. No good crying out for Terrill. Nothing but divine love that went out beyond circles natural to man's affections could avail. If an enemy hunger, feed him. If he thirst, give him drink! Thirst! He fancied he was crying the word aloud. Only Heaven; not Terrill, to whom, foolishly, he had cried before. He could imagine Terrill's face; the face of a man who knew the desert and had seen hard things done on the trails where the stuff of men was tried. If Terrill could see him now, he would be grimly ironical. A hard, rough man, he would appreciate the humor of the thing—if he could see this blind, stumbling helplessness, this fitting justice being worked to its finality. But Terrill would now be facing this same kind of thing. The innocent and the guilty there in that maze of sand, and the water that might have saved them—lost!

Water!

That thrust aside all other thinking; the thought of water—and thirst. He supposed Terrill would be able to fight against even that; Terrill had often said imagination would waste or conserve supply. If you *thought* you were thirsty—thought? It was no thought now. His tongue seemed swollen; he had a fancy that it must be protruding through his parched lips, and that he would soon be unable to draw it back into his mouth. That was silly, because he had drunk not long ago. Just imagination! That stage should not be reached for some time yet. He mustn't get thinking of stages! The increasing thirst; the blind stumbling on in the sand; the weakness—the end, with vultures circling above. He halted, listening tensely.

"Keep fightin', son! Keep fightin'!"

He knew it would affect his mind sooner or later! And here he was fancying he could hear Terrill's voice ironically exhorting him. So real was it, though, that his lips mouthed with difficulty the word:

"Terrill!"

There was no answer.

He stiffened himself, and with a sudden, angry courage, started plunging on. He would keep going anyway. Perhaps it was Terrill's spirit following. Terrill had told queer tales of desert fantasies.

"What's the hurry, son?"

It *was* Terrill! It must be.

"Terrill!"

No answer.

His voice rose to a muffled shriek. "Terrill! You can't fool me, Terrill. You're there. For Heaven's sake, speak!"

No answer. Was it a trick of the mind? He halted for a moment, swaying, his hand to his forehead.

"Just a minute!" said Terrill's voice drawingly from a little distance. "I'm having a swig of water."

"W-water!"

"Found it," said Terrill's voice. "Lucky you were making tracks around it pretty well! The glare got your eyes —eh? I saw you when I was quite a way off. Silly, you know, goin' off that way. I might not have been able to find you, and then where'd I have been—without water?"

Silence. Sorley passed his tongue with difficulty along his lips.

"Terrill! I say, Terrill!"

"Well?"

"For Heaven's sake—just a drop of water!"

"Why should I? A fair division—you've got the gold. And I've got the water. And—and you tried to have both, didn't you, son?"

Sorley was silent.

"In league with the vultures, eh, son?" said Terrill's voice in that inexorable, drawling way. "The old man don't count—leave him to die in his desert, huh?"

Sorley tried to speak but couldn't.

"There's a sort of code to the desert —like at sea," said Terrill. "And when a man breaks it, it's queer, but the desert seems to get him. I've seen it happen very often before. So long, son!"

"Terrill! You're not—going to leave me! Here's the gold, Terrill! You can have it all for a drop of water!"

"Or—just for taking it from you, couldn't I? Don't know that I'm interested in it now, son. Sort of blood money now, ain't it?"

Sorley spread his arms gropingly.

"Terrill, you're not going——"

"Got to get on!" said Terrill easily. Sorely could hear him moving off, humming to himself. He began to follow desperately. If he lost that thread of song that bound him to Terrill, he was done. Nothing mattered but that. As long as he held that thread he had a chance. Life lay in that song. Once or twice the sound ceased, and he was in agony, but then it was resumed and he followed. He grew expert in the interpretation of direction. Terrill could not be far ahead; Terrill and the water that he, Sorley, must have.

And then it died.

He listened, called, but no sound came. He cried again: "Terrill!" There was no answer, no resumption of the song.

So Terrill had played with him, increased the torture by way of revenge, and gone on, had he? Perhaps, in the distance, he had turned for a last look, to see his betrayer drop exhausted and hopeless in the sand. He could imagine the grim hardness of the veteran's face. The hard code of the desert toward one who broke its precepts. His breath came sobbingly. He deserved it all, of course. He had buckled under the desert test. And the desert that broke

men's spirits, and unhinged their nerves, and drove them to madness and cruelty, acted as judge and executioner—as well as tempter. He called again, stumbling hopelessly forward into the awful silence. Falling, he felt he could not rise and go on through this inferno. But he stumbled up at last and staggered on. A hand seized his arm.

"Steady, son!" drawled Terrill. "Here—just a drop of this! You'll do! I guess that's enough of a lesson! Don't bleat, son! Hold up! Hold up!" The warmish fluid on Sorley's lips and tongue was no longer like blood but like some potent wine, though a weakness ran in him, a desire to cry like a child. "Easy!" said Terrill. "You'll need all your water supply to make the canyon! You didn't think I'd really leave you in the lurch, did you? Huh? Not accordin' to the code, son! Why, I've known a guy to help out a sheriff that was after him for murder, even—and you seem to forget, my son, that you'n' me's partners!"

MARVELS OF ARIZONA

AMONG the most interesting sights of the wonderland of Arizona is that known as the Wonderland of Rocks, a five-mile-square area covered with rocks of strangely shaped proportions. The curious and even awe-inspiring formations of this wonderland are already becoming known to an increasingly large number of travelers, so great is their attraction for sightseers, for the area has only been open to the tourist for about five years.

As is generally the case in all such natural wonders, the rocks of this area, which are for the most part vertical in shape, afford much entertainment to visitors in providing them with opportunity for finding resemblances to well-known characters and places. And, as one finds so often in tracing resemblances in glowing coals, each visitor finds likenesses that had been seen by no one else in the party.

The rocks of the wonderland are covered with vivid coloring matter, purple, green, red, and yellow predominating, and this glowing color adds enormously to the picturesque appearance of the place.

Some of the most remarkable formations of the wonderland are known as the "Totem Poles." These gigantic columns of rock which line the sides of a canyon rise to a height of one hundred and eighty feet. Overspread with a pattern caused by the coloring matter on the rocks, they have a striking resemblance to the totem poles of Alaska.

The wonderful profile of Cochise, the famous Apache Indian chief, is also to be seen in this region. The legend being that the old chief's profile appeared on the rocks after his death and there remains, facing heavenward. A truly noble conception, that has possibly given rise to the custom now fast gaining favor of carving the portraits of great leaders on vast rocks as national monuments.

Followed

by Mel Watt

WHAT had been suspicion in Tiesen's mind settled into certainty when he stopped to peer, from his vantage point on the ridge, across the bleak, desolate expanse of snow. His bloodshot eyes stared unblinkingly at the miniature figure in the distance: a figure which, by infinitesimal degrees, grew larger and clearer, as though a camera lens were slowly bringing it into focus. It moved like clockwork, very like an automaton. Its snowshoes dented the snow with the precise regularity that bespoke military training, and sure knowledge of its environment.

Tiesen's eyes, trained to observe at long distances, took in one or two of the figure's outstanding details. Deathly fear struck into his heart. A "Mountie"! That hat! No one but a Mountie could wear a hat at just that angle. And the trim, straight figure! In the North, none but members of the Royal Northwest Mounted looked so neat and well set up.

Tiesen shuddered. He caught himself doing so, and flopped his arms back and forth in a vain attempt to make himself believe he shuddered from the cold. But he was not cold. A fine moisture was out all over his body. He was afraid, and the realization of it drove him suddenly into an ungovernable fury. He let loose a long string of curses.

"Quit actin' like a squaw!" he said and jabbed himself viciously on the jaw. "Yo're imaginin' things. Nobody could've found him. Not a chance! Not the way you fixed it." Another furious jab at himself. "Losin' yore nerve?" he sneered. "Jest because there's a Mountie goin' the same way you are?"

He settled his pack with a jerk, and started mushing somewhat faster than was necessary. He tried to whistle, and, at the sound of it, inadvertently put a huge hand over his mouth. The sound would carry. Well, why shouldn't it? Why should he care who heard him? What was there to be afraid of? He shrugged, and snickered at himself. But he did not resume the whistling.

He was in undulating country now.

Over the immense billows of white he slogged, straining himself rather more than he cared to admit; snorting out short breaths which he knew were foolhardy, if he expected to make time and cover distance.

He had been forcing himself to keep his eyes to the front. But now, something made him look back. No one in sight. Still, that did not prove anything, for the rolling country would hide a man just a short distance away. But, anyhow, it felt easier if you could not see any one. Tiesen sighed with relief.

"Well!" he grinned. "Worryin' about nothing. He probably turned off back there a ways."

He slackened his pace to the easy lope of the experienced musher. Released from the dread that he was being followed, his thoughts turned inward on himself. He shrugged irritably. Why did the *thing* persist in dominating his mind? It was past; he was on his way. What else mattered? But the more he tried to suppress the glaring scene that had photographed itself indelibly on his brain, the clearer it became. It was like a great ghoul, following him like a black shadow, grinning hideously at every step he took. His long steps beat an accompaniment to its taunting hiss: "I—know—I—know—I—know!"

He felt his heart beating faster, and he growled: "Cut it out, you fool." But beneath the growl there was a faint note of fear.

For hours he trudged along. He began to feel hunger. He stopped abruptly, and unswung his pack. He was on flat plateau now, and his narrowed eyes took in instinctively the full sweep of the vastnesses. He started violently, and the color left his face, turning it to a muddy brown. In the distance was a tiny, moving speck. It was moving straight toward him, just as it had the last time he had seen it! Even so far off, Tiesen could make out the sure, mechanical motion, the *plod-plod-plod* of the snowshoes. Tiesen, with only a very weak curse, gathered up his pack, and started away at a pace that was enough to burst his heart.

The exertion of his stride, and the fear that was whipping at his mind, worked him up to a near hysteria. The Mountie knew! The Mountie knew! He was coming to get him! Tiesen knew, now, the meaning of that sure, measured pace. The Mountie was out to get him! It was to be a test of endurance. That slow, measured stride! That determined, unhurried stride! Inevitable, inexorable as death. It was as though it were saying: "No—use—no—use—we'll—get—you—in—the—end." Criminals in the Northwest have been hounded to madness by that monotonous, relentless stride. It drives terror into a guilty conscience.

Tiesen, with a gasp of pain, clawed at his heart as though he would prevent it from bursting. He was suffocating: the trip-hammer speed of his heart, the icy air driving what felt like millions of small blades through his pained lungs—they were torturing him. From sheer exhaustion, he leaned against the scrub of what had once been a fir tree. He did not mean to do it, neither did he mean to rest more than an instant; but nature rebelled, and forced him to lean thus for several precious minutes.

The Mountie was still far off; but he was all too near for Tiesen. Tiesen was about to start off again, when he heard the faint, ringing sound of the Mountie's voice. He could not make out what the man was saying, but he looked back, and saw the officer wave his arms as though he were signaling for him to stop. For Tiesen, that motion was enough. He knew now that he was a marked man.

The false courage of desperation gripped him. His chattering teeth

abruptly crunched together, and his bleared eyes narrowed to a glitter. His left hand clutched at the poke under his coat, and the action brought again that glaring, hideous scene into the center of his mind. The horror of it, viewed in retrospect—the knowledge of what it would mean for him, were he caught—drove him to the wild, unreasoning fear of an animal. He spat out a stream of invectives that were as ugly as they were useless.

"I'll give him a fight!" he jeered. "I'll give him a-plenty!"

For several instants, a hopelessness surged through him. Fight! Of what use was it? Suppose he killed the mountie? Others would come; others without number, without end! He saw, in his mind, a long, unending line of man hunters, following him on horseback when the snow was off the ground, following him afoot when the snows came again. Long, unending columns of them! All coming straight at him! And always, always with that relentless, unwavering, maddening tread!

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned, and the next moment jerked out his rifle and began wildly to pump lead at the small figure in the distance. It was the stupid action of hysteria. In his right senses, he would have known that he had not a chance in a thousand of hitting a man at that distance. He paused for a little while, his breath coming in gasps, his hands clutching his rifle tightly, to keep it steady.

The officer had stopped at the sound of the first shots. But he hesitated only an instant. Then he came on at a quicker pace, but with a sort of wary crouch. Tiesen brought up his rifle, and bore on the trigger with a viciousness that threatened to jam the magazine. The small figure gradually grew larger; came steadily onward. Tiesen pushed in a fresh clip; and, reaching into his case to get it, realized with dismay that he had but one more clip of cartridges left. Reason would have told him to go easy; but reason had completely left him. He saw the terrifying, ruthless figure bearing in on him; stalking down on him to get him —unless he could get it first.

To another accompaniment of terrific oaths, he blazed away at the oncoming man. His crazed mind fell prey to the notion that the officer was unkillable, that his life must be charmed. Not one of the shots had touched him. Reason, again, might have told Tiesen that fast-and-wild shooting is seldom effective; but reason had fled. The man hunter came warily, but steadily, toward him.

With a sob of helpless fury, Tiesen rammed home the last clip, waited as long as his jagged nerves and terrorized mind would permit, then blazed at the officer with the ineffectual desperation of an exhausted beast at bay. The officer dropped quickly to the snow. Tiesen let out a harsh yell, thinking he had made a hit. Then a bullet snapped his wrist, and his rifle fell to the ground, a split second before the report of the officer's gun carried through the air to his ears!

Tiesen sank down in a clumsy heap, like a man without a spine. The intense cold, the fear, the crazed terror in his brain, the realization that he was trapped and wounded—all reacted on him at once. He went completely to pieces. When the officer came steadily up to him, Tiesen was little more than a groveling, babbling animal, with even the instinct of self-preservation gone from him.

"I did it! I killed him!" he whined between intervals of choking gasps and helpless sobs. "You got me! See? I'm winged! I can't do nothin'! You got me!"

The officer, tight-lipped, stood peering at Tiesen in silence. When Tiesen could stand it on longer, he beat crazily

upon the officer's legs, and shrieked: "Say something! Say something! I've confessed, ain't I? Say something, you —you bloodhound! You and your eternal *plod-plod-plod!*"

The officer, without a word, bandaged Tiesen's wrist. Then they started back. For days and days they were on the trail. And when at last they got to territorial headquarters, Tiesen confessed in writing.

A detail of police was sent to investigate. In the barren shack where Tiesen and his partner had lived, they found the body of the partner buried deep beneath the rough floor boards, under the spot where the stove stood.

The poke of gold for which Tiesen had killed, was, as has been told, found on Tiesen's person.

The Mountie who had brought Tiesen in, was, some time later, discussing the affair with his superior. He had not yet got over his astonishment. He grinned derisively.

"Chief," he said, "you could have knocked me over with a feather. I was low on grub, and didn't want to turn back if I could help it. Thought I was lucky when I spotted Tiesen. I couldn't figure out why he worked so hard to outdistance me. And when he started shooting, I thought the fellow was crazy from loneliness or something."

They both sat, silent and thoughtful, for a time, each tracing in his own mind the amazing and, to them, somewhat amusing outcome of Tiesen's crime.

"That's irony for you!" grinned the officer. "And all because I wanted some chow."

PIONEER SUGAR.

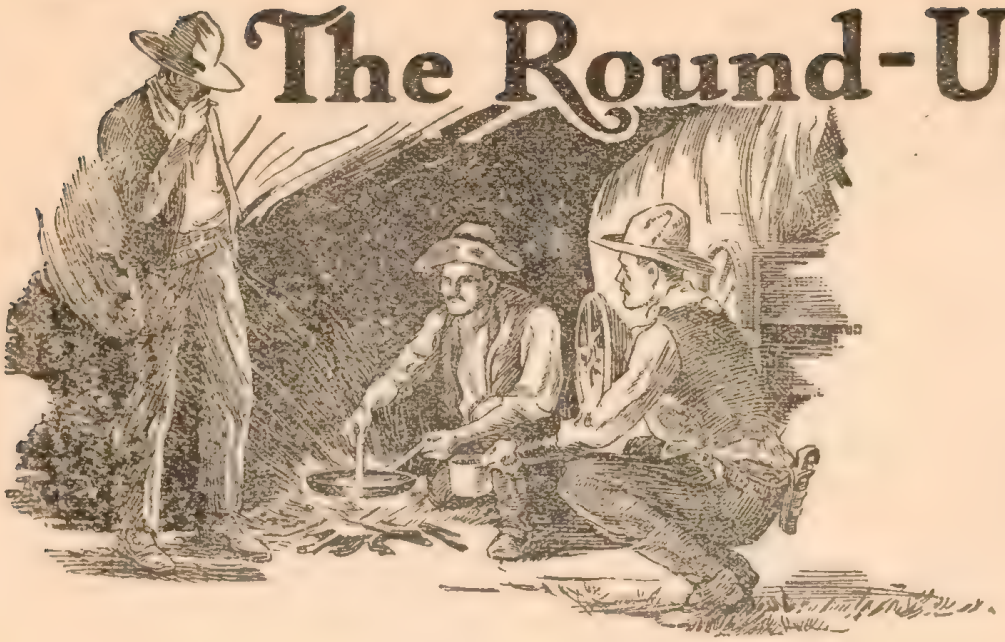
IN these days when sugar is so easily obtainable and is used lavishly both at the table and in cooking, while maple sugar is somewhat of a delicacy, it is hard to realize that there was a time when the positions were just reversed.

Had it not been for the Indians, Canada's first settlers would have felt severely the lack of sugar, which, together with salt, was very hard to obtain in those days. However, they soon learned a valuable lesson from the redskins, who taught them to tap the maples in springtime when the sap began to run, and boil the sap down into sirup or sugar.

One important use which pioneer housewives made of maple sugar was in the putting up of conserves. Successively, in the order of their ripening—strawberries, first, then raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, plums, and cranberries—the different fruits would be boiled in sugar, then poured into a keg, with layers of powdered maple sugar between each variety. Sometimes by the beginning of the winter, the keg would be filled. And, almost always, there would be a shelf in the pioneer cottage for the big cakes of maple sugar, and the cans of sirup, to be used all winter on—cakes, on cereals, in most of the ways that ordinary sugar is used.

Maple sirup and sugar making have become to a large extent commercialized and specialized, the tendency ever being to perfect the quality of the product, and to prepare it for market in the most attractive form; but even in our own time, many of us can remember or still look forward to the running of the sap, when every one that can be spared on the farm goes to the little cabin in the "sugar bush," and helps in gathering in the sap, and boiling it in huge kettles over a great, open fire. And it is especially interesting to know that our knowledge of the process by which we can obtain this delicacy was gained, primarily, from the Indian. More than any written reminder does it bring near to us the pioneer days.

The Round-Up



BEIN' as how this is jest about the time of year that folks give thanks for whatsoever they've got to give thanks for, it seemed as how it might be kind of appropriate for us, with your good help and assistance, to round up some of our strays.

Well, we've got a whole corral full of 'em for Thanksgiving Day. Jest step over to the fence with us, while Pete holds the lantern, and we'll show you jest a few of 'em:

C. L. Willey, University Station, Tucson, Arizona, he up and p'ints out as follows:

"I wish to thank you, Boss and Folks, for your kindness in printing my request in the Missing Department, asking for information concerning the present whereabouts of Verna, Maude, and Orville Ingram. We received a letter from one of these three, and she has also given me information concerning the other two.

"I very much appreciate your efforts in finding these people for me and wish to thank you for your assistance. I do not know of any other way that I could have had the desired results, as I lost track of these three relatives nearly twenty years ago. I think that your department is one of the finest in the world, and I hope that others who take advantage of your offer to help find missing relatives and friends will be as fortunate in their results as I was."

And now comes Mrs. Alice V. Enright, Burns, Oregon:

"Boss and Folks: Want to tell you that your Missing Department found my brother, D. M. Wadams, and his wife for me. Thanks, good friends."

All the way across the country to Chelsea, Massachusetts, and Mrs. E. Daniels:

"Good Boss and Good Folks: Just a few words to let you know that my son, Frank Daniels, bought Western Story Magazine yesterday, saw the advertisement in the Missing Department, and came to Chelsea and hunted me up through people he used to know. You can all be sure that I was some surprised and delighted to see my boy. I

don't know how I can commence to thank you enough. Many, many thanks. I hope that every mother who has a missing son will use the Missing Department in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and will get the same results that I did. Then she'll be made as happy as I am."

Now for a long trip, all the way to 550 Dalny Road, Wayside, Shanghai. It's Mrs. Ada Harvey who'll speak:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Referring to my letter to your good selves, dated March 7, 1928, in which I requested you to insert two notices in your Missing column of the DETECTIVE STORY and WESTERN STORY magazines, regarding A. J. Harvey and the Parmentier family, I herewith beg to express my thanks to you for doing so in the June issues. I would further inform you that I have already received results, due to your efforts on my behalf, as I have located both the above-mentioned parties."

From Brazil, Indiana, Miss Pauline Peyton:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Received the letter, giving me information about my brother, William Peyton. For all you've done, I'm very thankful, and I want to tell you that I've located my brother."

Into Canada. Sarnia, Ontario, is the place; Mrs. William Wincott, the person reporting:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I want to tell you what your wonderful magazines, DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, did for me through their Missing Departments, in which an advertisement was published, by me, for Charles Ward. I am pleased to say that Charles Ward read the advertisement in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. Please let me most heartily thank you for the service you did in putting us in touch with each other."

From out Oregon way, Nyssa, canters Mrs. Lillian Maude Newby, to say:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I wish to thank you all very much for your valuable help. I got in touch with my brother's family. Had not heard from them in twelve years. My brother's name was Tom R. Pashley. He lived in Victoria, British Columbia. His daughter, Josephine, and his two sons, Herbert and Fred, now reside in Everett, Washington."

"BOSS AND FOLKS!" cries Joseph D. Fuller, Rockford, Illinois. "More strength to the Missing Department of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, for through it another missing one has been found and reconciled to loved ones at home. Am not at liberty to disclose the name of the one who has been located, but wish you to know how grateful we are to you all. Thank you many, many times for the services rendered."

Out in California, in Los Angeles, lives Mrs. Dora Hawkins. Mrs. Hawkins is happy.

"DEAR FRIENDS OF THE ROUND-UP," she reports. "It is with pleasure that I'm telling you that I have heard from my boy, Ray Hawkins, through your help. I put a notice in the Missing Department of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, and I received a letter from my son a week after the notice was printed. He had joined the army. I do indeed thank you all for your kindness, and cannot say enough in praise of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE."

Miss Edith M. King, Centralia, Washington:

"DEAR FOLKS—ALL: Just this:

Thank you for your promptness in forwarding my Buddy's letter to me. It has been a long time since I had heard from my brother, Fred King, and I just took a chance in the Missing Department. You don't know how happy you made all of us here on the coast, when we learned through you that our boy is safe and still reads his WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. Thank you again and again. Good luck to you all, and may WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE keep up its good work. Forever a loyal WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE booster; that's what I am."

Mrs. Minnie Todriff, Chicago, Illinois, has a word to say:

"Please accept my thanks for locating my sister, who was missing for nine years. Words cannot express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to you. All success to WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, and, again, my thanks."

One more—but there are thousands and thousands more, did we have time this evening to point them out to you.

Mrs. Hannah Pillivant, Mount Clemens, Michigan, says:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I am here to tell you, as you requested, that Charles Mason, whom you so kindly advertised for in the Missing Department, has been found. Both Mr. Mason's sisters and myself wish to thank you and extend our sincere appreciation for your kindness in publishing the notice in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE."

Remember, Folks, the Missing Department and all the other departments are run for you to use. Their service is given you free, just because you are a reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE or DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE. Use one or all of them, whenever you think they can help you.

How better can we close this evening's Round-up than by singing the good, old-time song—or should we say hymn?—entitled:

THE COWMAN'S PRAYER.

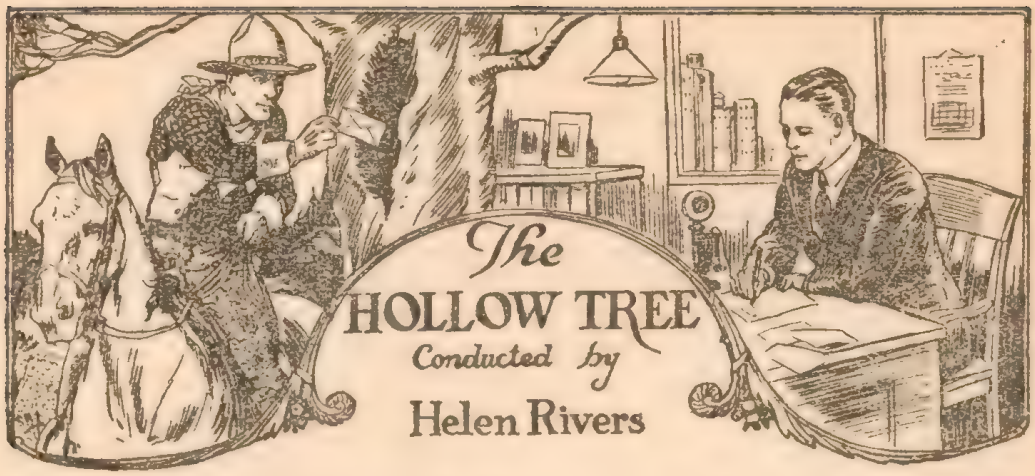
Now, O Lord, please lend me thine ear,
The prayer of a cattleman to hear.
No doubt the prayers may seem strange,
But I want you to bless our cattle range.

Bless the round-ups year by year,
And don't forget the growing steer;
Water the lands with brooks and rills
For my cattle that roam on a thousand hills.

Prairie fires, won't you please stop?
Let thunder roll and water drop.
It frightens me to see the smoke;
Unless it's stopped, I'll go dead broke.

As you, O Lord, my herd behold,
It represents a sack of gold;
I think at least five cents a pound
Will be the price of beef the year around.

One thing more and then I'm through—
Instead of one calf, give my cows two.
I may pray different from other men,
But I've had my say, and now, Amen.



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.

ALTHOUGH most of us wander as far abroad as we can get, our chief interest is always in the direction of the home range and the home ranch. Every hombre is interested in every other hombre's home ranch.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: I'm just another ranch hand like the rest of the Gang. The name of the ranch is Scott Field, and the location is Belleville, Illinois. The owner of the ranch is Uncle Sam, and the foreman is the Air Mail Corps. The brand is L T A—lighter than air—and we herd our cattle up among the woolly clouds or corral them in a huge hangar.

I haven't been many places nor seen any very big wolves, but I'm always interested in hearing about the home ranch, the home village, or the home town. So let's hear from the home range, pards, and if you've stampeded in another direction, let's hear from you just the same. BEN B.

Care of The Tree.

On the south plains of west Texas.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've lived here on these south plains for ten years, and I can say a good deal about this treeless, stock-raising country of western Texas. Yes, we have sandstorms aplenty, but that only goes to prove what a fine country this range is. I'm a maverick of twenty-two, and proud to belong to this Longhorn State.

JOE E. SCOTT.

Ralls, Texas.

Stock raising in eastern Texas.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Since my letter appeared in the old Holla, telling about the opportunities for stock raising in eastern Texas, I've been flooded with letters from Maine to California, and as I'll not be able to answer 'em all, except maybe a few hundred, I'm aimin' to answer most of the questions now.

This land is located in the extreme eastern part of the Longhorn State, and lies in Jasper, Newton, Orange, Angelina, and other counties. This is what is called the "piney wood" section, and is cut-over land. The pine trees have been cut off and the grass has come up thick and fine, and it has been converted into very fine grazing land. The country is well watered by creeks, springs, rivers, and there is plenty of rainfall. The grass stays good all year, and the cattle are allowed to range all year round. It is a fine winter range.

There are no stock laws in this section of the country, and land can be acquired for

almost nothing, according to location, of course. There are stretches, between settlements, of five and six miles, and this land can also be leased for five years at a time, free. I believe this to be one of the best places in the country for a man with a large family and small capital to get started.

Now, folks, you can get all the information you want regarding this section of the country from the Chamber of Commerce, Houston, Texas. I'll also try to answer a few more letters, folks, if you'll be sure to inclose return postage.

J. M. WAGSTAFF.

Box 682, Smithville, Texas.

Oklahoman.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Speaking of the West, I guess that I would be considered a Westerner, as I've lived in the western part of the State of Oklahoma most of my life. I've never ridden the range, however, nor have I trailed the herd.

I've had a taste of most of the Western States and now I'm aiming to find a pard who'd like to try living a nomadic existence throughout the West. My plan would be to fix something in the way of a truck and living quarters on wheels. With this arrangement a fellow could be at home wherever he was at. Come on, pards. Let's get going! FRENCH BILL.

Care of The Tree.

Cowboys of England.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've been in England, folks, and any one who thinks that England hasn't any cowboys, just write to me, pronto. I was an amateur waddy myself for a couple of years. I'm twenty, folks. PAT CREES.

Rosedale, McHenry, Illinois.

Hoosier boy.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've seen a good part of Texas and Oklahoma, and would like to make friends with some of the boys of the West. If any of you folks know any old Western ballads, I'll trade you some for them. I have "Way Down on the Banks of Red River," "In the Fall of '45," and several of the songs written on the life of Jesse James. I've been on the spot where he was shot, at Round Rock.

I'm a Hoosier, hombres, and sixteen.

DALE H. SCHOFIELD.

1404 Spann Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Pal seeker.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: There are any number of folks who are looking for pals through the old Holla, and I want to be counted as one of them. I hope to be able to find a good pard of about thirty, or a little older, who will stick through "thick and thin" on a trip out West this next spring. My idea is to start out for Colorado or Wyoming, but we could arrange our plans to suit both. We can work our way or not, just as the plan best suits.

Now, sisters of the Gang, speak up. It is never too early to start planning, and we want to be on our way before the Westward "rush" begins. MRS. LILLIAN FOOR.

34 Wootring Street, Delaware, Ohio.

Make friends wherever you go. The H. T. G. badge stands for Hollow Tree Gang friendship. Be sure that you wear the badge.

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.

Back in the foothills of Idaho.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live fifteen miles from the nearest town, back in the foothills of Idaho. Mountain Home is our neighboring town, but we're out among the wild sagebrush.

I'd like to hear from sister Gangsters from every State, from Alaska, Canada, England, Scotland, Australia, the Islands, and, in fact, all foreign countries. I believe that folks everywhere are interested in the wild sage or sagebrush of our West. I'll be glad to exchange sprigs of sagebrush for the heather of Scotland, or any other special plant of any country. Will also exchange snaps. I'm thirty-five, folks, and have a baby girl ten months old. MRS. L. C. SURBAUGH.

Mountain Home, Idaho.

The little town of Pineville.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We're off the main highway. If you follow a little narrow country road, one and a half miles northwest

of Pineville, Missouri, you'll surely strike our little ranch of a hundred and twenty acres. Pineville? Well, it's a little town of about five hundred folks. It's the county seat of McDonald County, and it's in the Ozarks, the land of a million smiles. Elk River is one of the scenic attractions, and although the little town of Pineville has almost everything to offer, it has no railroad. The nearest rail is at Lanagan, five miles away. Of course you've all heard of the lead mines—they're the largest in the world—and most of them are in southeastern Missouri. Joplin, that famous Western town, is only forty miles away. FLORENCE GREEN.

Pineville, Missouri.

"Ours is a small ranch of nearly four hundred acres, about three hundred of which comprise range land. I can tell you-all about central Texas, as I've lived here most of my life. I'm sixteen, and love horseback riding," says Virginia Mitchell. Her address is Youngsport, Texas.

"I'm a lonesome eighteen-year-old girl. I've traveled over most of the West, and can tell quite a bit about it. My home State is Oklahoma, where the wind storms come along." This Gangster is Nettie Hurse, Route 9, Winchester, Oklahoma.

"For information concerning the West, I will give information about my Maryland," says fifteen-year-old Reatha White, 305 Grand Avenue, Cumberland, Maryland. This Gangster would appreciate hearing from girls living on ranches, either younger or older than she.

"I'm a girl living in central Pennsylvania, and I'd like very much to have some girl who lives on a cattle ranch in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, or southern California, write to me. Come on, cowgirls, I'm not holding back my address." This Gangster is Hazel W. Quick, Box 8, Moshannon, Center County, Pennsylvania.

Margaret Smith, 48 Maple Street, New Britain, Connecticut, is an eighteen-year-old Gangster who is fond of music, horseback riding, hiking, and swimming. Fill her mail box, girls.

Where the buckeye grows.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Thought I would drop around and see if you had room for a Buckeye Gangster. I'm only sixteen, but I'm anxious to go to the wide, open spaces of the West. Before I start for that part of the country I want to know a little more about it and perhaps have a pard or two living in that direction. I also want to find a pard of about my age to go along, as I don't think I want to start out as a lone wolf along the trail.

I'm hoping, folks, to hear from some Middle Western hombres pronto.

JOHN WINTERS.

R. R. 2, Box 92, Latty, Ohio.

The land of a thousand lakes.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a young trapper from Michigan, the land of the thousand lakes. I'm aimin' to set my trap line early for a good catch of Pen Pals, folks. Let's see if a lone wolf will drift out my way.

GRAY WOLF.

Care of The Tree.

Riding the plains and mesas.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've seen no less than forty out of the forty-eight States, and most of our national parks. Yes, and I've enjoyed riding over our plains and mesas, by night as well as by day. While I'm on the subject of riding the plains, I want to ask some of the cowboys of the Gang—between thirty and forty-five—to get in touch with me. I'm also hankering to learn some of the cowboy songs.

I've traveled over Europe and Sweden—was born in Sweden—and I'm prepared to tell you-all a bit about this little old world.

ANDREW OHEN.

Box 396, White Plains, New York.

"Just landed in the middle of Kansas—my birth State—and am interested in hearing from a pard of seventeen or eighteen who is living in or very near Salina, Kansas. I'll be glad to hear from hombres anywhere, who are my age," says Kenneth McAfee, General Delivery, Salina, Kansas.

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.

THE wonders of the West seem to be inexhaustible, and here is a query about one of them which, to the best of our knowledge, we have never discussed in this department. "I'd like to have some information, Mr. North," writes Jim C., of Asheville, North Carolina, "about that famous Western curiosity known as the Craters of the Moon. Just where is it located? For years I've sort of specialized in Western excursions, and as I'm going to hit the trail out that way again some time soon, I am especially interested in taking in this sight."

We'll say that there is a big thrill in store for Jim when he first sets eyes upon the Craters of the Moon. This national monument lies in the semiarid portion of the Snake River Plateau in south-central Idaho, at the foot of the White Knob Mountains. Needless to say, it is a volcanic region, being, in fact, the most recent example of fissure eruption in the United States, and. as its name implies, closely resembles the surface of the moon as seen through a telescope. Nowhere else in Uncle Sam's domains can so many volcanic features be found in such a small area.

When Jim enters the monument his attention will be caught at first glance by numerous smooth cinder cones, beyond which for miles stretches a huge black stream of lava. From a distance this appears smooth, but upon closer inspection it is found to be exceedingly rough and covered with jagged fragments of lava and cinders. It is believed by scientists that the volcanic eruptions in this area lasted spasmodically over a period of at least a thousand years, and that the final eruptions may have occurred only a few hundred years ago.

Just last July, President Coolidge signed a proclamation adding forty-one square miles of recently erupted lava to this property. Before this addition, the monument contained approximately

thirty-nine square miles. The added land contains many important features of scientific interest, and in addition makes a new boundary which is more regular and geometric than the old one.

The Northwest is a mighty popular section this week, for here is another query about that region from Sam L., of Wheeling, West Virginia. "I've read your department for many years, Mr. North," writes this citizen of the Panhandle State, "but this is the first time I've had enough nerve to speak up in meetin' myself. However, I've got the 'back-to-the-land' bug bad and am thinking of trekking out to northeastern Washington, which I've heard recommended as a fine place for the new settler. Now, what can you tell me about this section as to industries? I'd also like some idea as to the price of land."

First, we think we had better define for Sam just what is meant by northeastern Washington. This section embraces the largest portion of Boundary, Stevens, Spokane, and Ferry Counties. It is a region of rolling surface, with a number of rugged, mountainous ranges dividing the principal valleys. Sam will find that this part of the Evergreen State is rapidly developing in diversified farming, stock raising, and dairying. Commercial fruit growing is confined to the Spokane Valley and limited areas near Deer Park and in the Kettle Falls Valley near Marcus. Apples and several kinds of fruit are grown for home use on practically all farms.

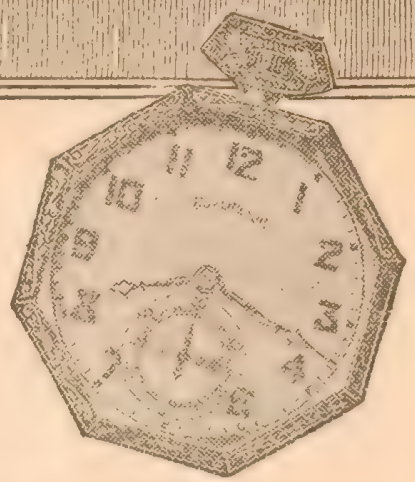
Profitable crops of wheat are produced, ranging from twenty to forty bushels per acre. Alfalfa, timothy, and clover hay, heavy yields of potatoes of excellent quality, and many other vegetables for home use or local markets are also grown. Dairying is extensively practiced on these farms. Numerous small streams or mountain springs or shallow wells furnish an abundance of pure water. The timber to be found in this region supplies an unlimited quantity of cheap fuel, while numerous sawmills and a large amount of lumber and logging work offer profitable employment for the new settler.

As to the cost of land, Sam will be able to purchase unimproved land of good quality at a price ranging from ten to twenty dollars per acre. All in all, I would say that this large region offers many opportunities for the settler who wishes to develop a modest, permanent, and comfortable home.

And while we are discussing this ever-popular subject of land for the settler, I am going to give the floor to W. K., of Dyment, Ontario, Canada, who has some remarks to make that may interest many of you prospective pioneers.

"I read your magazine from time to time," says this Canadian, "and on such occasions I often wonder why so many of the fellows seem to want to go to such extreme points to settle, as, for instance, the Peace River Country. I have never been up there myself, although I have been pretty close, but I have spoken to quite a number of folks who have been there. Although reports vary considerably, I believe a man has a chance there, but it seems to me that the country has many drawbacks. One of them is water. If one has to dig a well he has to go down seven hundred feet to the level of the Peace River, and for a beginner the costs are prohibitive. This is only one drawback, it is true, but a very important one, and I thought I would mention it to you.

"Your description of the country is very accurate, Mr. North, only I should not advise any greenhorn to undertake that trip unless he knows exactly what he is doing. We have, however, a very much more attractive country close by for those who want to homestead, and that is that part of the country situated along the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railroad and the Canadian National Railroad. To mention just one point, at Upsala, on the main line of the



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Canadian Pacific Railroad, and on the Kenora division in the Province of North Ontario, and this point deserves attention from those who want to get a good one hundred and sixty acres.

"The land is for the best part chocolate loam and is nearly all covered with poplar. On some places there is considerable pine and spruce for pulpwood. A few years back, one township was opened for settlement and taken up within a year, and I learn that the government is now contemplating opening up two more townships. I believe that the postmaster at Upsala, Ontario, as well as the department of lands and forests, at Toronto, will gladly give any inquirers further information.

"Thousands of acres of the best land are open for homesteading along the Canadian Government Railroad in the 'clay belt,' some free—seventy-five cents for the filing paper—and some at fifty cents per acre.

"Winters here are very cold, sometimes fifty below zero, but there is no wind. The country abounds with game such as moose, deer, bear, caribou, and all smaller fur-bearers. In the lakes and streams are found the finest of fish, such as muskellunge, trout of all kinds, white and jack fish, and pickerel. A resident license for hunting moose is five dollars, and one for deer, seven dollars and a half. A domestic fishing license for a settler is three dollars.

"Altogether, I think that for people who desire to establish a home in a section where they can enjoy outdoor life, this is about as good a country as any that I know of. Furthermore, it is easy to reach from Fort William, Ontario."

And now we are going to turn what is left of our space over to F. W., of Stillwater, Minnesota, for we think some of you will be interested in what he has to say. "My farm in the northern part of Minnesota is now idle," writes this hombre, "and I want to convert it into a fur farm. The location is healthful and there is fairly good trapping in the winter. What I am looking for is a partner. I am twenty-two years old, single, and a good worker, and I would prefer some one near my own age and a chap who would stick through hardships, as the first year or two may be slow going with slim pickings."

All letters addressed to this prospective fur farmer in care of this magazine will be promptly forwarded.

WHEN THE SOUR DOUGH STEPS OUT

WHETHER it is due to a desire to prevent the ranks of the sour doughs from being overrun or not, the fact remains that we hear very little of anything but their hardships. Therefore, it is good news to learn that the sour dough has his day as well as the rest of the world.

The trapping season lasts from November until April, and it is a long and weary and lonely period for the fur-clad men who watch over their traps. But in the spring, when they have boarded up their mountain shacks, the woodsmen return to civilization and celebrate the occasion by a trappers' ball. One can imagine what a jolly and lively festivity this is. The ball is held at Cody, Wyoming, in a former bar, which is now transformed into a ballroom. The best-dressed guests usually wear furs, moccasins, and beads—in which one might think it would be rather a task to attempt the "light, fantastic"—and the decorations also are reminiscent of their craft. One thing is certain that, whatever their apparel, the tripping trappers enjoy their party to the full and that their motto must be "On with the Dance!"

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.

CLARKE, VIOLA PEARL.—Last heard from in Rochester, New York, about two and one half years ago. Everything is O. K. Leslie is free and his parents need him badly. Please write to Mrs. W. Morton, 190 West Avenue, North, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

J. E. S.—I have moved from West Virginia. Please write at once to O. B. J., care of this magazine.

KIRBY, LYNN BOYD.—Fifty-two years old. Blue eyes and brown hair. Five feet, eleven inches tall. A carpenter. Last heard from in Jacksonville, Florida, March 5, 1923. Information appreciated by his son, Leonard Kirby, 126½ Broadway, Paducah, Kentucky.

KIRBY, FRANK M.—Twenty-eight years old. Brown hair, blue eyes, and has a scar on back of hand near wrist. Last heard from in Norfolk, Virginia, when he was working for a bus company. Information appreciated by his brother, Leonard Kirby, 126½ Broadway, Paducah, Kentucky.

WAGNER, BERT.—Last heard from ten years ago when he was in Big Valley, Alberta, Canada. Sad news about his father. Information appreciated by Mother, care of this magazine.

BARNARD, EDGAR LAWRENCE.—Six feet tall and blond. Believed to be on the sea. Please write to Mrs. E. L. Barnard, care Martin Kane, 473 Twelfth Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

WARTERS, ROBERT.—About fifteen years ago he had a tobacco plantation at Monroe, West Virginia; later he moved to Virginia, and, together with his son, Willie, worked in the shipyards. Has a daughter named Edith. Wife's name is Cassie. Do not know your address. Please write to your brother, Albert Warters, Route 4, Victor, New York.

SHECK, WALTER C.—Last heard from in Oakland, California, in fall of 1927. Sickness in the family. Please write to Mother, 20 Underwood Park, Waltham, Massachusetts.

THORNTON, BILL.—About seventy years old. A carpenter. An Englishman. Formerly of Attleboro, Massachusetts. Last heard from in Eastport, where he was shipbuilding during the war. Information appreciated by his nephew, Fred, care of this magazine.

REED, PAGE, GOLDA, PINA, VICK, LAURA DOVE, and **RENA LOVE.**—Lived in Missouri in 1898-1900. Please write to a school chum of Pleasant Shade schoolhouse. G. E., care of this magazine.

DOYER, JOHN JACOB.—Formerly of Festus, Missouri. A mason and a member of the Iron Moulders' Union. Last heard from in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1914. Has a daughter, Ruth, by his first marriage. After fifteen years of separation I still love him and forgive him for leaving me at Buffalo, New York. Want to find them so as to make my will in their favor. His wife, Bertha. Please write to B. M. B. T., care of this magazine.

MILLER, LUCY.—About twenty-nine years old, reddish-brown hair, and fair complexion. Last heard from in Riverside, California, seven years ago. Information appreciated by her sister, Kathryn Miller, 803 East Van Buren Street, Phoenix, Arizona.

HERRINGTON, ERNEST CHESTER.—Last heard from at Klamath Falls, Oregon. Have found Bertha and Philip and know about Joseph and Roy. Little mother has gone. I love you and am anxious to find you. Information appreciated by his youngest sister, Mrs. Ruby Dover Fairchild, Route 4, Box 177, Albany, Oregon.

BEAUDIN, MRS. LEON, nee **MARIE L. RUSSELL.**—Last heard from ten or twelve years ago. Your nieces, Anne and Edna, and your sister are anxious to hear from you. Please write to Mrs. P. D. Norris, 105 C Street, Lynchburg, Virginia.

WELLER, WILLIAM E.—An ex-aviator. Last heard from in California, in 1922, when he was working for the United States Geological Survey. Remember S. S. V. and your pal? Please write to Skinny, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any of the Marine Guard of the old U. S. "Tennessee," "Olympia," and "Kansas," or any of the Signal Platoon at St. Thomas of the Virgin Islands who served from 1915 to 1919. Arthur H. Watson, United States Immigration Border Patrol, Marine City, Michigan.

SOPHIE S., nee **QUARTET.**—About thirty-five years old. A widow. Wears glasses and has a defect in one eye. Last seen in Central Park, New York City, July 3, 1926. She then lived in Thirty-fourth Street and was employed in a manufacturing and distributing perfume house on Fourteenth Street. Had relatives on Long Island and in New Jersey. Information appreciated by Larry Edwards, 613 West Weatherford Street, Fort Worth, Texas.

STEVENS, JOSEPH F.—Last heard from in Auburn, New York, about twenty years ago. A shoemaker. Information appreciated by his brother, Edward F. Stevens, 5 South Union Street, Rochester, New York.

FERGUSON, WILBERT or **WILLIAM.**—Worked for the Bates & Rogers Construction Co. at West Portal, New Jersey, about two years ago. A friend you made at that time would like to hear from you. Paddy, care of this magazine.

McREE, MYRTLE and ELLA.—Ages twenty-two and fourteen, respectively. Last heard from in the Orphans' Home, Little Rock, Arkansas. Information appreciated by their brother, Lee McRee, care J. O. McClure, Route 3, Van Buren, Arkansas.

FORRESTER, MRS. JOHN D., nee **NELLIE LESTER.**—Last heard from in Miami, Florida. Please write to your sister, Lucille Johansen, Box 1099, Pensacola, Florida.

HUGHES, JESSE GLENN.—Was discharged from the U. S. S. "Kansas," August 17, 1921, as lieutenant-commander. Please write to your anxious sister, Lucille Hughes Johansen, Box 1099, Pensacola, Florida.

ASKEW, WALTER.—Left Seattle, Washington, about six or seven years ago. Last heard from in Montesano, Washington. Please write to Mr. and Mrs. Cyril Askew, 8708 Greenwood Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

ROLLER, KURTH H.—Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by J., care of this magazine.

POWELL, GLENN, MRS. MAUDE PETERSON, CLYDE WILDER, and **WALTER BUSSY.**—Of North Carolina, Mississippi, Illinois, and Ohio, respectively. All these people worked for me in 1926-27. Important news for them. Information appreciated by Robert H. Kuhn, 2811 Church Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

STADE, FRED or **OTTO.**—Left Rochester, New York, June 1, 1914, leaving two children, Anna and Frederick. Information appreciated by Anna and Frederick Stade, care M. Vander Heyden, 72 Evergreen Street, Rochester, New York.

PEACE, WARNER JACKSON.—Thirty-six years old. Tattooed on arm. Left Durham, North Carolina, October, 1918. Last heard from in Atlanta, Georgia. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Artelia Peace, Route 1, Box 27A, Franklinton, North Carolina.

HETTLE, EARL.—Have work for you at any time. Am traveling with a company en route for California with salary and expenses. Please let me know where you are. Mildred, care Milton Copeland, 5 Columbus Circle, New York City.

KITCHELL, ROBERT T.—Last heard from in Oakland, California. His sister, Carrie, and brothers, Frank and Nort, would like to hear from him. Address Nort C. Kitchell, 4400 Vista Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

CULLINANE, MAITLAND, or **KOLDE, MARY.**—Formerly of South Boston, Massachusettts. Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois. Has a son named William. Information appreciated by D. R. M., care of this magazine.

BROWN, JAMES.—About fifty years old. Brown eyes and hair and is about five feet, ten inches tall. Last heard from in Greenville, Kentucky, where he worked in a department store. Please write to Nellie, 2017 Harrison Avenue, San Diego, California.

HOLLAWAY, HENRY EARL.—Last heard from at the time of his father's death. Believed to be on the U. S. S. "Cheyenne." Please write to your broken-hearted mother, Mrs. C. L. Hollaway, 301 Braza Street, Austin, Texas.

ELLIOTT, J. L.—Death in family. Mother and wife ill. Please come home. L. E., R. D. 2, Canton Road, East Akron, Ohio.

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Name.....

Address.....

.....*Age*.....

BARKER, ARLEY.—Last heard from in Stuttgart, Arkansas, in 1913. Remember the good times we had hunting ducks? Please write to your old friend, Clifford Willoughby, 408 Bowman, Rear, East St. Louis, Illinois.

McKIBBEN, MICKEY.—Please write to your old friend Esther, Mrs. Charles Van Werdon, Fort Worth, Texas.

HURT, ALBERT, ETHEL, TOMMIE, LUCILE, and JOHNNIE.—Ages ranging from fourteen to twenty-five. Last heard from in 1917. My mother nursed your mother during her last illness at Gainesville, Texas, in 1915. Information appreciated by Blanche Frances Martin, Box 1947, Coolidge, Arizona.

MARTIN, HATTIE and MYRTLE.—Believed to be married. Last heard from in Gainesville, Texas, nine or ten years ago. Please write to your half sister, Blanche Frances Martin, Box 1947, Coolidge, Arizona.

THOMAS, MRS. ALBERT, nee **OPHELIA MARTIN.**—Last heard from in Johnstown, Colorado, ten years ago. Please write to your half sister, Blanche Frances Martin, Box 1947, Coolidge, Arizona.

BALTIMORE.—Please write to F., Penshaw Farm, Narberth, Pennsylvania.

NOTICE.—Would appreciate information concerning a sister of Henry Griffiths, christian name unknown, who was married, August 12, 1839, at Bresley, in County of Salop, Shropshire, England. Address Mrs. Douds, 1 Pringle's Buildings, Choppington, Northumberland, England.

BILLIE.—Please come back. Jeanette needs you. Dorothy Morris, 429 Jackson Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

MacDONALD, MARGARET ANN.—Born in Stornoway, Scotland. Worked in vicinity of Boston and East Milton. Information appreciated by J. Cruechshank, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from any one who was connected with the Denison, Texas, band, in 1887 or 1888, in order to prove the death of its teacher, Frank Philip Conway, so that his widow can secure a pension. Information appreciated by Mrs. Nannie Conway Newton, 631 Shaefer Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri.

BUDD, HARRY W.—Last heard from in Salem, Hoods River, and Portland, Oregon, in 1914. Information appreciated by an old friend, I. A. B., care of this magazine.

CARTER, HENRY.—Believed to be in Merryville, Louisiana. Tall, dark complexion, and heavy mustache. Information appreciated by Laures Matthews, care of this magazine.

WILSON, MRS. MARGARET.—Of Little Rock, Arkansas. Please write to your friend, Doctor Marguerite Messmer, care of this magazine.

WOOLEY, MRS. GEORGE.—Of Rosedale, Kansas. Please write to your friend, Doctor Marguerite Messmer, care of this magazine.

HILL, EDMUND LEE.—Last heard from in 1927. Information appreciated by his son, Samuel William Hill, R. F. D. 3, care R. F. Sory, Wilmington, North Carolina.

PORTER, JESSE C. or **R. McCLURE.**—Thirty-two years old. Dark-brown hair, blue eyes, heavy eyebrows and lashes, and ears set close to head. Scar on temple and on back of hand near finger. Served in the 42nd Division, 117 Ammunition train in the World War. Last heard from in Luling, Texas, January 18, 1926. Saw your picture in paper last November. Everything O. K. We love you and can't do without you. Please come home or write at once to your faithful wife and three babies. Lucille, care of this magazine.

DUNCAN, FRED A.—Sixteen years old. Six feet tall, brown eyes and hair and weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. Has three tattooed designs on his arms. On upper left arm the name Lucille. Information appreciated by his anxious grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. A. P. Duncan, 2903 Oregon Street, Los Angeles, California.

HOLCOMB, MARSHALL.—Twenty-five years old. Disappeared in fall of 1927. Red hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Five feet, eight inches tall, and weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Has a diagonal scar on left forearm about four inches long. Information dead or alive appreciated by his brother, G. D. H., care of this magazine.

SILK, JACK W.—Thirty-three years old. Six feet, one inch tall, weighs one hundred and sixty-five pounds, dark hair, ruddy complexion. Was at one time a State trooper, and served in the United States navy during the World War. Last heard from in Philadelphia, in 1924. At this time he was planning to go to New York and take a position as a guard in a bank. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Jack W. Silk, care Hotel St. James, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

QUINN, JACK.—About nineteen years old. Six feet tall. Left San Francisco, California, with me on June 20, 1928, for Phoenix, Arizona. Left him at Soledad, California. Information appreciated by Bill Wolfskeil, care Marine Firemen's, Oilers' and Watertenders' Union, 70 South Street, New York City.

CLOUGH, EDWARD.—About twenty-three years old. Last heard from in Greenfield, Massachusetts, in Franklin County Hospital, eight years ago. Please write to your friend who was only ten years old at that time. Dorothy Leighton, R. F. D. 2, Washington, Massachusetts.

McKENZIE, JOHN A., WILLIAM B., and HERBERT D.—Thirty, twenty-four and twenty-two years old respectively. Last heard from in the vicinity of New York or New Jersey. Information appreciated by their mother, Mrs. Annie McKenzie, 26 Darlington Street, Roxbury, Massachusetts.

BANTA, WILLIS EDGAR.—About thirty-two years old. Son of John and Lilly Banta, who separated. Believed to be in California. Your half sister, who is now twenty-six years old and whom you have never seen, is anxious to hear from you, as she has news concerning your father and your younger sister. Please write to Mrs. Sharlet Banta Slack, Box 126, Bonanza, Oregon.

ANDERSON, ALFRED JOSEPH.—Dark complexion, five feet, six inches tall, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. A logging engineer and a tugboat skipper. Last heard from in Seattle, Washington, in spring of 1928. Information appreciated by Leonard Dimock, R. R. 1, Box 107, Cashmere, Washington.

ALLEN, I. T.—Have tried to locate you several times. Important news. Please write to Bee, care of this magazine.

DICKIE.—Everything is O. K. I love you and miss you. Mother, dad, and I worried. Please come home or write to your wife, Jane, care of this magazine.

TRANK, DAVID.—Last heard from in Seattle, Washington. Am worried. Both babies are well. Little Helen calls for her daddy. Please come home, for you and my babies are all I have and love. Your wife, Mrs. David Trank, care Charles Mellor, 1319 Muncy Street, San Antonio, Texas.

ANDERSON, HAROLD.—Have been thinking about you all this time. Am more broad-minded now. Have moved, since you took the trip, from Rockford to Chicago. Please write to Bertha, care of this magazine.

SWARTY, BRYON WILBER or **SAMMY.**—Mother would like to see or hear from her boy. Mrs. Philip Swarty, Box 120, Jacksonville, Oregon.

MACK, or **MARS, BILLY.**—Left St. Louis in spring of 1928, en route to Texas. Has two fingers and thumb off of right hand. A mechanic. Mother worried. Ruth and I would like to see you. Please write to Dottie, Box 882, Abilene, Texas.

WINDERS, MRS. FRANK L. or **BURT.**—Last heard from when living in a suburb of Chicago. Important that we know your address, on account of Mother Mack. Information appreciated by Dottie, Box 882, Abilene, Texas.

WRIGHT, WALTER LEE.—Son of Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Wright. Left home about twenty-one years ago. Parents are anxious to have you come home or write. Information appreciated by a friend of your parents, Mrs. H. B. Hamilton, R. R. 3, Fort Madison, Iowa.

ARTHUR.—When do we lift the propeller for Honolulu? Would like to see you. Watching for a message. Pauline, care of this magazine.

VAN TAUSK, GEOFFREY VICTOR.—Born in New Zealand. Formerly a British army officer and latterly a high-school instructor. Last heard from in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Information appreciated by his old friend and pal, A. B. Ward, Box 183, Williamson, Iowa.

WILLHELMS, RACHEL.—Lived with us at one time and left to go to Fort Towson, Oklahoma. Am married now and have three children. Please write to your friend, Mrs. Ida Harris Gerry, South Route, Ralls, Texas.

ALLEN, JESSE E.—A railroader. Last heard from in Tucson, Arizona, in 1924. May have gone to Los Angeles, California. Information appreciated by Florence M. Moore, Box 64, Lakeside, Washington.

WATSON, L. F.—My brother. Last heard from in Grappes Bluff, Louisiana, where he was running a sawmill in 1915-16. Please write to L. Watson, Box 464, Moclips, Washington.

DAWSON, BENNIE.—Last heard from in Washington, Utah, in January, 1928. Nora wants you. Please write to F. C. M., 294 North Water Street, Idaho Falls, Idaho.

ELLERY, TUCK.—Can't forget you or forgive myself. My heart has always been yours. Please write to L. R., Oakland, California.

JULIAN, M.—My father. Last heard from in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1922. Has relatives in Newark, New Jersey. Was separated from my mother twenty years ago. I was born in Philadelphia, December 28, 1906. Information appreciated by his son, George F. Julian, 2503 South Watts Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

GALLAGHER, PETE.—Was a landscape gardener in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Please write to your friend, Norman Whitehouse, Hotel Lafayette, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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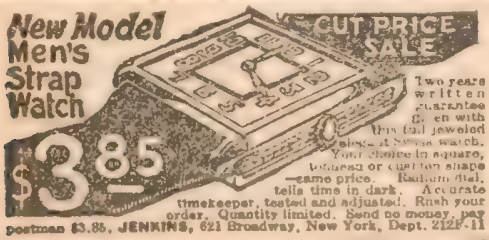

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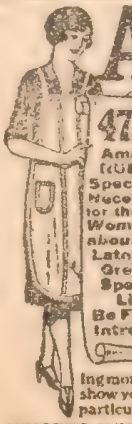

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GILLILAND, HARRINGTON.—Sad news about brother Charlie and Tom. Am alone but own my home. Important that you write to your mother, Frances Redman, 129 South Kalamath Street, Denver, Colorado.

JACK.—Am worried. Please write to Myrtle M., 412 Monson Street, Peoria, Illinois.

THOMAS, WILLIAM L.—Recently discharged from the United States army, Company H, Thirty-fifth Infantry, Honolulu, Hawaii. If you know where I am, write to me before trying to see me. Address letter in my married name. Still think the same of you. Long to hear from you. Nellie, care of this magazine.

H. T. S.—Born on Friday, September 13, 1904. Five feet, ten inches tall, medium-brown curly hair, and blue-gray eyes. Very important. Please write to Bertha, care of this magazine.

DECKER, MRS. VIOLA.—Lived in one of the big sawmill towns in the State of Wisconsin. Information appreciated by C., care of this magazine.

HALL, A. F., JR.—His mother, who has been under the doctor's care for a year, would like to see or hear from him. Nelson lives in Ocala. Much has happened since you left. Mother, care of this magazine.

HAINES, SAMUEL ENOCH.—Information concerning his location or his address appreciated by Haines Art Service, Box 244, Greenfield, Ohio.

FORSBREY, HARRY and JAMES.—Left England for America. Last heard from when living in Ocean Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. A son of their brother Joseph would like to correspond with them. James Forsbrey, 78 Milligate, Newark, Noth. England.

WRIGHT, JOE.—Five feet, four inches tall, brown eyes, gray hair, and dark complexion. Last heard from in O'Donnell, Texas. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Allie Nix, Enid, Oklahoma.

HALL, VICTOR E.—Please write to Evelyn, care of this magazine.

HAMPTON, GEORGE.—Disappeared in 1915. Important. Would like to hear from him. George Baker, 30 Prince Street, Manchester, New Hampshire.

KENNEDY, MRS. CHARLES H., nee **MARY** or **MAY JANE BURROWS.**—Born, September 16, 1895, at Altman, Colorado. Was married at Cripple Creek, Colorado, to a cripple with one leg. Information appreciated by her father, W. J. Burrows, Box 927, Electra, Texas.

EDWARD, T.—Am loyal. Please write to Mother, 230 West Center Street, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

SMITH, MARTHA and JEANNETTE.—Lives on Canal Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana. Last heard from in Harrisburg, Mississippi, in 1919. Please write to your sister and send your street number. Mary Smith, McCamey, Texas.

KELLY, WILLIAM.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, about two years ago. Would like to hear from you. Tom, Daisy, and Wilhelmina Reeves, 219 West 129th Street, New York City.

LEIGHTON, GERALD.—Twenty-nine years old. Five feet, ten inches tall, gray eyes, auburn hair, and has a scar on his cheek. He was with Brown and Dyer Shows in 1925. Last heard from in Lawrence, Kansas, 1927. Information appreciated by his sister, J. Lois Leighton, 438 South Union Drive, Los Angeles, California.

FEATHERBY, GUY ELMER.—Fifty-six years old. Blond. Letters G. E. F. tattooed on forearm. Last heard from in Butte, Montana, in 1923. Information concerning him dead or alive appreciated by his sister, Winnie Elliott, 522 Valley Avenue, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

FRANK.—Jack has forgiven all. Mother anxious to hear from you. Please write to Mother, "Chatsworth," West Seventy-second Street, New York City.

WATSON, ARCH.—Last heard from in Beggs, Oklahoma, May 1, 1928. Jimmie wants your address. No one else will know it. Please write to E. A. Hicks, 1705 Cavalry Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

ROY W., or **TOFFEY.**—Please let me know where you are. If you do not want S. to know I will not tell. Am worried. Please write to your mother, Mrs. R. B., care of this magazine.

NEWMAN, LUTHER CLAYTON.—Eighteen years old. Dark hair and eyes and weighed about one hundred and sixty pounds when he left home, July 24, 1926. Last heard from in Millsaps, North Carolina, where he was working with a road contractor by the name of W. G. Landon. Believed to have gone to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Please write to your worried and heartbroken mother, Mrs. W. T. Newman, R. F. D. 85, Eatonton, Georgia.

LANG, ALICE CARLETON.—Last heard from in Waltham, Massachusetts, where she was employed in a watch company, in 1910-11. She had one daughter. Information appreciated by her friend, C. B. F., care of this magazine.

SHORE, FLORENCE.—Last heard from in 1925, when she was living at Shawnee, Ohio. Please write to your old friend, George, care of this magazine.

BOBS.—My letter to Billings returned. Hope no trouble was caused. Did not go to India. Saw ad in S. F. paper but did not answer. Thought it might be a trick. Am miserable, not knowing what to think. Please get in touch with me, then we will both be happier. Address Crazy, care of this magazine.

PATTON, MINERVA, or **BILLY WALLESTIN.**—About thirty years old. A blonde. Five feet, five inches tall and weighs about one hundred and thirty pounds. Last heard from in Salisbury, North Carolina. Information appreciated by W. S. Cook, 2406 West Main Street, Richmond, Virginia.

COOK, MRS. MINNIE, nee **BRIDGET CHAMPAGNE.**—Lived in La Fourche Crossing, Louisiana, in 1920-21, French; dark hair and eyes; five feet, four inches tall and weighs about one hundred and twenty-five pounds. Was employed as a nurse at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D. C., and at the State Hospital in Stamford, Connecticut, at one time. Information appreciated by W. S. Cook, 2406 West Main Street, Richmond, Virginia.

STEARN, HILDIE.—Left the hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1927, and went to Normal, Kentucky. My letters to you returned. Please write to your friend, Bonnie Branch, Box 111, Branch, Arkansas.

IVERSON, MAY.—Was ten years old May 1, 1928. Has black curly hair and blue eyes. Father's name is A. N. Iverson. He is a machinist. Last heard from in Red Bluff, California. Lived at one time in Hilts, California. Information appreciated by her half sister, Alpha Binley Bird, Box 552, Hollis, Oklahoma.

TRUDGIAN, LEONA or **JACK.**—Lost your last address. Mail returned from Macon. Please write to Lois V., care Hotel Beebe, Elmira, New York.

MYERS, CLARA.—Formerly of Akron, Ohio. Met you at Crum's Rooming House in Cleveland, Ohio, about ten years ago. Have news for you. Remember the one who played the piano for the quartet? Please write to Joe Morris, care Hotel Fairbairn, Detroit, Michigan.

PHILLIPS, JOHN H. and **FRANCES.**—Brother and sister of James Yancey Phillips, who married Mademoiselle Arsan Rambin near Minden and Mansfield, Louisiana, in the '50s and died during the Civil War. John H. lived near Gelma, Alabama, and Frances, near Holly Springs, Mississippi, in the late '60s. Frances' first husband, a Mr. Powell, died, and she married Elic Ware. John H.'s daughter, Mollie, lived with Mrs. Ware and taught school near Holly Springs. Their father came from England and settled in North Carolina. Information appreciated by children who were orphaned and scattered during the Civil War. Address Inquirer, care of this magazine.

ELSOM, DANIEL PORTER.—Left Texas for Goldfield, Nevada, about forty years ago. Was an engineer and built mine shafts at Goldfield. Information appreciated by Grandson, care of this magazine.

CRAIG, MARY COONEY.—Left Toronto, Canada, nine years ago. Married in Dresden, Ontario, Canada. Last heard from when she was with her brother-in-law, Bert Parker, in Buffalo. Information appreciated by Leslie, care of this magazine.

MAYS, CHARLES J.—Please write to Sis H., 236½ South Idaho Street, Butte, Montana.

CUTLEO, CHARLES C.—Please write to mother, 236½ South Idaho Street, Butte, Montana.

JONES, SALLIE and **ELLEN.**—Daughters of William and Nancy C. Jones, of Huntsville, Alabama, and Tennessee. Believed to be married. Sally ran away from home when she was sixteen years old and is believed to have gone to her uncle's at Sherfield or Decauter, Alabama. This was thirty or forty years ago. Information appreciated by their sister, Mrs. Bridget C. Wilkie, 1412 Parker Street, Dallas, Texas.

WARNER, DONALD D.—Lived in Portland, Oregon, at one time. Believe to have moved to Aberdeen, Washington. May have gone to Montana. Information appreciated by Walter Hanthorn, 2015 East Flanders, Portland, Oregon.

BRYAN, WANN.—Last heard from in 1926, when he was on his way to Ashland, Oregon. Information appreciated by his wife, Edna Wann, care of this magazine.

WATTS, WALTER.—Formerly of Rock Island, Illinois. Last heard from when stationed at the United States Naval Hospital, Fort Lyons, Colorado. Please write to your old pal, Leo Padeski, 2314 Third Street, Moline, Illinois.

DOUTT, GOLDIE.—Sister of Edward Doutt, who died in 1912. Information appreciated by her nephew, Floyd Doutt, 713 State Street, Fairmont, West Virginia.

GEORGE.—Please let us know where you are, and we will come after you. Mother, 147 East Belfonte Avenue, Del Ray, Virginia.

TROTTER, JACK.—Must get in touch with you at once. Important. Want to come to you. Please write to Billie, care of this magazine.

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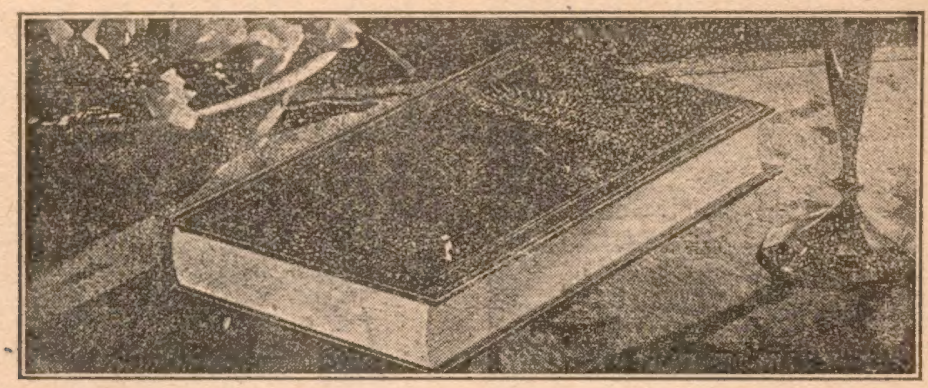

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- How to read people's thoughts by watching their eyes
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- How to control others by a glance
- How to use Magnetic Healing
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