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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LIV

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IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE:

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Beginning a New Serial

By Max Brand

Although Hugo Ames, outlaw, was on the trail of the four assassins of Truck Janvers, he was also, without being consciously aware of it, on the trail of "Crinky."

A One-man Ranch

A Novel

By George C. Jenks

But it needed a real he-man to run it!

The Spent Pearl

By Hugh F. Grinstead

Three lives are lost in the finding of it!

AND OTHER STORIES

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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LIV

AUGUST 8, 1925

No. 1

The Horse Thief

by
George Gilbert

Author of "A Hair-raisin' Puncher," etc.



CHAPTER I.

THEFT OF THE STALLION.



HE cashier slid the certified check through the gilt-barred window. Gene Rood folded it slowly and tucked it firmly into his inner pocket.

"You wouldn't think that that was two thousand heavy steers an hour ago."

"No, you wouldn't," replied the cashier absently, his interest already on the next customer.

Rood walked out, his gait suggestive of saddle stiffness still, although he had not been on a horse for two weeks, since he had got his steers away from the Diamond Tail toward the market. Gene

had paid off his men and seen them aboard the home-bound train right after selling the steers, having had cash on hand sufficient for that. He had a little cash left, a return ticket—and the big check. He had a half-formed idea of going on east to Iowa, where he had some cousins and other distant kin that he had not seen in years. His own people were dead, and he was a bachelor. The bunch would take care of the ranch till he got back, all right. Gene was minded to go East, spend about all his spare change, perhaps chuck a pretty cousin or two under the chin, buy them all a present, and then go home and tell the boys all about it.

Without any particular reason, save that he was without definite plan, Gene

boarded an electric car, after buying a newspaper, and became immersed in the news. He noted that the baseball leagues were going strong, and that a lot of games that he did not know anything about—golf, tennis, squash, and the like—were taking up space. Then he fixed his attention upon the big cut on the right-hand sport sheet—a picture of a horse and man. The man was Herbert Trevoir, wealthy owner of crack hunters and jumping horses.

Gene's kindly gray eyes went wide over the center picture of the news layout—one showing Golden Glow, topping a big gate, studded on top with spikes. Herbert Trevoir was riding the horse. That jump had given the horse a record, the article stated.

"They oughtn't've put those spikes on that gate, though, you beauty," Gene said aloud, falling into his habit of talking to himself. "You might've cut yourself wide open on them. I don't like the looks of that geezer ridin' you, either. Le's see what it says about him. Oh, yes! Has a big stable here. Has trainers, too. Bet they do all the bust-in' on them hosses and then, when they're properly gentled an' all that, this Trevoir manikin, he steps onto the top hoss that some one else made, an' he rides that hoss about one minute, meb-be two, and when the hoss has done his stuff, that man hogs down all the hand-claps an' gets his name in the papers."

He put the paper out at arm's length, studied Trevoir's features again, as they appeared in the inset of the layout. The name grated on Gene for one thing. Trevoir's face had a half smirk on it. He had one of those little toothbrush 'staches and slicked-back hair.

Gene slatted the paper down onto the seat and forgot about it as he watched the people on the walks, in motors, in stores, everywhere.

"Too much millin' around t' suit me; I'll be glad when I get to Iowa," was his thought.

A hobo with red whiskers asked Gene if he could have the old paper. Gene nodded, and handed the tramp a half dollar, saying: "Go and eat on me, bo."

It was late afternoon when the trolley stopped. Gene had intended to ride back into the city's center on it. But the line had been longer than he had thought it to be. He had remained on the car out of sheer persistence. He had set out to see the end of that line, and he had seen it. The tramp passed Gene on the way out, grinned a friendly good-by, and was gone.

They were at the gateway of a park. "How long before another car's due?" Gene asked the conductor.

"A few minutes. This is Lookout Park."

"So the sign says. All right; I'll look in at it an' see what makes her go," he said, swinging down to the street level.

Gene knowingly dodged the concessions, not then much patronized. He found paths to walk upon, viewed the sad-eyed animals, loitered along bridle paths, and finally found a bench that was hedged about by high, thick shrubbery. It was a spot favored by men and women who wished to enjoy a quiet canter on horseback. Motors were forbidden to use that road.

It was that hour between day and evening when parks of that sort quiet down. The afternoon crowd had gone; the evening pleasure seekers were yet to arrive. Gene rather enjoyed the interlude of quiet, after his days of hard work in getting the herd delivered and sold, and his experiences in the crowds of the city. He listened to the birds, saw a night hawk plane down, and heard its pinions go "thr-r-r-r-rump!" as it turned upward again.

Gene was almost at peace. He was just reaching for the making's, when he heard a horse coming at a little fretty jog, and then the animal appeared out of a side path and started to go around

the little circular track, by the side of which Gene's bench was. The man atop the horse spoke sharply and sawed on the bit.

Gene stared. The horse was Golden Glow and the rider was Herbert Trevoir, the great horse's owner.

A drooping limb of a flowering bush partly concealed Gene from the view of any one on the circular road. He sat very still and watched the foppishly dressed man in the bright mustard-yellow riding suit and shiny boots and high-crowned, hard hat wrangle the beautiful animal. Gene could see that the bit was of the cruelest sort. A light hand on the rein would have made it bearable, but as Trevoir was using it, it was an instrument of torture. It was plain to Gene that the horse was on the point of breaking out into one of those awful exhibitions of equine rage that man can create by prolonged misuse of a good, loyal horse. It was also plain that this so-called gentleman rider knew very little about the real science of horses, for he was doing everything possible to excite the horse and nothing to quiet the handsome animal.

Trevoir kept using his spurs, then sawing at the bit. He did nothing decisive. He tried this and that. The horse was verging upon a panic.

"Now, old-timer," Gene said to himself, "either do it, or not. If you feel that you've got t' be master, jam the hooks an'-bit t' him an' he'll quit. But do it, or quit. Let up on that bit and spur an' he'll quiet down. He don't mean harm. Or give him enough an' he'll quit or put you plumb against it in a clean-cut fight. But quit nagging him—I told you so, didn't I?"

The horse reared and very nearly threw himself over backward. The man eased on the reins, and he settled down. Then the man jerked the reins again. The horse began to dance. As he started to rear, the man brought the loaded whip in his right hand down,

right between the ears of the horse. The animal settled forward, stunned. His legs spraddled out, and he quivered in all his members. The man swung out of the saddle in time to save himself, and leaped to the head of the horse, reins in hand. Gene had to acknowledge that the man had handled himself pretty well, at that. The horse, still partly stunned, reeled and fell as the man struck him again, the sound of the leaded ball at the end of the loaded whip booming in Gene's ears like the crack of the hammer against a board. The horse fell over sideways with a dull groan.

"Well, I dunno but you've got a right; he's your hoss, an' he was actin' up some," Gene said to himself, true to that code which says that a man has a right to handle his own horse. But then something happened.

The man, seeing the horse helpless, went into a sudden fury. He reversed the whip and began to lash the helpless, stunned, prostrate horse. He cut and slashed in a fury of blind, unreasoning passion.

"That's not in the rules," Gene found himself yelling, as he suddenly leaped forward. He grasped the wrist of the man, snatched the whip away from him, and threw it into the bushes.

"What're you doing?" the man snarled at Gene.

"You cain't beat up that hoss no more," answered Gene quietly.

"Can't, eh? I'll show you," and his hand went to his hip with a snaplike precision. In his hand there was a flat automatic. Gene stared at it.

"Attacking me in the park, where it's secluded. A holdup, they'll say." And the man began to laugh.

The poor horse was groaning in pain.

Then Gene leaped and struck as the automatic spoke.

Twisting to one side, after seeing the light in the other's eyes that told of murder, Gene was not hit by the snap-

shot of the town man unused to weapons. Gene's balled fist, like iron, found the mark—the chin point. It was all over in a second and then Gene was bending over the unconscious form. He picked up the automatic, dropped it, and then stooped to make sure that the man was not dead. The blow had been a terrific one, delivered with the whole force of a hundred and ninety-five pounds of steel-thewed cowman behind it. Trevoir was prone, face up, alongside the horse he had misused so.

There was complete silence. Traffic sounds were hushed for the time. A bird flipped up onto a near-by shrub and trilled. Gene wondered that no one came at the shot, forgetting that it would pass for an auto's backfire, or might not even have been heard in that secluded nook. The flat, popgunlike report of the automatic was not like the booming roar of a black powder .45, that would carry its sound for a very long distance.

The fallen man opened his eyes and groaned. Then an expression of deepest hatred went over his face as he caught sight of Gene Rood. He let his head drop, and rolled his eyes about.

At that moment Gene thought he heard a sound in the shrubbery behind him. He turned, thought he saw the leaves move, then flicked his glance back toward the fallen man.

Trevoir had reached out, clutched the gun again, while Gene had been looking away, and now was trying to swing it up to shoot again. Like a flash Gene blamed himself for his folly in giving him another chance at murder, and reached for the gun.

At that very moment the horse, that until now had lain muscularly quiescent, lashed out with his mighty forefeet in a convulsive effort to get up. And, just as Gene knew that he had missed the gun and was in danger from it and the flying hoofs, one of the horse's steel-shod hoofs caught the horse torturer

squarely atop the head. At the same moment the horse got his off front hoof out as a brace, heaved, and was afoot. Gene had not been touched by a hoof; but the top of Trevoir's head was crushed. One glance told Gene that the case of Trevoir was hopeless.

Gene heard again that sound in the shrubbery. He saw a ratlike face peering from the leaf screen; a long, lean arm came forth and a bony finger pointed at him as the apparition screamed:

"I saw yuh kill him; I'll tell de perlice."

Gene's reaction was characteristic. Brought up to look to the horse for speed, having little or no experience with trolleys, railroads, and the like, and abhorring the automobile, he did just what he would have done when in a tight corner in his own country, with a good horse within reach. He forked the horse, finding the "postage stamp" saddle not to his liking but taking it as he took the horse, as apparently the only way out, for he was in a momentary panic that was unreasoning.

Had he been at home he would have gone to his sheriff, surrendered, and faced the charge. He would have expected the sheriff and some others to go to the scene, read the sign, and bring in a report clearing him. The print of the horse's hoof on top of the man's head would have been enough, he thought, to have told any sensible man what had happened. But just at the moment, with the thought of the city jail, the legal frame-ups he had read about being used on accused people in his mind, the thought that he had not a real friend among the teeming thousands of cattle market city, the thought that if caught he would be gouged and hoodwinked out of his money and perhaps finally railroaded to jail by the influential family of the wealthy bachelor sportsman, Gene Rood took what seemed to be the easiest way out, and

leaped astride the good horse and lifted him for a speedy gallop. But then came the thought that to flee thus hurriedly would be to appear as a-marked man. So he started away through the now-gathering gloom at a slow, even canter, and was gone.

CHAPTER II.

REDNEY'S GUESS IS GOOD.

AS Gene left the scene, a thin man, with a ratlike face, darted from the shrub screen, bent over the dead man, and at once began to search the victim's clothing. He hurriedly took a well-filled wallet, the contents of a small-change purse, the rings and watch and fob. He chuckled to himself as he finished, and then scurried into the shrubbery again. He skulked through the now almost dark park, keeping to the clumps of cover. In a few moments he had reached the park fence and slipped under it at a point where there was a hollow in the ground under the woven fabric of the fencing. He straightened up and struck off through the vacant land to a small dip, where he saw smoke arising. There he whistled and went forward. The man who was cooking things in a collection of tin cans over the small fire looked at him inquiringly. The man at the fire was chunky, with a rather agreeable face, although it was ambushed in fiery red whiskers.

"Got any scoffin's?" he asked.

"No, but I got what'll buy us a lot," the other answered, and he kicked over all the tin cans, spilling their unsavory contents into the fire. "Dat's how I feel, Redney Whisk."

"Here, whatcha foolin' like dat for?" the red-whiskered one protested. "Ain't you got any sense a-tall, Bony?"

"I got more sense than you got an' more dollars, too. Lookit"—and he squatted before the fire and displayed his treasures, dumping them into his

ragged cap. Redney Whisk bent over, awe-stricken.

"Yaller bills, an' a di'mond ring an' lots o' silver change, an' a white-gold ticker that's worth a lot. Dat fob is di'mond-studded. Say, what's the ide-ar?"

"I'm hiding in the park, waiting for the horse bulls to change rounds, so dat I can panhandle a little, when I falls asleep. Well, about dusk I'm waked up by two men quarreling. I looks out. A guy is bawling out another for mis-using his hoss. The hoss is down, been knocked down with his rider's loaded whip, I makes it out. The guy dat does de bawling out has on a gray soft hat, wid a wide rim. The man dat's bawled out shines a gat at him and he dodges de shot and knocks him clean. He picks up de gat, drops it, looks around, and just den de guy dat's down reaches for de gat again."

Bony stirred the loot in his old cap. Redney Whisk begged him to go on.

"And just then de guy in de gray hat sees de new play wid de gat. He reaches to git it and I'm sayin' he's too slow dis time, but just den de hoss, dat's been mighty still, does a scramble, and one of his hoofs cracks de man wid de gat on de nut and he goes out dead dis time. Den comes de joke."

"What is it, Bony," asked Redney eagerly.

"I sticks my face outa de bushes and I yells: 'I saw yuh kill him: I'll tell de perlice.'"

"And den?"

"He mounts de hoss dat's on his footsies by den, and rides. I frisks de stuff off de stiff and comes here, like a good pal."

"Any one see yuh?"

"Nary a see. How'll we divvy on dis stuff?"

"We'll split up de small change, beat it on a rattler, and pawn de sparklers and ticker in some oder burg. We'll get good clothes, put on good fronts,

den we can get dese yellar bills changed widout being marked. If we try to change one of dose hundreds now, looking like de hobos we are, we gets in a jam."

"You got a head like a fedder bed, Redney Whisk; dat suits me; here's de split on de chicken feed," he said, handing him his share.

Soon they were on their way toward the near-by railroad yards. Redney Whisk refused to buy a bottle of illicit booze, but Bony could not resist the temptation. Redney admonished him not to drink much before they started.

"It may weaken you so dat you lose your hold on de rods," was his caution. Bony agreed, yet dropped behind Redney Whisk several times to tip the bottle secretly.

They found the freight in the yards—the freight they wanted. They swung under. The train started. Then each was engaged in a life and death struggle to hold fast in that perilous position till the train stopped.

At the next yard stop, seventy-five miles up the line, Whisk crawled out, white and shaking. Somewhere back there he had missed Bony. Bony had been overcome with the illicit booze, against which his partner had warned him. Bony had slipped from the rods—"greased the rails."

"And all dat dough and dem sparklers gone. Not a chance in a million finding dem. De body's been picked up in bits, and if dat watch and fob and ring are identified, dey'll frame dat job off onto old Bony's corpse. I should worry; I got a little chink, and de world's wide. I'll ramble. Yes, sir, I'll jest ramble along."

That evening, in another city that he had made on the rods, Redney Whisk read the screamer headlines telling of the murder of the great gentleman sport and horseman, Herbert Trevoir, in the big city park back there. The story told, too, of the finding of the body of

the unknown hobo alongside the railway tracks. The half-pulped yellow bills on him, the watch and fob and ring that had escaped the whirring death wheels of the train somehow, had been identified.

The police had announced that in their belief the unknown hobo had waylaid the millionaire horse fancier, forced him from his horse, beaten him with some blunt instrument which they hoped to find, and had robbed the body and then decamped. The great Golden Glow, however, was gone. The police thought that the animal had merely wandered off through the park, leaped the division fence, which he could have done, and had been lost in the rough suburban country adjacent to the park. In fact, they had found the saddle and bridle at a point ten miles north of the park, denoting that the horse had worked the saddle off against trees or in some other way and the bridle by catching it in some bushes in passing. At least, the throat latch of the bridle was snapped. The horse might have snagged the bridle on a bush, lunged back after the manner of a halterpuller, and broken free.

"I guess old Redney Whisk guessed dat wrong, eh?" said the hobo complacently to himself as he stretched himself out on the park bench for a snooze. "I'll spend dis small change in dis burg and den I'll ramble again. West, dis time."

CHAPTER III.

DRIFTING WEST.

GENE soon found that a tall hedge barred his way. He sent the big bay at it. The horse had made a quick recovery from the stunning effects of the blow from Trevoir's loaded whip. He topped the fence easily. Now Gene was outside the park, in rugged suburban territory. He found a dirt road and took to that. The night had fallen thick and dark. Gene judged that he

was on a dim side road, little used by traffic, a back-farm route, in fact.

Gene knew that he was traveling directly away from the park, for the park was on the western edge of the cattle market city. So he was going west. Taking this as a good omen, he kept on through the night. Occasionally an automobile passed; then he rode aside to remain unseen.

After a time the horse stopped. Gene dismounted and went ahead, leading the horse. He had no clear plan of action. He found himself off the road, on some sort of a bypath. He leaned over and felt of the ground. Two deep-rutted marks told of usage by wagons. He thought at first that he was on a side road leading to some farm. He led the horse forward. The animal seemed to have given to Gene his full trust and obedience. Gene was careful not to jerk on the bridle reins.

They came to a barn. No dog barked. There was no light. He ventured to strike a match. The flare of it showed him the entrance to what he took to be a tumble-down shed used as a hay barn by some farmer who lived elsewhere. Perhaps the old farmhouse was deserted, or burned. Gene didn't know, for he did not look farther than the old barn. The flare of the match had shown him something else—a very old saddle and bridle on a peg. The saddle was a stock saddle. It was tattered, scuffed, with the skirts rat gnawed, and poor. But he knew that it would serve. The bridle was old, the leather of it musty, but he knew that it would do for a while. The saddle and bridle had evidently been abandoned in the old barn years before.

Working with the skill of a born horse wrangler, Gene stripped the fancy park saddle off the handsome Golden Glow. He cinched the old-time stock saddle on, and adjusted the stirrup leathers at a venture. He got the wicked bit out of the good horse's

mouth and got the plain, easy bit onto him. Then he mounted, holding the fancy saddle and bridle on his left arm as he guided the horse out into the night again with his right lightly on the bridle reins.

Down the old road a ways Gene threw the saddle off to one side, in some bushes. He carried the bridle a way farther, then stopped Golden Glow and partly cut the throat latch, breaking it the remainder of the way through. He threw that down, and then started the horse onward. The stars came out; Gene shaped his course by them through the region where villages were thickly strewn. He had no clear plan. He thought at times of turning the horse loose and getting on a train. But that would be to run right into danger, he figured it out. The trains would be watched.

He knew there was danger in riding Golden Glow, but he loved him already. To trade him for another would be to leave a sure clew, and he would be traced from that. If he could stave off recognition for a few days he might be able to devise some sure plan; might be able to get the good horse back to the city without putting himself in the way of being incriminated, he thought.

The truth of the matter was that Golden Glow had captured Gene's heart of hearts. He craved for the horse. He did not want to give him up. The big, loyal stallion had won Gene's heart the moment he had glimpsed him.

With the dawn Gene drew the horse down to a foot pace and began to think things over. The daylight, he knew, would bring danger. In the half light Gene saw a little ravine, over which the road crossed on a bridge. There was a dim path up the side of the creek bed. He turned the horse up that and rode quietly into the dimmer light of the deep ravine.

Gene dismounted and sat down there and made his plan for the day.

"I'll be quiet here. Le's see. Golden Glow's tail ain't docked, like them city dudes sometimes take off a hoss's fly brush. He's got two white sox in front an' a white blaze on his forehead. His mane an' forelock are pretty light-colored, too. He sure looks too handsome now."

Gene proceeded to let down the horse's tail from the shiny tail bands in which it was dressed up short.

Then he got mud and smeared the tail all up, letting it hang in drabbles. He smeared caked mud onto the horse's white stockings. He caked the forelock with dirt. He drew in his own belt, for he was determined not to show himself, that day, at least.

Gene let the horse crop grass in the ravine that morning and drink. The caked dirt and mud hardened. The handsome animal, now in old, tattered saddle and bridle, looked entirely different from the shiny, velvet-coated animal that Herbert Trevoir had ridden forth to his death the day before.

"You'll pass at night, but not in the day, yet a while," Gene told Golden Glow, who came to beg for tobacco.

No'one came into the lonely ravine that day. Gene heard children on the higher ground on either hand, but they did not come down into the ravine itself. He knew the horse would be better off for grain, but he did not wish to risk getting him any there, and the grass was dry and not such as would give a horse eating it the colic from too sudden a change in diet, Gene figured.

With the night Gene rode again, setting his course due west. He let the horse go easily, turning matters over in his mind.

He could not figure out any way in which he could get right with the law. The horse was of service in going forward; the horse, turned loose or sold or traded, would give a clew that, close to where he was found, Gene had been.

He pictured the sensation caused by the killing of Trevoir, the hunt for the man who had the horse, as the killer. He had seen no newspapers and dared not get one. He intended to keep from sight as long as possible. So far he had been on lonely byroads, for only a few cars had passed him in the night.

But the next day he knew that he must do something. He found a deserted shed in a field at dawn and put the horse into it. He shut the door, after throwing down plenty of old hay that he found there, and that Golden Glow nibbled at. The horse was pretty well gaunted, and must have more solid food, Gene knew.

Gene found that the road he had been using led to a small town. He hesitated a long time, but finally took it. It was fully daylight now. No one was in sight.

Alongside the road Gene spied a place where cast-off stuff had been dumped. He saw a hat there, a tattered but serviceable soft hat. He got up and donned the old hat and stuffed his broad brim into an empty paint pail on the dump. He glanced down at his clothing. His new ready-made suit was rumpled and dirty, his shoes soiled where he had alighted and walked beside the horse in the night to rest himself from saddle weariness. With the old hat he was a different-looking man from the trim, successful rancher who had sold his cattle at top prices not so long ago.

Gene sauntered into the edge of the town and saw a man putting out a display of fruit in front of a store. It was one of those hit-and-miss stores that cater to wayside trade at the fringe of a small town. Gene bought some fruit, a box of fancy crackers with sweet filling, a can or two of beans and corn. He sat down with his packages and idly picked up a newspaper. His heart was thumping; he wanted to see what had happened in the Trevoir case.

The man had gone to putting out his

sidewalk display and Gene did not hesitate to read of the case at length. The finding of the body, and the finding of the body of the tramp were described. The theory of the police that the wanderer had slain Trevoir for his money was set forth at length. It was all cleared up to the satisfaction of them all, it seemed to Gene, except that the great Golden Glow, was missing.

"If they don't find him, they'll still lay the killin' onto that daid tramp," he thought. "If they trace that hoss to me, I'll have a lot o' questions to answer. He ain't my hoss, but I can't let him convict me of killing that dude. From all I've read of him, Trevoir got what was coming t' him."

"Yes'r, he got what was coming to him. A man that'd torture the nicest hoss in the world and lash him when he's down and out, would do anything. He tried t' shoot me twice in two minutes, and I had nothing but my fists t' throw against him. Old Golden Glow's hoof saved me that second time. I owe my life to that hoss. He ain't never going t' have a Spanish bit in his mouth again. He's going where a hoss is treated right as long as he does right, and he'll do right."

Gene got up from the big sack of peanuts whereon he had been sitting, laid down the paper, and started out. As he did so he saw something else on the shelf that he wanted: Magic Hair Dye. He saw from the label that it was brown dye. He bought a bottle of that and some tobacco and a comb. Then he went out shamblingly, like any other early rising laborer, on his way to some toil that he had little interest in. The storekeeper paid him no attention; he wanted that display of fruit fixed before the workmen of the town were astir; they bought it of him on their way to work, to put into their lunch kits.

Gene got back to his old shed in the field, where he remained all day, think-

ing over the situation. He ate heartily, slept some, and rejoiced to see Golden Glow eating the old hay that was good, if not the best. He looked at the horse's mouth and saw the scars of many wounds in it, telling of cruelty practiced by his trainers and owners in fitting him to become the great jumper that he was acknowledged to be.

"They sure hogged it onto you, old-timer," Gene told the good horse. "But no one's going t' do that again. I'm a hoss thief, all right, but you're goin' where a hoss is a hoss, as long as he behaves like one."

At another town next day, while Golden Glow was concealed in another shed about dawn, Gene purchased a little paint brush and a road map, such as auto tourists use.

With the brush, Gene now made a good job of dyeing the white socks of Golden Glow. Dipping the comb in dye, he darkened the light mane and forelock somewhat. Golden glow now had plenty of cockles in his tail; his coat was roughening. Gene was apparently a seedy granger, riding on some personal mission; the horse had been turned into what looked like a rangy, travel-stained bay. The bright hue of his coat was hidden under cakings of dust. Gene looked like a lazy, inefficient farmer.

With the road map Gene planned his route, keeping to the dirt roads and circling towns as much as possible. When dirt roads raveled out in back districts, he cut across country on Golden Glow. He traveled by night, making short forward marches at first. When he became bolder, at the end of a week without discovery, and finding the news sheets full of other sensations, with the Trevoir case dropped, Gene began riding in daylight, but always, with the road maps to guide him, keeping to the little-used dirt roads. Often he had to take main roads for a way, but he kept off them as much as possible. He

avoided controversies, paid cash for everything, and overlooked slights put upon him by auto speeders.

At one town he bought a stamp and an envelope and sheet of paper. On this he wrote just a line or two.

TOMMIE: Bank this for me and run things till I get in. I'm in a J. P. now and can't say more.

He did not sign this, but inclosed the indorsed check for his cattle and addressed it to his home ranch, the Diamond Tail, Split Fork Creek.

And then he drifted west again, always and ever west.

Golden Glow now had oats at each obscure town where they stopped. He had a rough coat, his mane and tail were matted. Gene was in a bedraggled suit. The farther west he got the more he changed his appearance to conform to the country he traveled through. Finally he struck cattle country. By that time he had acquired an old belt and well-worn but very accurate frontier six guns, a battered broad-brimmed hat, fair boots, and plain leather chaps, as well as a well-suppled rope. He had not been molested or even challenged on his long trip back to the ranges. He was yet a long way from home, but he did not mind that; he meant to work back home later.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO T.

AIR-TIGHT slept in the late summer sunshine. All around it the sage-billowed hills rolled. Here trails met, here mail was left, here water was, and here men came to buy necessities, get mail, gossip, sip cooling or heating drinks, and perchance to make plots. All about was cattle country. Air Tight consisted of a few houses and stores and the Mossy Horn saloon. A few gambling joints and minor hang-outs for men added to or took from the town's prestige, according to one's

standards in judging them. Bill Cattle polished the bar in the Mossy Horn. It was early in the afternoon, siesta time. No one was about.

Then came a clatter of hoofs, and the creak of saddle leather.

A tall man in battered hat, worn leather chaps, with one old gun swinging low at his left hip, butt turned to the front, entered quietly. He strolled forward easily as one who knew his place and worth in the world, had a mild drink, and invited the house to have one with him.

"Any hands needed around here?" he asked.

Bill Cattle continued to look the newcomer over—noted that his left arm seemed not tight against his side. Gun in a holster there? Perhaps. Bill blinked. He shook his head in reply to the newcomer's query.

The stranger did not seem to mind. He said:

"I'll sit down an' let my footsies rest," and he slumped into a chair in a corner not far from a table. He tip-tilted the chair against the wall of the place, pulled his hat over his eyes, and relaxed. Cattle went out and looked at the man's horse. It was a rangy, gaunted bay, with no light points and a rather dark mane and forelock. Cattle viewed the horse's muscular frame with approval. He sauntered back in and was about to speak to the snoozing stranger, when two men entered and then Cattle went behind the bar.

The men bought drinks, told a few stories, to which Cattle listened with enjoyment. He said to one of them, a rather squat fellow with ears that stood out from his head like a pair of sails:

"How about the Two T widow now, Lenstrum?"

The man laughed resoundingly, yet with a note of harshness.

"Oh, she's got t' move, right off pronto. I won't let any one be real

ugly t' her, but she's due for a move," he said decisively.

"Pernell going t' put on the screws now that her husband's dead?"

"You got that sized up all right, Bill," the other man said. "And she's going out quick. She starts t'-morrow. We ain't goin' t' be harsh with her, any. But she's got no hands, an' she's goin' to move away."

"I guess losing her husband sudden that a way and her two hands leavin' will make her want t' sell out to the Hour Glass? Is that it, Malvene?"

The second man was quite thin, and his head was hunched forward on his shoulders. He had a habit of looking up at people without moving his head, rolling his eyes up under red lids that lacked lashes, almost.

"You bet; if she had a hand or two she might stick, but there ain't no hands goin' t' join up with her knowin' that the Hour Glass is against her. Pernell wants her water rights in the Big Springs, and Pernell's apt t' get what he wants."

"Yes; Pernell's a cagey old coot. There never was any love lost between him an' Burt Twitenham. If the Two T widow won't sell to him, she may marry him. To be sure, Pernell's fifty, as Twitenham was, but a few years on a man's nothing, especially when a hook-up that a way may give you the best water on these ranges and let you expand your holdings double on that account. Mrs. Twitenham doesn't need that water; they never ran half enough cattle t' use it. They'd let most neighbors have all they wanted for their cattle in passing, but they never would even sell the Hour Glass a drop. Well, we've got things t' buy up the street. So, long, Cattle."

They turned away from the bar and went out.

Cattle polished away at the bar, after the manner of his kind. After a few moments he remembered something.

He glanced keenly at the man who first had arrived. He was still leaning back against the wall, snoring regularly.

"Just's well he didn't hear that talk; they didn't see him sittin' back in that corner, an' he wasn't snoring then," Cattle soliloquized, giving the wiping cloth a final flourish. The snore went on and on, growing in volume. Cattle came out from behind his bar, sat at another table, and read an old newspaper. He glanced at the stranger from time to time. The snores went to a crescendo, ending in a resounding gulp, and the stranger opened his eyes with a jerk, waving his hands before him as if he were unable to realize where he was. Then he began to smile.

"Say, that was a right one; I dreamed I was ropin' an elephant with a spider web, and it held and threw him. That stuff you sold me must have a kick. Well, as there's no hands wanted around here, I'll ride."

He got up, stretched, and went out rather slouchily. Cattle began to read again.

Outside the stranger found two men in a buckboard, before the door. They were looking at the rangy bay horse of the stranger. They were the two men who had talked with Cattle about the Two T widow.

"That's a funny lookin' cow hoss," the one with the stooped, lean shoulders was saying. They were Lenstrum and Malvene, back from buying stuff at the stores. Lenstrum edged in on criticism of the stranger's horse.

"He looks as if he'd split wide open turnin' after a cow that didn't want t' be held in the bunch," he said sneeringly.

The stranger did not say anything to this provocative banter. He merely swung up awkwardly, choking the horn severely as he did so.

"Lookit him squeeze that pommel," Malvene jeered.

"He may force some lemon juice out

of it yit," Lenstrum joined in the taunting.

The stranger was now firm in his seat. He glanced down on them rather timidly. Lenstrum got out of the buckboard and strode over to the hitch rack.

"Say, stranger, where did that hoss come from? He ain't got a brand on him."

Malvene followed, letting the reins down over the backs of the buckboard ponies limply. His thin lips were drawn back in a sneer.

"Ridin' for a job?"

"Sure am," answered the stranger, glancing nervously about, as if seeking a way of escape.

"Well, there ain't none around here. This range don't take much t' strangers no way a-tall. Is that your hoss?" he asked, pointing to the big bay with one lean finger.

"I'm riding him to-day, anyway," replied the stranger, showing more nervousness.

"Where'd you git him? He ain't got no brand."

"Is it in the law that a man's got to have a brand on his hoss?"

"Now, lookit, stranger," Lenstrum interrupted their debate. "You ain't tryin' t' be funny, are you?"

"No, no," returned the stranger, in a faint voice, lifting his hand in a gesture of self-depreciation.

"Because if you are, it won't last long. Have you got a bill o' sale for that hoss?"

"Suppose I ain't," replied the abused one, glancing about apprehensively.

"Then we'll lodge you in the calaboose, an' hold the hoss till claimed or till you prove ownership t' the satisfaction of the sheriff."

"Who is he?"

"Lime Prembrill, at Elk Forks."

"Would I get my hoss back?" he asked anxiously, letting his hand drop on the pommel again.

"Say, do you think we'd steal him on

you while you was shet up in jail?" Malvene cut in with.

"No, I ain't sayin' anything; you two're sayin' it all."

The two interrogators exchanged looks. Quite a few men had appeared to listen more closely to the discussion.

A slight snicker ran around the group of listeners at this last remark of the stranger's. Lenstrum and Malvene showed by their flushed faces that they resented this. Malvene spoke sharply now.

"Hey, pink ear, show a bill o' sale of that hoss or git off him."

"Have you got a bill o' sale?" Lenstrum backed his pal up.

They were standing side by side now, at the withers of the rangy bay. Up till this time the horse had remained very quiet, yet his long, pointed ears had flicked back now and then, as if he were listening for some certain word of command from his rider. The rider was still slouched forward in the saddle, gripping the pommel hard. The reins, over the pommel, hung slack.

"I ain't got a reg'lar one," he said slowly. "It's a li'le mite irregular, you might say, but I guess it'll do, *here*," he ended with emphasis on that last word.

"Oh, it ain't reg'lar, but it'll do, *here*," Lenstrum mimicked.

"Show it, then," Malvene urged.

"Look at it, then," he said. The voice was steel edged now; the eyes glinting. The slouch had changed to a firm seat, the horse at a mere twitch of the left rein had stepped aside, bring the two right under the muzzle of the gun that leaped forward to cover them as the lightning wrist of the stranger flipped the weapon out of his holster like magic. Lenstrum and Malvene stared at that steady-held muzzle.

"Is the bill o' sale good?" the stranger asked again.

"I—guess—yes," Malvene spat out venomously.

"Sure, cow-boy," Lenstrum joined him.

"Then git onto that buckboard seat an' make dust out o' here," he ordered them quietly.

The two turned and walked jerkily toward the buckboard. They leaped into it from either side. The slack-muscled ponies came to life, lunged, and leaped, and the swaying vehicle swung out of town in a cloud.

"If they've got any friends that want in on this, I'm right here t' receive," the stranger said quietly. No one moved. He waited a moment, then spoke to the rangy bay that picked his way daintily through them all and jogged up the street. As he passed the last staring group the man flicked the gun back into its holster. He heard some one behind him say:

"What'd'yuh think o' that, runnin' Pernell's two pet gun throwers out o' town that a way!"

The stranger drew his horse in at the upper store. The storekeeper, a broad-faced old fellow, with a fringe of gray fuzz all about his face and head, smiled at the newcomer.

"Quick work, that, bub," he offered genially. "What'll it be?"

"I thought you looked different from the rest, pappy; where's the Two T Ranch?"

"Keep right out this trail, turn t' the left at the two red buttes 'boot five mile out, then keep right on. You'll see the mail box an' side trail that leads t' the house. Know Missus Twitenham?"

"I'm goin' t' work for her."

"Well, she's hired a man, all right. Drap in when you come t' town, bub."

"All right, pappy, so long!"

The rangy bay jogged out of town easily, the man on him swaying lightly. The trail lifted over a ridge, and Air Tight was out of sight. The stranger whistled and sang a bit. He talked to his good horse, and when he came to the two red buttes he made the required

turn. It was dusk when he came to the mail box, marked Two T. He urged the horse up the dim trail leading up a ridge, and along that to a slope, at the foot of which was a little creek bed, now dry. He saw the snug little house, the small corral, and the leaning sheds of a minor ranch. Below, he discerned, was a widening flat that was green, and, dotting it, were bunches of cattle.

The house was quiet as he rode up, save that from somewhere came a sound that was regular, but that he could not place. It came to him:

R-r-r-rub, r-r-r-rub, r-r-r-rub!

"I'd say," he said to his horse, "that the old widow was doin' her washing about now."

He gentled the horse 'up the path leading to the house. He rounded the house at the rear and saw a rough bench, and on it a washtub. A woman was bending over it, rubbing methodically and humming to herself.

"Poor old widow, she ought t' have one o' those washin' machines that they sell in the mail-order books," the stranger said, aloud, as if speaking to his horse.

The "poor old widow" drew her plump hands out of the suds, wiped them carefully on her ample apron, and looked up.

The stranger gasped. She was young—and very pretty. Say about twenty-three, with a mass of wavy brown hair, unbobbed, done up in curls that hung all about her face and in back. Her eyes were brown, the deepest brown, and her color not such as the rain would wash away.

"Are you the widow's hired girl?" he asked.

"I might be; are you her hired man?" she asked.

"I'm goin' t' be, ma'am. Where'll I put my hoss?"

She gazed at him intently, then: "Slat him into the corral."

He swung down and stripped saddle

and bridle from the bay with a dexterity that told of long habit. He let them lie on the ground and went, his hand on the forelock of the bay, to the corral gate, about two hundred yards away. When he came back the saddle and bridle were on a peg under the overhang of the roof of the house, at the side. The roof came close down on either hand, making a sort of open-air shelter on two sides of the house.

"Can I get a mite t' eat?" he asked. "Thanks t' whoever hung that saddle up that a way."

"They're due to me, then," she answered, her voice deeply resonant and pleasant. "I don't like things cluttered around."

"I can see that; everything's slick as a whistle around here."

"Yes, you can have something to eat. Wash up and I'll throw something together."

He found the washbasin and made a good job of cleaning up. After using the towel—and it was not a towel to make a man wish he had not tried it—he went to his saddle, got a gay kerchief out of the side pocket, and knotted it on in place of the trail rag he had been wearing. He located the splinter of mirror tacked up beside the door and combed his hair out with his fingers carefully. Satisfied, he picked up an empty pail and started off up a path at the other end of the house and found the spring that he guessed was there. He filled the pail and came back whistling. She was at the door.

"Come and git it," she invited him, leading the way into the kitchen.

"Which I sure will. My name's Gene Rood. When will the widow be here? I've got something important t' tell her."

"Oh, have you? Well, eat first; likely it'll keep," she said placidly, sitting down and watching him.

"I dunno; this is important. Do you work here right along?"

"I do"

"Does the widow need a hand?"

"She does."

"Well, I'm the hand," he stated, putting fork to nicely crisped bacon and eying the eggs approvingly. "I'd almost work here for nothing a month to get grub like this"

"The widow will pay well for a hand that suits her, I know that."

"Will she?"

"Yes, sure. Sure you're a hand?"

"I've always made one."

"We had two or three of these mail-order cowboys before—a while back, that is. They ran into some unpleasant things and quit on me—on us."

"Oh, did they? What unpleasant things?"

"Oh, men that showed them guns and things like that."

"That ain't bad, when you can do it too," he answered, lading in sugar enough to sweeten three cups of coffee.

"No, I suppose not, but these mail-order boys fade away in such cases."

"I know that. I saw two of them fade away down in Air Tight to-day."

"Who were they?" she asked with interest.

"I dunno them; just saw them a minute. I heard them called Malvene and Lenstrum."

A shade of fear passed over her pretty face then. She seemed to shiver a little bit.

"They faded out? Who made them?" she asked, leaning forward eagerly.

"Oh, a feller that came into town."

"A feller that came into town? What was he like?"

"He rode a bay hoss, kind of rangy hoss, and had on leather chaps and old clothes that wasn't much, and packed an old frontier six gun."

"Oh!" She was holding his gaze intently.

"He was just ridin' through, lookin' for a job, ma'am."

"Did he get one?" she inquired eagerly.

"He's tryin' hard now," he came back, finishing the last egg and slice of bacon and stirring up the dregs of his coffee to get all the sugar.

"He may get it, too. I'll tell the widow."

"Thanks, and I've got t' see her right away."

"Won't the news keep?"

"I'll tell you an' you can judge. There's a ranch around near by called the Hour Glass?"

"Yes," she said, showing keen interest now.

"Well, they're goin' t' run the widow off this place so that Pernell can have the water rights here. I heard this Lenstrum and Malvene talking it over with the man that keeps the Mossy Horn down in Air Tight."

"Well?"

"So I thought I'd ride out an' hire out t' the widow of the Two T."

"Well, cowboy, you've done it."

"I have? Not without seein' the widow?"

"Your pay starts right now. Sixty dollars a month, free keep for your hoss, and grub like you've been havin'."

"But I've got t' see the widow t' make it official."

"You're looking at her right now."

"Right now?"

"Yes; I'm the Two T widow, cowboy."

"Ain't I glad!" he exclaimed, laughing.

And she laughed, too.

CHAPTER V.

THE COMING OF PERNELL.

I THOUGHT," Gene found himself saying when they had controlled their laughter, "that you'd be a nice old lady, with a frilly cap, an' soft, trembly voice."

"I might've been," she said, her face

going into serious lines at once, and her voice breaking a bit, "but it happened like this. Pap and I came out here from Missouri and located on a homestead a ways below. There's a small spring down there. It let pap irrigate a patch of land. Well, Pernell crowded us down there. He—he got fresh. I was eighteen then. Pap whopped him one day in town. He said he'd run us out. Pap stuck. His hoss came in one day, dragging pap. His foot was caught in the stirrup. I didn't know what to do. Twitenham had lost his wife. He buried pap and was kind. Well, he needed a wife. I married him. Twitenham was a good man, kind, pleasant. He made me a good husband. It wasn't a love match, like a young feller and girl might have made out. But he was decent and kind, and I was his wife."

Gene nodded, something warm in his eyes in spite of himself.

"How did Twitenham come to die?"

"He went out last spring, hunting strays. His horse came back to our corral here. His foot was caught through the stirrup. The hands buried him. Then they quit on me. Pernell came and offered to buy me out," she went on, her eyes flashing. "I told him I'd not sell till I knew how the two men came to die the same way. Two men that knew how to ride and that kept their heels always in good repair so that they wouldn't slip through their stirrups. Pernell went away, swearing that he'd have this place. They haven't been over since. It's been six months since Twitenham died. I'll show you his grave to-morrow, down on the lower bench by the creek bed. There was no romance about our wedding, but—he was a good man."

"I savvy that, Mrs. Twitenham," Gene said earnestly. "Now, I'm plum tired. I'll see that my hoss is all right, and then turn in. I suppose that li'le shack by the corral is the bunk house?"

"Yes, and it's clean and ready."

"I'd bet on that. Well, ma'am, I'll be going. Got a gun?"

"Twitenham's," she answered, indicating it hanging on the peg over the door.

"Let 'er speak if you want me in the night, any time," he said, and then he went out.

Gene found the bunk house as she had described it—clean and airy, if meagerly equipped. He rolled his blankets in the first bunk and was soon asleep.

The relaxation from the feeling that he must travel on and on, gave to Gene a sense of quietude that night. He slept heavily. Dawn came and the light gained; the mists rolled out of the vale. Gene came awake to find the sun up. He rolled out, went to the door, and heard some one talking.

"Oh, you're a beauty, under the trail dust and sweat. Your owner must not think much of you to let such a nice horse get all caked up and his mane and tail so full of burrs."

It was the Two T widow, rubbing Golden Glow's nose over the corral bars and talking horse talk to him. Golden Glow was nipping at her playfully.

"Come and get it," she invited, pointing toward the kitchen. Gene went to the washbasin and made ready. He found the breakfast even better than the supper—pancakes, nice thin honey drips, bacon, coffee, eggs, real milk.

"I keep a few hens away from the coyotes behind wire netting," she explained, "and a couple of milch cows for milk, cream, and butter. I've been up two hours, milked, set the cream to rise and gathered the eggs."

"Why didn't you call me early?"

"You looked plumb tired out, Mr. Royal."

"I was. I've been coming a long ways."

"Have you?"

Gene did not volunteer further in-

formation about himself, and she did not ask for any.

"We'll ride around a little," she said, after a time, "and I'll show you what I think ought to be done. We only have five hundred head here, and they range mostly close in. We have had help at branding time, of course, but winters my husband managed, because the little valley here held the cattle, and sometimes we got too big a drift from other bunches. Pernell tried to buy my husband out, but he never tried to run on him much, because Twitenham was an old-time ranger and men knew he wouldn't be crowded. I suppose it's different with his widow," she added, a shade of bitterness in tone and manner.

She washed the breakfast things while Gene, on the doorsill, smoked. She was hanging up the dish pan when he spoke quietly:

"We're due for visitors, Mrs. Twitenham."

She came out to the door. Golden Glow, at the bars, was looking down past the house to where the dim trail lifted to the level of the ranch house. They could hear the clatter of shod hoofs.

"Pernell and friends," she whispered. "He always has his horses well shod. They have a Mexican smith at his ranch, and a forge."

The clatter, musical and regular, increased.

"I'll step inside; see what happens." Gene said to her.

She sat on the doorsill, waiting.

She heard their hail out in front. She did not answer. Then she heard them coming around the side of the house. As they rounded the corner, she noted that the leader, a well-built man of florid countenance, clad in a neat gray suit, with expensive boots and high-crowned hat, was leaning over, reading the sign. He jerked erect as he saw that she was watching him, and raised his hat ceremoniously. He glanced at the

horse in the corral. The two men with him looked keenly at the horse, too.

"Good mawning," said the leader, with a lingering drawl. "I hope I see you as well's you look, Missus Twitenham," Pernell offered.

"Good day," she answered shortly. The two men laughed a little, and their boss colored.

"You seem mighty short to a neighbor, Missus Twitenham."

"I didn't ask you to come, did I?"

"No, but as I was passing, I thought I'd remind you of that offer for your place. You can't make a go of it alone."

"I suppose that's a nice way of telling me that I won't be able to hire any cowboys to work for me?" Her voice was a bit higher in pitch.

"Oh, no," he came back urbanely. "Not at all. Nothing rough or harsh, Missus Twitenham."

His face was wreathed in smiles. The faces of his men likewise were wreathed in smiles. Pernell jerked his thumb toward the horse in the corral.

"Have you been buying a new horse?"

"That's my business, Mr. Pernell."

"Better be careful about buying horses from strangers."

"I traded for one of mine," she said with a hint of mischief in her eye, if Pernell could have seen it.

"And the man you traded with has gone?" inquired the man with a look of relief.

"He isn't visible, is he?"

Pernell's face cleared. The two men with him whispered something to him. Pernell spoke.

"We think that that horse is a stolen horse. You'd better be ready to give him up, on demand. Now, about my offer to you for this place. I'll raise the price twenty-five per cent, for a quick bargain."

"The Two T isn't for sale," she answered firmly.

"Not for sale?" His face showed harsh lines again.

"No, and will not be."

Pernell set his horse forward until he was at the very doorsill. He towered up over her as she sat there quietly on her own threshold, and, bending, over, shook his finger insultingly at her.

"You'll sell out to me, or——"

"Or what?" Gene Rood asked, stepping into view, and standing behind her. His old gun swung low at his hip. A mocking smile was on his face. The light of battle was in his eyes.

Pernell jerked his horse back a few paces and stared at the man.

"Or what?" Gene asked quietly.

The widow sat very still. Her face expressed joy, relief.

The two men with Pernell spoke to him in low tones. He edged still farther back.

"Why'n't you stay an' talk this over," Gene went on with seeming friendliness. "Me, I ain't goin' t' bite any one unless they first start t' bite yours truly. I'm naturally a peaceful cuss, but if you or Malvene there or even Lenstrum, puny and weak as he is, want any talk with me, it's high time you began, because you ain't going t' stay here long."

He stepped off the doorsill and advanced toward them, walking on the balls of his feet. As he passed the widow, seated there so quietly, the mocking smile left his face. His features were stern set, his eye chilly as stars on a frosty night.

"There's the trail back," he said. "Better take it while you can. I'd sure admire t' have one of you start it. Pernell, you start it, so I can finish it."

He waited, bent forward, jaw out-thrust. He waited and the silence grew and deepened. Golden Glow pawed at the earth in the little corral and snorted. At that sound the three jerked in their saddles, but Gene was rocklike in his stern pose of menace.

"Well?" he demanded.

Pernell turned his horse about and called to his men to follow. Over his shoulder he called back: "All right, this time; I don't fight in the presence of a lady."

"I'll have her go away, if it'll accommodate you any," taunted Gene.

But they did not turn back. Far down the trail Pernell turned in his saddle and shook his fist. Gene whirled out his gun and it flamed once. At the shot the high hat leaped from Pernell's big head. It landed down the trail ahead of them. He bent over in the saddle and picked it up. Then the three rounded a turn and were gone.

"I'm glad—I'm glad—that I had a man to face him this time. He had me almost wore down to a point where I was willing to sell and move," the widow said, as Gene turned toward her.

"Well, we'll work this out together," he said simply.

CHAPTER VI.

REDNEY GOES WEST.

REDNEY WHISK had endured a long string of poor luck that had begun when his time-tried pard, Bony, had "greased the rails." Having in mind the easy "grifting" on the gold coast when the "winter birds" came to California, Redney started toward the West. He did not rush West on a vestibule, seeing only a strip of country on either side of the steel highways. No; he had other ideas than that. He went by easy stages, stopping here and there, going up side lines and working easy souls for trips across country to other lines of steel. He went north and he went south, at times, but his main direction was toward the coast.

And so Redney arrived at Thomaston one rather keen morning, with a splitting headache, with only a drop left of that which had caused it, and a feeling that Lady Luck had deserted him entirely. So he determined to quit the

steels for a time. The box car in which he was, was on a siding. Next to it was another, from which a freighter was moving goods to a big freight ark, to which six mules were hitched. Redney Whisk viewed all this pother of work with a cold and disdainful eye. He opened the box car door and sat in the thin sunshine of the high country, watching the freighter.

"Hey, you, come out o' that car an' help," the freighter called.

"I don't have t'," Redney Whisk jeered back.

The freighter said nothing more. He just whipped out a gun and knocked a splinter off the edge of the car door not far from "Red" Whisk's cheek.

"You big stiff——" began Redney.

But the freighter threw another .45 that tore off another splinter, right alongside Redney Whisk's chin. He slid out of the car quickly enough, considering that his head was still unsteady from last night's experiences, and started to obey.

"Thought better of it, eh? Take hold o' an end o' this box an' help me h'ist her onto my load."

So the autocrat of the six mules ordered. He was a lanky, whiskered, rather unkempt old fellow, but, as Redney Whisk said to himself, he "shook a wicked six." So Redney obeyed, although his soft muscles would rather have rebelled. And, obeying, Redney Whisk soon was to have the reward of industry, for presently there strolled down from the town's center a man wearing a bright star on his coat lapel—a man who eyed Redney Whisk and who spoke to the freighter.

"Is he your helper, Josh? Thought yout shot at something."

"You can see for yourself, cain't you? I shot a gopher, for practice. This man's helpin' me, ain't he?"

The man with the star watched Redney Whisk work for a while. Redney now went to his task with added zeal.

The man with the star spoke again to the freighter.

"The eagle eye of that freight that dropped that car told me one o' his shacks thought there was a tramp in that empty on the siding. I want a few tramps just now. We're short on that road job, an' two—three more making little ones out o' big ones wouldn't displease the county judge."

Redney Whisk's labors now became exemplary and fervid. The man with the star walked away.

"See what comes o' industry and acting a lie," Josh Yercomb told him, as he straightened up to see if the load was rightly balanced before he put on the lashings. "If you'd not minded me about comin' out o' that freight car, he'd got you and put you at real work. He'll pick you up when I go, probably, but that won't be now. No train you can catch here again till most night."

Josh Yercomb rubbed his whiskers—they were sandy—and eyed Redney Whisk speculatively.

"Couldn't I hide out somewhere?" Redney asked anxiously.

"He's up there, watching t' see what you do when I get through. He's got a hoss an' you got laigs. I'm starting for Air Tight now. Take your choice between the rock pile and Air Tight."

"I'll take Air Tight, without knowin' a thing about it," said Redney, climbing up.

Yercomb let the wanderer have part of the seat and they rode away together, respecting each other's desire for silence. They smoked and dozed all morning, nooned without conversation, and rode all afternoon. At night Josh, stopping at a water hole, handed Redney the water bucket.

"I like your conversation a lot," he said.

And so, three days later, when Josh's ark drew up to deliver its freight to the storekeepers in Air Tight who hired him to draw stuff for them, Redney

was with the load. He thanked Josh and scuttled away toward the nearest saloon and thereupon disappeared in the town's swirls of lower life, a pathetic figure in his tattered rags and with his fringe of red whiskers all about his face and red hair peeping out from under his tattered old straw hat.

He had some money and ways of getting more without actually breaking the law or working at anything regular. Yercomb departed when Redney was asleep, and so Redney did not get the coveted ride over to Wylieville, and the other short-line railroad to which Yercomb drove his mules every other week. He was stranded in a small cattle country town, without a horse, and therefore was an object of scorn to even the lowest loafer about the town who did have a horse. But that did not bother Redney. He was accustomed to having people look down upon him. And so he settled into the life of the town, waiting for Josh Yercomb to return. But the longer he waited, the more uncertain he became in his actions. He was the butt of the town's alleged humor. He wanted to get away, but had no means of doing so.

CHAPTER VII.

PERNELL'S PLAN.

GLADE PERNELL sat on the sill of the door of the little corner room of his ranch house. Before him on the steps were several of his hands. Malvene was looking off down the valley as Pernell talked.

"It's time that we looked for Lenstrum; Hilt ought t've made it from Wylieville by now."

"No doubt about his getting that deputy's star from the sheriff?" Malvene asked.

Pernell laughed. "Lime Pembrill knows who gives him the votes up in this end of the country. His home town of Elk Forks cain't swing many

for him, and he has t' have help in the county seat at election time. We big cattlemen see to it that we get a sheriff that toes the mark. But where's Lenstrum?"

"There he comes now," one of the men said, pointing.

The farthest notch in the trail below was smudged with trail murk now. Soon it was seen that the rider was coming fast. As they talked he whirled into full view at a nearer bend and then came out of the bottom and up onto the bench, alighted easily for all his bulk, and nodded to Pernel.

"Got it! Want action t'-day?" he asked, displaying a star.

"That all depends, Hilt. We've got a man watching the Two T. All we're waiting for is his report that the widow's new man has started t' town. Then we put up some kind of a job."

Hilt Lenstrum sat down on the steps. The hard-ridden horse stood with quivering flanks and down-drooped head.

"I told you t' come speedy, but I didn't tell you t' kill that hoss," Pernel complained. "Rope out a new hoss when we ride t' town."

Lenstrum did not answer this criticism. Instead he got up, walked the horse toward the small corral, stripped off saddle and bridle, and turned the tired animal in. Then he walked silently back to the watching group and sat down.

"Got any settled plan if he does go t' town, boss?"

"No, only this; we cut around and get there first. When he's in town, we start some kind of a ruckus that will draw him to us. He'll get ribbed up and pernickety, as he was before, with you an' Malvene. You'll arrest him or tell him he's under arrest. I guess with our whole crowd against him he won't resist much. We'll have it fixed some way so that the upper end of the street will be closed, so that he ain't able t'

make a good slope out, once he's inside the town."

"That hombre's got a cold eye; I want you-all t' back'me hard after I flash the star on him," Lenstrum made his plea for support. "You boys know I'm apt t' play lone hands, but, this hombre is bad, if r'iled, I'll admit."

"There comes Blaine!" Malvene fairly shouted.

From up the valley could be seen another man riding. He, too, came at speed. He drew up before them sharply calling:

"The pink ear left Two T an hour ago; took the Air Tight Trail."

"Anything new?" Pernel asked, getting up quickly.

"No; they've been doing nothing. He's been up early, working around the place. That nice-looking hoss of his isn't any cow hoss. He uses her cayuses when he does any cow work. He rode the big bay to town to-day, though. He's a good rider, and roper. I've had him at the end of my glasses every day. There's something funny about him. But they've got to get a hand or two pretty soon; the work will be crowding them before long."

"She may get some of this gang and be glad t' have them," Pernel let drop as he started toward the corral. "Le's ride, men. You-all know your parts now; we'll lay out the ground for a ruckus when we get t' town. We can be in an hour ahead of him by cutting around. Watch me and follow orders, and we'll have that new man roped and hog tied before the sun sets to-night."

"I claim his big bay hoss, as my share," Lenstrum spoke up.

"All right; when the dust settles, if you've got him, no one will raise a howl about it," Pernel agreed.

"Now I've got something t' work for; that hoss sure is a daisy cutter," Lenstrum gloated. "He's just the same as mine, right now."

One Good Watchdog

By Austin Hall

Author of "From Under the Bear," etc.



WITHIN an hour after Tab Conners had made up his mind definitely and for all time that he was through with prospecting, he was off on a new adventure. And the reason was as follows:

Tab had ridden up the long gulch and had climbed the ridge to get one last look at the country before he broke camp, when he stopped suddenly to study a wisp of smoke that was winding up from the clump of cottonwoods. Tab had no idea that there was a living soul within a radius of forty miles, and so his surprise was all the stronger. The only men who came to the Diablos were rustlers, outlaws, and occasional prospectors; and it behooved Tab to be careful. Nevertheless, even an outlaw can talk, and when a man has been living for six months on silence and beans, conversation is a likely tonic. Tab rode down the hill.

But he stopped just before he reached the turn that brought the clump into view. He heard voices, and the voices were enough to make any man stop. Also the voices were such that Tab scented a tragedy. One was threatening, bullying, alcoholic; the other stoical, grunting, Indian.

"No?" questioned the alcoholic voice. "Yuh won't tell, eh? Yeah? Yuh won't tell me, eh, Injun? And yuh knowing all the while jus' where the Swede put his gold. Eh? An' yuh won't listen tuh reason. Yuh'll just sit there and grunt and look at me out of them moon eyes o' yuhrn like as though yuh wasn't never go'ng tuh tell me. No? Well, yuh ain't half wise tuh yuhr friend Toby yet. Me? When I was in good health I used tuh kill seven Injuns every morning before breakfast. I ain't popped yuh off yet, because I got use fer yuh; but if yuh don't loosen up with that information that yuh've got stored away in that pate of yuhrn, I'm just a-going tuh put a slug in yuhr gizzard and beat it back tuh Frisco. Yuhr Uncle Toby is craving society. He's aiming tuh get that Swede's gold. And if he doesn't get it, he's a-going tuh leave yuhr body fer buzzard meat. Savvy! In the meantime, pending the time when yuh get beyond conversation, we'll keep on using the iron. That last time she wasn't quite hot enough. This time she'll reach the bone. Yuh're a-going to talk or yuh'll be a cooked Indian."

Tab had met Toby during his stop in Wasco one year before, and he knew him for a tinhorn, a petty thief, and a

cutthroat. Toby had been standing beside a roulette wheel when there had come a flash of iron from two inebriates and a crash of glass as the big man went through the window. That was Tab's recollection. He wondered whether it was the same Toby. He swung his horse around the bend and then—Tab used his gun. And Tab was in no way a killer. He did not kill now.

Instead, he neatly clipped off a finger that held the iron. There was a roar of pain as the big man shot up into the air, spun around, and then landed on his back. Tab had seen it all—the Indian tied to the tree, tortured and defiant; the fire, the cooking bacon, and the red-hot irons that spoke like an exclamation. Swede's gold! Tab had heard of that, too. Here was another tragedy. Subconsciously he wondered whether he would have to kill Toby. That would make another victim. He came near doing it when the big ruffian leaped to his feet and made a dive toward the brush. Another bullet stopped him.

"Not in our family," said Tab. "Now then, come back here! Give me that gun. What's the idee, eh? What sort of a seance was you pulling off here, anyway? Tell me that."

The big fellow loomed with his six feet three inches; had he had the courage of his bulk, he could have torn Tab to ribbons. He was unshaven, bleary-eyed, and terrified. The Indian tied to the tree was a pitiful object. There was a mark where the iron had seared his breast, his eyes were rolling, but he was still defiant; he looked at Tab as though Tab was merely a new enemy. Tab caught a rope, threw it into a hitch, and drew it up about the ruffian's arms. Then he stepped over to the Indian. But the Indian was far gone; the moment that his bonds were cut he fell to the ground. Tab picked him up and held the water bag to his lips. The red man swallowed, and rolled his eyes.

"Never mind," said Tab tenderly. "You'll be all right. Just you straighten up and we'll turn things about. It's your turn now, chief."

Tab was thinking. He had seen enough to vindicate any kind of killing; and he was mad enough to give the thug a taste of his own medicine; but at the same time he knew that he could not do it. Neither could he kill him. Yet—Tab turned around.

"Now listen here," he said. "If I was to give you your desserts, I'd burn that iron through you lengthwise. Understand? Only I'm not that kind of an hombre. I'm for killing in a fair fight. If you want to fight it out, say so, and I'll give you your gun and kill you in your tracks. Otherwise, here's a bag of water with your hands free and there's the road to Wasco. How about it?"

The big man was too frightened to answer; he looked into the blue distance. It was plain that he expected nothing better than a plain killing.

"All right," said Tab Conners. "Here's your water. That will last you through to-morrow. Now git!" And to facilitate the man's progress, he gave him a shove with his foot that gave him a flying start of twenty feet. And when the ruffian had a running start, he let fly a persuading bullet that sent him on a run for Wasco.

That done, Tab picked up the limp Indian, put him in front of the saddle, and started back to camp. For three days thereafter he was doctor, nurse, and general factotum; until gradually and by degrees the Indian began to come around. Tab had plenty to think about, and he asked the Indian nothing. That was the Indian's own business. Nevertheless Tab was thinking about that Swede gold. He wondered what the Indian knew, and he wondered whether the secret of the haunted metal would ever be solved. Tab knew the story; he had heard it many times. The

cleverest version he had heard, had come from an old prospector in Wheelbarrow two years before.

"Gold!" the old man had said. "Say, Bub. There's more gold up in them hills than will ever come out. And there's gold that will be found in a strange way, too. Ever hear of the Swede's gold? No? Well, I'll tell you.

"It was way back in the sixties that the Swede came out with his first lot. Who he was no one ever knew, except that he went in them Seven Devils up yonder and come out loaded down with gold. And he had lots of it—gold, real gold, in big nuggets. And of course every man Jack in town wanted to know just where he got it. But the Swede wouldn't tell them, I guess, because he was a Swede, and knew enough to keep his mouth shut. All they knew was that he came into town to set the town on fire with his spending and get everybody drunk. And he was a strange character, too, because he could drink everybody under the table and at the same time keep his head, no matter how much he swallowed. He was never known to get drunk, although I s'pose that down under his skin he was as drunk as a lord. So they lay for him, and when he started back to his diggings, the whole town followed.

"But the Swede was too wise for them, and instead of going straight back, he headed over the mountains and made a bee line for Frisco. And that settled his trailers. Most of them had never been in the big town, and so when they hit it, they forgot all about the Swede and his nuggets. They came back when they was broke and in a few weeks here come the Swede with more gold than ever. And once again he blew it, and once again he lit out and left them looking. It took him about two weeks to make the trip, and after he got in, the same old round would recommence. The Swede was popular, of course, but

he was foxy enough to know what made him popular. The only words he ever spoke were:

"'They bane big kettle up dar. She's bane full of gold, and she's bane in mighty strange place all right, too. You go find him. But you bane find him you watch out you no get kill. I bane have one good watchdog. Dat faller she's bane killer.'

"That's all he ever did say, until one day he got into a knifing scrape with two Mexicans, and they finished him. He wanted to talk then, but he couldn't. All he could do was to take a pencil and draw a crude map of a place somewhere up in the Seven Devils. Also he drew a circle that looked like a kettle, and which, some said, was a copper kettle. After that, he handed the map to a friend and then passed out. The friend, of course, shoved the map in his pocket and as soon as the Swede was buried, hustled but after the kettle. But he must have remembered something of the Swede's warning, because before he started he drew another map and mailed it to a friend in California.

"That was undoubtedly the origin of the many maps that kept cropping up in the after years. It was all strange because the friend never found the gold, or if he did, he never got back with it. No one ever knew, but when it was mentioned, some one would always tell of the Swede's warning. Then one day the friend from California showed up, told what he was a-going to do, and foolishly displayed the map. There were bad characters, and they wanted that paper. The upshot of it was that the man from California was murdered by two men just outside of town—he lived long enough to tell who they were—and they took the map. They would have met quick work had they ever got back, but they were never heard of afterwards.

"And they couldn't have got the gold, because their horses came back without

them. And there is no way out of the Seven Devils over on the other side. The two crooks must have met the fate that overtook the Swede's friend. Of course that started the story of the Swede's warning again. Then one day came a man from San Francisco with a strange quest and a strange secret. He told no one who he was and he told no one what he was after, but one night he lit out over the desert and was gone—after the Swede's gold, of course.

"He never came back—was never heard of. How he ever got hold of the map no one ever knew, but that map down in California must have been copied, because for a number of years at intervals of two years, some one would show up. Always with great secrecy and great confidence. But once on their way, not a one of them ever came back. Yes, sir! That gold's haunted, and she's haunted good. Somewhere up in them Devils is a pot of gold bigger than the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, but they ain't no one ever a-going to get it. You just can't work against a haunt.

"The last one to go up was the Swede's own brother. It seems that the Swede had sent him a map as a sort of present or a will, mebbe, but the brother was in Sweden, and only a little fellow at the time, and so he had to grow up before he could come after it. Well, when the brother showed up everybody thought that he would break the hoodoo—only he didn't. That boy never came back no more than the rest.

"There isn't any more people coming with maps now, and they say that there is only one more in existance. That belongs to a tribe of Indians. It seems that the Swede was a squaw man and at some time he must have given his squaw one of those maps. The squaw kept it as a relic. Her tribe has it yet, and as far as I'm concerned, they can keep it. Oh, yes! There's gold up there, but most of it is as hard to get

as that of the Swede. And that's prospecting all in a nutshell."

Tab Conners remembered. This was an Indian and perhaps the right Indian. Tab knew enough about legends to know that the tale of the Swede's fabulous cache should be taken with a grain of salt. Yet Tab had had such hard luck and had been driven by such adversity that the tale appealed. Gold was where he found it. And stranger things than a kettle of gold have been known in this world of miracles.

That afternoon Tab went down to his meager claim and looked it over. It had come to nothing and had not brought him a tenth of his grubstake. All Tab could do now was to sit down and mourn over its leanness and think of what might have been. He was sitting on his haunches and watching the daylight adventuring of a little kangaroo rat, when he heard a stealthy step behind him and looked up to see Red Eagle standing above him with folded arms. The Indian had not spoken for days, and so Tab did not look for him to speak now. But this time he was mistaken.

"Huh!" said the Indian after a long silence. "No good. Heep big dig. Heep big fool work hard. No gold. Bad man she's catchum plenty gold. Good man she's too much fool. Huh!"

Tab looked up; the words of the Indian were just about the sum of his own thoughts. "I guess that's right, chief," he said. "I'm the fool. Heep big work. No pay. Now I go back to the city."

Red Eagle looked into the distance; his mind seemed to be in the blue of the Seven Devils that loomed there.

"Huh!" he said. "You go way. You catchum Mahaly! Huh?"

"Mahaly?" asked Tab Conners.

"Squaw," explained the Indian. "You catchum squaw. Pretty squaw, eh?"

"Oh!" That made it still harder to think of. "Yes, I have a squaw. Not

a wife, but a sweetheart, you understand. Pretty. She's a teacher, but that is something that you don't understand. She was teaching school and I was up here to pick up a fortune. We were going to live in Piedmont in a bungalow, a white man's teepee, you understand, where we could be right under the mountains and look out over the Big Water."

The Indian nodded as though he understood. "Huh," he grunted. "Big fool for little gold. You catchum old squaw, too, huh?"

"You mean my mother?" That was a harder thought still. "Yes, I've got a mother. And she's old. And she's waiting for me to come back. But I hate to come back empty. There's a mortgage, which you don't understand, but which is the thing that got my grubstake. Now——"

That was all that was said. The Indian walked off, and when Tab returned to the cabin, he had disappeared. He did not show up for three days, and when he did, Tab was saddled and all ready to strike out for Wasco. The Indian grunted when he came up and held out a piece of paper. Tab knew what it was.

"Huh," said Red Eagle. "You no go home yet. You catchum gold first. Here!" He pointed. "Here, you catchum big fool gold. You go Seven Devils you catchum gold plenty. Swede gold over there. You good man. Injun savvy evil spirit. Spirit no catchum good man. Catchum bad man sure. You go."

That was all. His act of gratitude done, the stoic son of the desert turned on his heel and mounted his pony. A half hour later he was only a speck on the desert. Tab Conners held the map in his hand and studied it. Here was the stake that had cost so many lives. Would it cost another?

Three days later he had crossed the desert and was on his way to the

haunted fastness of the Seven Devils. It was the first time that he had ever been in such a country, and after that first day he made up his mind that it would be the last time. Tab was used to mountains, but not such mountains as these. The scenery was sublime, but the heights had a weirdness that was uncanny. The cliffs had a beetling bleakness, eagles swept the heights, and the cañons slept in haunted silences. Verdure on the first range was almost none, and water was only a tormenting wish. Whoever had named the place the Seven Devils had done well.

Yet the trail indicated by the map was clear and easy to find. The map said two ranges and places were indicated where water could be found. Tab ascended the first ridge and found the water hole on the other side. Also he encountered the first reminder of the Swede's warning. He had watered his horse and was just gathering some dry twigs for a camp fire when he ran across a white object protruding from the shifting sand. He stooped to examine it and then he wondered. It was a skeleton hand still holding in its bony clutch a rusty Colt.

Tab shuddered when he saw it and looked about. Then he examined the colt to find two chambers empty. The man had died in combat, whether in offense or defense, he could not make out. Further search revealed the man's tattered rags, weather-beaten, and rotten from the storms of many hard winters.

Tab built his fire, cooked his bacon, and lay down under a full moon that traveled up the jagged points of a silent mountain. He had his plans, and he had his own way of going to his strange destination. He intended to follow the line of direction closely, but he proposed to keep a careful lookout. He was not afraid of a haunt, and he had no fear of a hoodoo. The danger might exist in the water or in a thousand and one

other things, but he knew that it would be natural.

He recalled the Swede's warning as it had been told to him, and he wondered what sort of watchdog could have been meant. Perhaps a landslide, boulders, or a trap. But it could not be a trap, for any trap, once sprung, could hardly be set again all of itself. He knew that men had fought for the mysterious reward, and so he interpreted the rusty Colt that he had found. Men coming in and men fighting over the right of way. But he knew that he was alone, and that no one had been over the trail for many years.

But that belief received a severe shock the very next day when he reached the third big cañon. Here he found another camping spot and a clear spring just as indicated on the map. After staking the horse he followed up the cañon to find what was around the bend. He was gone about two hours, and it was twilight when he returned. Everything was as usual, except that the horse seemed nervous and worried.

Tab started his camp fire and then stepped over to the horse. Suddenly he stopped. He was not sure, but he thought that he had seen a track. The track was dim and obscure and muffled by the soft sand, but Tab could make out the plain print of a toe where the palm of the foot had not twisted. He stooped over to examine it and then followed the successive steps that led out to the firmer ground. Sure enough it was a footprint—almost bearlike—of a man. Or was it a man? Tab was not so sure. If it were that of a man, it was by far the largest and the strangest foot that he had ever seen. Tab would have called it a bear's track but for the toes. The alignment was that of the human foot, except that the curve was tremendously broad. Surely it was the foot of a giant.

Tab was not a coward, but when things like that took to prowling about

one's camp, he had a right to feel uneasy. There was something about the Swede's gold, even in the telling, that made a man's blood curdle. The horse was restless and excited. He nickered as Tab came out, and then suddenly he stopped to prick up his ears and look down the cañon. Tab followed the look and studied the place carefully. There was only the steep jagged sides of the cañon, the blue-gray tint of the heights and the eerie silence of lonely desolation.

The place was alive with great birds, vultures sweeping in the distant blue and combing the mountains for what stray pickings the place could afford. Tab watched one of them come into the walls of the cañon and swing down with a rush of silent wings. Then it shot up between the sides like a bullet and began soaring up into the evening sky. Tab knew the buzzard instinct—that it has a way of following death even into the future, but still he had no real feeling of fear.

He picked up his rifle and started down the cañon. For half an hour, while there was still daylight, he studied every cranny that the place could afford. Likewise he looked for tracks, and in one place in a dry wash he discovered a fresh imprint.

When it was too dark to see anything farther, Tab returned to camp, cooked his meal, and lay down to think it over. That night he slept with one eye open and his ears alert to catch the slightest inkling of sound.

But there were no more signs during the night. Next day Tab found water, a rushing torrent that tumbled through the wildest kind of cañon.

He went as far as he could on his horse, and then decided to camp again. A mile's further investigation convinced him that the rest of the distance would have to be made on foot. The way was steep, and the only ingress was through a tumble of gigantic boulders and along

cliffs where footing was precarious for even a climber. Yet the goal was close, and the map indicated only a few miles farther. Tab decided to stake his horse and take his time for a careful investigation. In the morning he proposed to go forward and complete his quest. However, when he returned to camp he discovered something that set him to deep thinking. He found that his camp had been visited a second time.

But this time there was evidence that the stranger had been almost caught. Tab's saddlebags had been rifled and the contents dropped about in a confused manner. Tab seized his forty-five and ran down the cañon, but whoever it was, or whatever it was, had escaped. There was only the old weirdness, the roar of the water, and the blue sky hanging like a ribbon above his head. Once he thought he heard a sound like a boulder falling into the water, but that was all. He hurried down the cañon, looking for tracks, but the way was covered with dry gravel and there was not a place where a print would show. And all the time he was wondering what could have been wanted in his saddlebags. He returned to the camp wondering, and when he reached it, he had still more to study.

The camp was on a level bend where there was plenty of grass. On one side was a beach that had been washed by the swishing water. The level compact sand on the higher part of the beach told that there had been a freshet at no distant date. Tab picked up the contents of the saddlebags, put them away, and carefully noted them. Nothing had been taken; and so Tab concluded that there was nothing wanted or that the intruder had been frightened away before he could make a selection. Evidently the fellow had followed or had been living here all along.

Could it be that there was a man, or a semblance of a man, living in this wild neck of desolation? No one had ever

come back! And then again there was that footprint. Tab remembered its size. The thought made him turn around suspiciously and watch the walls of the cañon carefully. Only the same old sound rang in his ears; but at the same time there was an insistence that drove with a haunting undertone. He went down to the water's edge. The water splashed and swished and crooned an eerie sound. Perhaps it was the depths of the cañon, or the sound of the rushing stream, or still again it might have been the subconscious knowledge of what had taken place in the immediate vicinity.

Gold is gold, and is often found in the strangest places, and if there is anything in the adage that danger will guard the richest treasure, then the wealth ahead would be an Eldorado. Tab stooped to put his hand in the water, and then he stopped to look. He was looking at an object half covered with fine gravel and magnified by the clear water. But it was plain—just as plain as though it had come out of the store yesterday. He reached his hand in the stream and took hold. It was a forty-five! The barrel had been buried, but the butt, by some freak of the water, had been left to view.

Another Colt—and that meant another man! Surely the place had a story to tell. Tab looked up. A streak of sunlight was just tipping across the jagged top of one of the Seven Devils. That sunlight seemed to be miles away, and a part of another world. Outside was sunlight and freedom and the open lure of the great wild desert. Tab wondered why he had come.

But when he stood up to go back to his fire, he saw something else. Down the stream was a track set in the sand. It was the same track of the same foot; but there was something else—a smaller track of a modern shoe! Two! Two men! They had been in the camp and had leaped away when they had heard

him coming. Tab had not been able to track them when he ran down the cañon, because he had not gone close to the water. For a little distance Tab followed the footprints. Then he turned back.

Just as he reached the camp he picked up an object from the gravel—a shell! But of that he was not so sure. It might have been one of his own. Anyway, it took off some of the spookiness and gave him some assurance of a fight. But if the men were armed and wanted to get him, why had they not already done it? Why had they gone through his stuff?

The answer came when he was eating his supper. Of course! The map! They were looking for the map. Tab had kept the map in his pocket. As long as he had it there and was going ahead toward the Swede's gold, he would be safe. Coming back it would be a different matter. After that Tab staked his horse close by for company, and went to sleep.

In the morning Tab went over the map for the last time and then set out to follow the directions as far as possible. The directions were clear, and yet at the same time indefinite. The Swede had named the last camping place and had then drawn a crooked line to indicate the course of the cañon. At the end of the line was a straight curve upward, a zigzag, and then an arrow pointing down. Below the arrow was a cross, and under the cross the words: "Dis my gold." Rather a vague lead when he considered the obstacles in the way!

Tab decided that the only thing to do was to keep on until he came to a cliff. That would indicate the straight lift of the line; also the zigzag would mean the climb. But was there a cliff? And if there was, what would the gold be doing there? Tab passed that up when he remembered that the Swede would have his own reasons. And then

again there was the watchdog. "Dat faller bane darn goot watchdog." Those were the Swede's words, and from what had happened during the years that followed, they must have had a world of meaning.

Tab was going along with his forty-five ready and his eyes open for the least inkling of trouble. The way was crowded with boulders and the bottom of the cañon was interspersed with waterfalls. The air was roaring with sound—the booming of the waters and the crowding of the echoes along the walls of the cañon. For a mile he worked his way over the rocks and around the falls that barred his passage, peering around each turn and hoping each time for the thing he looked for.

Then, suddenly, just as indicated on the map, it came into view. He had come to a sheer cliff that seemed to be the end of the cañon. The water was coming out of an opening at the foot, and on the side of the cañon running back was a zigzag ledge leading upward. Tab sat down.

For a whole hour he studied. He took the map out and went over each detail. As nearly as he could make out, there was a path, and that path wound up the sides of the cañon, then out on the cliff, and then down. What in the world could have possessed the man to select such a hiding place? And even if he had selected it, how in the world had he got the gold up there. Tab went over the whole face of the cliff and could see nothing. He finally made up his mind that the only way would be to make the climb.

Fortunately that was not so difficult as he had anticipated. The way led along the walls of the cañon, up and back from the face of the cliff. He had climbed for half an hour and had reached a height of about three hundred feet. Down below was the roar of the torrent, the swish of the waters, and the noonday sun painting the air

with a thousand rainbows. There was no life other than that of the vultures and the eagles soaring above him. Always there were these great birds in this place of weirdness, birds of the heights; and heights that rose sheer to the clouds themselves.

As he climbed, the mystery of the thing and its strangeness became greater. "Dat faller bane darn good watchdog. He bane killer." Always the words rang in his ears and kept him thinking. Then suddenly the way changed, and he found himself headed straight out on the cliff.

It was a dizzy sight. Down below the stream was like a ribbon of silver and the gigantic boulders like so many pebbles. The way was perilous in the extreme. For a moment Tab hesitated. Then he put his hands against the cold walls and began to make his way out as well as he could. At first his progress was slow, and then something, he knew not what, impelled him with speed, and he began almost to run along the narrow ledge to the shelter of a protected shelf that was right ahead of him. At the same time there came over him the weirdest feeling that he had experienced in his whole active life. Something above him! He knew not what! Premonition told him to get under the shelter of that overhanging shelf of rock. There was something above him or something behind him, he knew not which.

As soon as he reached the wide, protected shelf of rock, he turned. Then he saw! It was Toby!

Toby?

Toby and another. And Toby was barefoot. But that was not all. The man behind big Toby was pointing down the cliff, but Toby was pointing directly at Tab. And Tab was looking into the mouth of a forty-five. All in the split part of a second!

It was death. Death! And then—there was a streak like a bullet and Tab

saw the bodies of the two men hurtling over the cliff.

At the same moment Tab fired. It was an instinctive shot—from the hip; he meant it for Toby, but instinct sent it into the object that had hurled the bandits over the cliff. Half dazed, Tab watched it all. He saw three objects hurl through space and dash on the rocks below. Then he understood. The men had been hit by an eagle. The eagle must have had its nest up on the heights.

The eagle was the watchdog of the Swede and was the killer. It was all plain now, and at the same time it was a greater mystery than ever. Why had not the Swede told about the eagle? Tab could understand the absence of detail in the other map, because that one had been drawn on his death bed; and his brother, the boy from Sweden, might have perished from natural causes. But this map had been given to his squaw wife! Tab wondered. But just then he saw something else that took his wonder away and gave him a still greater one. He was looking over the ledge, and he was looking directly at the Swede's gold!

Far down, close to the bed of the stream, was a round object that looked scarcely larger than an egg. The sun was shining on it and there could be no mistake. It was gold! Gold!! Gold!!! And if it looked so large from above, what was it from below! There was no way down from the cliff, but from where he was standing, Tab could make out a way from the stream below. The Swede had figured it out with diabolical cleverness. The gold could be seen from above, but it was death to look at it; and from below it certainly could not have been discovered.

An hour later Tab was on the floor of the cañon and had climbed to the shelf. Gold beyond his dreams—just as the Swede had said; and it was all

for him! And down in the stream below the shelf Tab found where the gold had come from. But in that Tab had no interest. He was going home. To home and his mother and his young sweetheart.

Tab examined the bodies of Big Toby and his companion. He noticed the size of Toby's feet. The two men had been following him. Toby had doubtless worn out his shoes on the desert and had picked up a companion. They had intended to let Tab take the risk of finding the gold and then rob him. But they had been too eager, and had come out on the cliff. The eagle had knocked them over the edge, to their death, instead of Tab.

Three days later Tab was coming out of the Seven Devil range and was hitting into the level stretch of the open desert. A rider was coming toward him. Tab watched the rider pass through the focus of a mirage and visualize into the shape of an Indian. It was Red Eagle. Red Eagle riding with easy grace. Tab rode up. Red Eagle grunted.

"Huh!" said the Indian. "You

catchum! You catchum gold, eh? You no die?"

"No," said Tab. "I did not die, but I came mighty near it. What's this?"

Red Eagle was holding out a thin strip of paper. He grunted as Tab took it and began to read it. "Huh," he said. "Red Eagle he know that evil spirit can no hurt good man. But just the same Red Eagle she come to make sure. Injun is afraid. He give white man paper to go after gold. He think he give him all. Then he find out big mistake. He go home to squaw. Squaw tell him that papoose tear off this piece of the paper. This piece. You read him?"

"That's all right," said Tab, reading it. "It's just a notation.

And it was. It was the note that the Swede had written warning the man who sought the gold to beware of the eagle. That settled it all. Nevertheless Tab had been lucky. He was not so sure about being a good man, but he was certain that the Good Spirit had been with him, and he rewarded Red Eagle with some of the gold, as was his due.

RAIN MAKER MAKES GOOD

FOR a number of years past, Charles H. Hatfield has been operating through the dry regions of the West as a "rain maker." His contract with farmers and ranchers usually guarantees a certain amount of rainfall over a special area within a given time. Failing even by a fraction of an inch to produce the stipulated result at any of the designated recording points, Hatfield loses all his payment.

The latest achievement of Hatfield resulted in his receipt of a check for eight thousand dollars for rain-making operations from March 15th to April 15th of this year, when he is said to have produced a rainfall of 2.50 inches in the Tulare Lake bottoms and 1.50 inches at Coalinga, California. The former feat netted Hatfield six thousand five hundred dollars and the latter one thousand five hundred dollars. The payment was made by W. H. Elliget, a Tulare Lake grain grower.

The rain-maker's method of producing precipitation is his own secret, and he guards it carefully. He and his assistants work at the top of a tower, mixing exploding chemicals, and this is supposed to bring the much-needed rain to the drought-stricken sections of the country in which his services are engaged.

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tossed the lifeless end of his cigarette away, half closed his eyes, lifted his voice, and sang:

"Oh, I love a girl in Sagebrush,
And another in Gold Town——"

His raucous voice shattered the silence of the waste places. It was not much of a song, neither was Bert Salern much of a singer, and it became immediately apparent that Lizard resented the affair. Suddenly the horse side-stepped neatly and caused Bert Salern to "grab leather" to prevent himself being unseated. The song ceased abruptly, but Bert Salern's voice did not.

"Lizard, dang your hide, I believe that you're right down jealous!" he declared. "Every time I start singin' about them girls in Sagebrush and Gold Town, you throw some kind of a fit. Is it pretty to try to dump me in the dirt? Them girls are only make-believe, Lizard, old hoss. I hope to meet a real one some time. It can't be that it's my voice you don't like, 'cause a music teacher told me once that my execution was wonderful. You behave, hoss, or you'll feel my quirt!"

Lizard bobbed his head and flapped his ears again, and on they rode. The heat waves continued to dance; the glaring sun blazed in a cloudless sky mercilessly.

"It sure and certain is hot, old hoss!" Bert Salern declared again. "Purgatory won't have any terrors for me after this. You seem to be standin' it pretty well, Lizard, so I reckon that you're well named. This is one tough trip, hoss. But we sure and certain have to make it. This place we're goin' ain't any paradise, and the gents in it ain't angels exactly, as we may be due to find out. Step out, hoss!"

Lizard stepped out. For a distance of a couple of hundred yards or so there was a high ledge of rock, along the base of which they traveled in the shade. The air seemed dead and stagnant, but even

hot shade was welcome. The ledge kept off the direct rays of the burning sun.

"Oh, I know a girl in Sagebrush,
And another in Gold Town——"

This time Lizard did not make an attempt to side-step and unseat his master. Perhaps he knew that it was useless to try. Bert Salern was not easily unseated when he bestrode a horse. He had ridden in many a rodeo, and several horses who believed themselves to be tough had learned to their sorrow that Salern knew a thing or two about riding.

"Sure a tough trip that has to be made," he continued, slapping the horse on its neck in a sudden demonstration of affection. "Glad that there's no posse on our heels now. We'd sure sweat some if we had to travel at top speed."

And then he was silent for a time, and seemed to be half asleep, except that he opened his eyes wide now and then to be sure that the horse was traveling in the right direction. The sun commenced to sink in the west, and the breath of a breeze came down from the distant hills. Streaks of red and scarlet and orange showed in the western sky. The hills took on shades of purple.

Bert Salern aroused himself.

"Lizard, old hoss, something seems to tell me that we're goin' to arrive at the proper moment. It won't be too light and it won't be too dark. Just the hour of shadows, Lizard, when a man's aim is pretty sure to be bad. And we want it bad, hoss! We sure don't want anybody aimin' at us any too good. And I'll bet a hat that somebody'll aim at us. And shoot, too!"

Lizard flapped his ears and bobbed his head again and broke into a canter, a peculiar gait which he could maintain for hours over rough country, and which allowed him to cover a wonderful distance without seeming to use speed at all.

The gap in the hills was very near at hand now. Bert Salern seemed to come to life and show sudden, keen interest. He sat erect in his saddle and peered ahead, once or twice bending forward and shading his eyes with his hand. He was inspecting that little gap in a row of cliffs.

It was a peculiar formation, even for that country. It looked menacing, in a way. The cliffs seemed to frown down upon anybody who approached them. And the gap was only a few feet wide, with jumbles of huge boulders on either side of it.

"Hoss, you could hide an army in that place," Salern said. "There ain't any army there, I reckon, but there's some bad and wicked hombres who imagine that they're a whole army. My good gosh! I wonder what kind of a reception we're goin' to get. I reckon that we'll know before long, though. Things ain't goin' to be delayed many more minutes."

On they went, until they were directly beneath the cliffs. The gap was open before them, only a short distance away. Salern took tobacco and a package of papers from his pocket and commenced the manufacture of a cigarette. As he worked at it, he started to hum the song again, but he did not lift his voice. He appeared to be waiting for something. His eyes were narrowed, his ears strained.

Came the crack of a shot from one side of the narrow gap! Salern pulled his horse to an abrupt stop.

"I knew it!" he breathed.

CHAPTER II.

THROUGH THE GAP.

THE bullet had whistled past within a few feet of Bert Salern's head. But he did not drop from the saddle, take to cover among the rocks, seek out his assailant by time-honored methods, and then engage in a revolver duel. He

deliberately threw his left leg across the saddle and assumed the most comfortable position possible. He continued the manufacture of his cigarette, flipped it upward and deftly caught it between his lips, struck a match and ignited the smoke, and puffed at it.

Not a move did he make toward the six-gun that swung at his hip. He was extremely careful in all his movements. Another shot crashed, another bullet whistled its sinister message close to his head.

"Rotten shootin', hoss," he said to Lizard, in low tones. "But I reckon that hombre, whoever he is, wants to shoot rotten. He ain't quite certain of our age, color, and lineage, he ain't. He's just intimatin', in his playful and delicate way, that we'd better stop where we are and stay put while we wait for developments. And I'll bet, hoss, they won't be long comin'."

A voice hailed him from the rocks on one side of the gap. "Stay right where you are, stranger, and don't make a move!" it said.

"I don't aim to," Bert Salern raised his voice in answer. "And my aim's some better than yours, at that!"

By way of reply there came a third crack, and for the third time a bullet whistled in Salern's direction. And this one cracked his high-topped sombrero from his head and sent it spinning in the dirt.

"How's that for aim?" demanded the man in the rocks.

"I'm satisfied!" Bert called. "You needn't come any closer. That made me nervous, and my Lizard hoss nervous too. What's the idea takin' shots at a peaceable stranger, anyway?"

"Stay where you are, and you'll find out," he was warned. "Get down and get your hat, if you want to, but on this side of your horse."

"Which is this side? I haven't seen you yet," Salern informed him.

"The off side will do, stranger."

"Thanks!" Salern got down deliberately, picked up his hat, and dusted it off and inspected it, then returned it to his head. "That was mighty good shootin'," he continued, as he got back into the saddle and made himself comfortable. "I couldn't have done better myself."

He puffed at his cigarette again and hummed the song about the girls of Sagebrush and Gold Town once more, and narrowed his eyes to watch through the gap ahead. The man in the rocks did not speak again.

And presently Bert Salern saw two riders galloping toward him through the gap, riders who rode like veterans, men stern of visage and bewhiskered.

"Tough hombres, Lizard. I knew it!" Salern whispered to the horse.

He made no move as the two men approached. He smoked his cigarette as though he had been sitting on the porch in front of the hotel in the town of Sagebrush after partaking of a satisfactory meal. There was nothing in his face or manner to indicate fear.

The two men who galloped forward were armed and watchful. They separated as they came on, one riding to either side of Salern.

"Wise men," he commented to Lizard. "Old game—but always a wise one. I might get one, if I wanted to do it—but the other'd get me while I was shootin'. Well, we don't care just now, do we, hoss? Time to think about violence later."

The two riders stopped in clouds of dust and flying sand and regarded Bert Salern narrowly. Their looks were not friendly. There seemed to be menace in their demeanor.

"Howdy, gents!" Salern said. "Glad to greet two manly riders of the plains and desert. Somebody took a couple of shots at me from the rocks. What do you reckon such actions mean?"

"Who are you?" one of them demanded. He seemed to be a sort of

leader of the two. His beard was shaggy, his clothes unkempt, his face that of a beast.

"The name's Salern," Bert replied. "Probably it don't mean anything to you. It don't mean much to anybody except maybe me."

"Well, what you doin' prowlin' away out here in the middle of no place?"

"Seems like there's a lot of us prowlin' around these parts," Salern replied. "What's your name, if I am allowed to ask?"

"Hank Lang, if it'll do you any good to know."

"Thanks, Hank," said Salern. "Now I'll tell you my one and sole object out here on the rim of blazes. I'm lookin' for the Village of Wanted Men."

"What's that?" demanded Hank Lang.

"I reckon that you know, Hank," Salern replied. "I'll bet that you're a wanted man yourself."

"Say, you—"

"Oh, don't get mad about it, Hank. You ain't got anything on me."

"So you're a wanted man, are you?"

"I reckon! I was forced—actually compelled, mind you," Salern said, grinning a bit, "to plug a jasper in Sagebrush. In other and smoother words, Hank, old-timer, I put a couple of bullets where I thought they'd do the most good. Do you grasp my meanin'?"

"You're pretty fresh," Hank Lang told him.

"Gosh, I hope not! I don't aim to be insultin'. I was just tellin' you. Bein' a wanted man, I didn't want any posse trailin' at my heels and maybe gettin' rough and slingin' hot lead my way. I don't crave to be a target if I can help it."

"Where did you hear about the Village?" Hank demanded.

"My good gosh! Dang it, every man in the county has heard of the Village. But there ain't many can guess where it is, I reckon. It's a little cup in the

hills, protected by high cliffs, and one entrance, through a narrow gap. It's got a stream tricklin' through, so rumor's got it, and the wanted men have built 'em a few dobe huts and are defyin' the world to come and get 'em. Well, Hank, I'm here to help defy the world."

"You've found the place, I reckon, and it's just as you've said," Hank replied. "But we're a little suspicious about strangers. So, when the gap guard fired his rifle, I came out to look you over. And suppose you tell me this, and pronto—how did you know where to find the place?"

"My gosh! I prospected through this part of the country with an old desert rat, when I was a boy. And I remembered the place—tricklin' stream and all. So, naturally, I guessed it. There wasn't any Village of Wanted Men then, but there was plenty of wanted men. You satisfied now?"

"It's for the boss to be satisfied, not me," said Hank Lang.

"Sufferin' rattlesnakes! I supposed you was the boss."

"I'm not, but I'll take you to him. He'll decide how to deal with you. If you'll just hand over that gun—butt first—"

"Why, Hank, I'm right down surprised at you," Bert Salern told him. "You know it ain't etiquette to ask a man to do that. It ain't just the right thing to ask a man to hand over his gun, unless you're a sheriff, or somethin' like that, and you know it. There's two of you watchin' me. And you c'n look on my back trail for miles and won't see anybody followin' me. Your gap guard, as you call him, would have spotted 'em a long time ago."

"All right, Salern. Keep your gun until we see the boss. But take my advice and don't let your hand go to strayin' near it."

"Certain not. Shucks! I came here in peace and quiet to find the Village.

I never saw such a suspicious man as you are, Hank."

"You ride between us, and a little ahead, Salern."

"Shucks! I just knew that you'd spring that old one. You sure are suspicious."

"Straight through the gap—and watch yourself."

"Got any objections if I make me a fresh cigarette? No? Thanks, Hank! On we go, then. Between you and a mite ahead, huh? That's funny!"

Pressure from a pair of knees, a touch on the reins, and the wondering Lizard traveled straight ahead and into the gap, where now the shadows were commencing to gather. Bert Salern, every move a careful one, made and lighted his fresh cigarette. And once more he began humming the song:

"Oh, I know a girl in Sagebrush,
And another in Gold Town—"

Hank Lang and his companion frowned and curled their lips in disgust at the song, but they said nothing.

CHAPTER III.

"ALL SET!"

THROUGH the gathering shadows of the gap they rode, Bert Salern maintaining the position he had been ordered to keep and the other two watching him closely.

It was a distance of less than a quarter of a mile through the gap, with several twists and turns, and the gap itself was scarcely wide enough to allow the passage of an ordinary wagon. But Salern did not doubt the absence of wagons there; these citizens of the Village of Wanted Men did not care to have a trail winding across the waste places and directing some big posse to their hiding place.

Suddenly the gap widened, and Bert Salern got his first view of the scene for several years. A dozen or so adobe huts were clustered along the banks of

the little trickling stream now. One of them was longer and wider than the others, and appeared to be some sort of storehouse. Half the gap already was in semidarkness, but the dying sun touched the other because of the position of the cliffs.

"Straight ahead, stranger," Hank Lang commanded. "We're goin' to have a little talk with the boss."

"Who's the boss?" Salern asked. "And how did he get the job—fight for it?"

"I ain't afraid to say that the big boss of the town is Bill Pagger, and he's always had the job. Bill came here two jumps ahead of a posse, found the place, and started the town."

"'Tain't much of a boom town, is it?"

"We ain't hankerin' for a lot of residents," Hank Lang told him. "And you'd better let me give you a little tip, Salern. Don't talk so fresh when you talk with Bill Pagger. He don't like that way of doin'."

"I reckon that I ain't a mite alarmed," Salern retorted. "Don't you try to scare me any, Hank."

He chuckled as he said it, and got no reply. Ahead of them, in front of one of the adobe huts, stood four men. One of them stepped away from the group and walked forward. He was short, fat, but had something of a distinguished appearance when compared to the others. He stood with arms akimbo, watching the approaching riders.

"I'll bet that's your Bill Pagger," Salern said.

"You win the bet, stranger," Hank Lang replied. "And you'd better be careful how you talk to him. He didn't do so well in the poker game last night."

"Huh! Plays poker, does he?"

"We all do, when we've got anything at all to play for," Hank Lang told him. "Generally we clean any stranger who comes to the village. You're the first stranger for some time."

"Does the stranger get any chance, or is he just naturally compelled to lose to keep his skin from bein' perforated?" Salern wanted to know. "There's a heap of difference, and I value my skin."

"If you can win, you're welcome."

"Thanks! I may take a hand. I don't dislike poker myself, when she's played fair and open and the fifth ace barred, and things like that."

"Are you insinuatin'——" Hank began.

"I ain't sayin' a single word out of the way," Salern interrupted.

They brought their mounts to a halt before Bill Pagger, who immediately looked the newcomer up and down and then turned his questioning glance upon Hank Lang.

"This here hombre comes ridin' up to the gap and claims that he's a wanted man," Hank explained. "He was right down fresh about it, too, so I fetched him in."

"How'd you find the place?" Bill Pagger demanded, a certain amount of hostility in his manner.

"Prospected around here when I was a boy. Heard the description and thought I recognized it. Rode here to find out. My name's Bert Salern. I plugged a man in Sagebrush. That's the whole story and why I'm here."

"Seems reasonable enough," Pagger replied. "What do you expect to do here?"

"Whatever the rest of you do," Salern answered. "I ain't a bit particular. I cook my own grub and roll in my own blankets. Just turn me loose and let me run around and play. Make me a citizen, old-timer—that's all."

"Hank says you're fresh."

"I'm inclined to be, bein' young. I'm only twenty-eight," said Salern. "Of course, I wouldn't get fresh with you."

"You'd better not!" Bill Pagger informed him. "Well, Salern, we'll try you out. But you'd better watch your-

self. You'll obey rules here, and all that."

"Oh, I aim to do that. I won't want to change any of your rules. Whatever you say goes with me."

"Get off your horse," Pagger commanded.

Bert Salern did so, while the others watched him. He stood before Bill Pagger with his hat cocked to one side of his head and his feet far apart, and started the manufacture of his cigarette.

"Money?" Pagger demanded.

"Some. I reckon it wouldn't make much of a dent in the country's debt, though."

"Any supplies?"

"About enough grub for to-morrow," Salern replied. "You c'n understand that I didn't have much time to go playin' around some store and stock up."

"I suppose not," Pagger said, grinning a bit. "Hobble your horse across the creek and take that dobe hut at the end of the row. It's yours for the present. But you want to understand that we ain't accepted you completely yet. We'll try you out a few days first."

"Certain and sure! I'd expect that."

"All right, Salern. Now—give me your gun."

Bert Salern's eyes narrowed for an instant, though the smile remained upon his lips.

"I don't like to hand my gun to any man," he said. "I reckon you ain't afraid of me."

"We're not. But you'll give me your gun if you want to stay in the village, and keep alive."

"When do I get it back?"

"When I'm satisfied that you're all right, and not before," Pagger declared.

"Oh, well! I suppose it's rules!" Salern reached down and drew his six-gun from its holster, and did it in a careful manner. He extended it to Bill Pagger—but first. "I'd like to keep the old belt and holster on," Salern continued. "It wouldn't feel natural at all

if I didn't have it swingin' against my leg."

"You can keep it."

"Thanks. The dobe shack at the end? All right. I'll put my stuff in there and cook me some grub after a while. Nice little place you've got here, Pagger. Since I'm goin' to be one of you, I'd like to know somethin' about my neighbors. How many you got in the town now?"

"Eight now," Bill Pagger said. "There was nine, but one of them made a little mistake the other day."

"Uh-huh! I reckon that I understand."

"We caught him tryin' to steal from the storehouse—and he didn't last long. The boys got rough."

"Yep! Now I do understand. How do you get supplies? Got a storehouse, huh?" Salern asked.

"It seems to me that you're wantin' to know a lot of things for a newcomer, but I don't mind tellin' you," Bill Pagger replied. "Now and then a couple of the men slip out and go to some town where they ain't known, and—well, they get grub."

"Uh-huh! Then forgettin' to pay for it, maybe," Salern said, grinning again. "Oh, I reckon I understand, all right. I'd admire to go on one of them there expeditions myself."

"And maybe lead a posse back?" Bill Pagger said. "Do you think we are fools? One of our little rules here, Salern, is that no man leaves the village until he has been here six months—and maybe not then unless we're pretty sure of him."

"That's all right. The village looks good to me. And for certain reasons, I ain't hankerin' to visit the marts o' trade just yet, anyway. Well, I might as well put my blankets and stuff in the dobe shack and hobble my hoss."

"Go ahead, Salern. There's a poker game in the storehouse in a couple of hours—if you've got some money."

"Uh-huh. I dunno. I'm pretty tired, and I don't like to play poker when I ain't in form. But I'll think it over."

He spoke softly to Lizard and turned away, and the horse followed him. Along the little creek he went until he came to the adobe shack at the end of the row. He stooped and peered inside. It seemed to be fairly clean, which was gratifying, so Salern unsaddled his horse and put his saddle and blanket roll and small outfit inside the shack.

"Well, Lizard, old hoss, we're here at last," he said. "It was sure some tough trip, but we've done it. And found everything just like I expected, too. Huh! Somethin' seems to tell me, Lizard, that we're goin' to have fun and excitement. Money and poker, huh? And guns! We'll see about that. Now I'm goin' to fix the rope for you all nice and pretty, old hoss, and you'll be where you can chew that coarse grass and get water from the creek. You come along with me."

Lizard followed obediently. Bert Salern was a man who cared for his horse well. And within a few minutes Lizard had been rubbed down and made as comfortable as possible.

Then Salern returned to the adobe shack. He glanced along the row and saw some of the citizens of the Village of Wanted Men preparing the evening meal over little fires before their huts. Some sort of light flickered through the nearest window of the storehouse.

"Some layout!" Salern told himself. "It'd take a whooper of a posse to get in here. But it's a danged tough place to stay forever, I'll remark to the world!"

He went into the hut and unrolled his blankets. He took out some supplies and a small coffeepot and a frying pan and left the blankets in one corner on the dirt floor. Outside again he gathered chips and sticks along the creek, and built his fire.

He got water from the creek and put the coffee on, prepared for flapjacks and bacon, and went back into the hut again, making sure there was nobody around.

And from beneath the bulge of his trousers above the boot and below his chaps, he extracted another six-gun.

"Guns, huh?" he said to himself. "I reckon that a man's got to protect himself."

He did not put the revolver into the holster which Bill Pagger had allowed him to retain. He tossed it beneath the tumbled mass of blankets in the corner of the shack. Pagger might take a notion to search him, he knew.

And then he thought better of it and got the gun again and put it under a small pile of debris in another corner, covering it carefully. Pagger might order the hut searched, too!

"Money, huh?" he said to himself.

Going to the open door, he glanced up and down the row of adobe shacks. There was nobody in his immediate vicinity. So he reached beneath his shirt and into a money belt there, and took out a wad of bills. Extracting a single twenty, he slipped it into his pocket. He carried the remainder of the currency to another corner of the hut and buried it there.

"I reckon that we're all fixed now," he mused. "A man's entitled to take care of his life and property, 'specially when he's in the midst of a gang of wanted men. I didn't like the look in the face of Hank Lang and Bill Pagger when money was mentioned. If they get mine, it'll be for grub or because they win it!"

Out into the open he went again, sniffing at the coffee and frying bacon. He glanced around the corner of the shack to make sure that Lizard was all right. Then he squatted before his fire, put on a bit more fuel, and started to eat his evening meal.

The last light of day was dying, but

there was a full moon that cast glory upon the scene. The little fires flickered before the other shacks. Down by the storehouse some member of the community was objecting to something in a hoarse voice.

"All set!" Bert Salern told himself. "Now we'll play around and wait for them development things."

CHAPTER IV.

A SONG IN THE MOONLIGHT.

BERT SALERN was an experienced, careful and methodical camper and man of the outdoors. Having finished his meal, he scoured his frying pan with clean sand, washed the other utensils in the creek, prepared the coffeepot for the morning meal, stored it all away with his little supply of provisions, and then banked the embers of his fire.

Naturally, after that, he manufactured a cigarette, leaning against the wall of the adobe shack and glancing up and down the row of huts. Eight men in the town, Pagger had said—not including Salern, of course. No woman, evidently, in such a place, for wanted men, though known to have done so, seldom carry a wife into a retreat where life will be rough, rugged, and almost a constant terror.

"What a place!" Salern told himself. "But it's what comes to a lot of law-breakers, I reckon. Ho, hum!"

He puffed at his cigarette, hitched up his trousers, and strolled slowly along the row of adobe huts. The fires were dying out, and he saw no man, neither could he tell whether he was being watched, but he assumed it.

The bright moonlight made the ugly Village of Wanted Men a thing of beauty. Bert Salern yawned, for he was tired. But the fact that he was tired did not mean that he would retire to his blankets. He had been tired plenty of times before in his young life, and expected to be many times again.

The flickering lights coming through the glassless windows of the storehouse seemed to beckon to him, and he yielded. On he went toward the largest hut in the town, still walking slowly and smoking. He glanced around now and then, and behind him, but saw no one.

From inside the storehouse there came a burst of raucous laughter, a volume of curses from some man's throat. Salern stepped up to the nearest window and glanced inside. Seven men were there—the complete registry of the Village of Wanted Men except one, if Bill Pagger had spoken the truth. Salern supposed the eighth man was on guard at the gap. There was a poker game in progress, five men playing and the two others watching.

The door of the storehouse was an open aperture, though there was a door of planks that was barred in place when the establishment was closed for the night, as Salern learned afterward. He went to the door and stood just inside it, inspecting the place.

There was a rough plank counter, and a few shelves that evidently had been manufactured by some amateur carpenter. A few packages of goods were upon the shelves, some slabs of bacon, and a few small sacks of flour, other sacks that Salern guessed contained beans. On one end of the makeshift counter were packages of smoking tobacco.

Salern approached the table just as one of the men sprang up with an oath and the others burst into raucous laughter again. Bert Salern recognized the scene; the man who cursed had been "cleaned out" and was quitting the game.

"Every danged thing except the shirt on my back and my pants!" the man cried. "You wait till I go out from the Village next time for supplies. I'll come back with some real money, too—and then we'll see who does the clean-in!"

Another chorus of laughs greeted the outburst, and he strode angrily from the place, almost brushing Salern to one side. Salern went on to the table. Bill Pagger looked up and saw him.

"Eat supper?" the boss asked.

"I reckon!"

"Too tired for a little game? There's an empty chair now."

"You allow a stranger to sit in?" Salern asked.

"Sure, if he has some coin. Real coin's necessary in this game."

"I reckon that I can risk a little," Salern replied. "But I ain't any millionaire mine owner, or anything like that. How does this here game run—high?"

"No millionaires in this gang," Pagger replied. "We'll play for what you've got on you."

Salern slipped into the empty chair and glanced at the other players. Hank Lang was across the table from him, and Bill Pagger on his right. The other men Salern had not met before, except the one who had been with Hank Lang in the gap.

"Well, make some talk," Pagger said. "I'm banker."

Salern took the twenty-dollar bill from his pocket and tossed it upon the table. "I'm willin' to risk that," he said. "Give me a stack. Who've I got to watch out for in particular in this here game?"

"You'd better ask Hank Lang that," Bill Pagger said, with some heat in his voice. "He's just about cleaned all of us in the last week. When it comes to luck, Hank's got it all."

"Luck's a funny thing," Bert Salern said, as he stacked the chips Pagger tossed to him. "A man never can tell where she's goin' to strike. I reckon that I'm a fool to sit in a poker game as tired as I am, but a man never can tell, as I have remarked, and I've got a hunch."

"Maybe I'll have that twenty of

yourn before we're done," Hank Lang said, glaring at him. "You was pretty fresh to me when we met, and I've got a notion to take it out of your bank roll."

"Lots of men have notions," Salern replied, as he picked up his cards.

"Me, for instance. I've got three already, and I've got a notion that they ain't goin' to be good at all. So I'm out."

"Close player, are you?" Hank sneered.

"Sure, sir. You're the boss!" Salern replied.

"You mean anything personal by that?"

"How could I?" Salern asked, as though in surprise. "You didn't deal the cards."

"Why, you——" Hank Lang was half out of his chair as he spoke.

"Sit down, Hank, and play," Pagger commanded quickly. "You're spoilin' for a fight. If I was as much winner as you I'd be smilin' at all the world."

"He can't fight me, 'cause I ain't got a gun on me," Salern declared. "And even a decent-minded wanted man wouldn't plug an unarmed one."

"And you shut up, too, Salern," Pagger ordered.

"Sure, sir! You're the boss!" Salern declared. "Only I'm always cautious when I start in a card game with strangers. Ain't a man got a right to drop out the first few hands, if he wants to? Sure! All you jaspers, bein' old-timers, can understand and appreciate that."

Hank Lang glared at him across the table again. And again the cards were dealt, and once more Bert Salern looked at his hand. His face betrayed nothing, for he was an excellent poker player. He seemed scarcely to glance at the cards.

"I'll risk one little chip on this," he remarked.

"You'll risk more than that when it

gets around to me," Hank Lang told him.

"We'll see, Mr. Lang, when it gets around to you."

The game continued. It came time for Salern to draw. Pagger was dealing.

"Many?" he snapped.

"I didn't ask, but this here game is table stakes, I reckon."

"It is! Many?"

"Oh, I'll just play these," Salern told him. "I hate to cause the dealer any extra work. And I think I'll just slip a couple more chips into the pot, just to make it look comfortable and more like a game."

"And a couple more!" Hank Lang snapped out.

"And two!" said Salern. "My good gosh! Everybody else is droppin' out, Mr. Lang, and leavin' it to us. And you're the king-pin poker player of the crowd, which makes it look bad for me."

"Two more," Hank Lang said, his voice tense.

"Which takes my last chips," Salern told him, "with the exception of these two here. I may as well toss them into the pot, Mr. Lang."

Hank Lang hesitated, looked at his cards again, and Bert Salern, his cards face downward upon the table, leaned back in his chair and nonchalantly rolled one of his cigarettes. The others were silent, tense. Hank Lang was a mean man when he played poker, a bad loser, a vindictive man. And now he tossed his hand into the discard.

"I'm no fool!" he said. "Pat hand, have you? All right. Take the pot, this time!"

"Now that's right down kind of you," Salern declared, as he raked in the chips. "I need the money, you understand. And I was eager to see how this bunch played poker. Huh!"

Suddenly he flipped over his hand and spread out the cards. Those

around the table gasped. Nothing—a bluff! Hank Lang had been beaten at his own game in the first tilt.

With an oath Lang sprang from the box he was using as a chair. The box fell over with a crash. Bert Salern was watching, his muscles tensed for a spring, his face inscrutable.

"Still fresh, are you?" Lang cried.

"Why, I simply bluffed you out, Mr. Lang," Salern replied. "I'm right down surprised at the way you act, and you a big winner, as these men here have been sayin'."

"None of your lip to me!" Lang screeched.

Salern's eyes grew narrow for an instant. "Now you'd better cool off, Mr. Lang," he said. "I ain't got a gun on me, as I said, and as you know."

"You've got two fists, ain't you?"

"Oh, if you want a fist fight, I reckon that I can accommodate you," Salern replied, getting slowly up from the box where he was sitting. "I'm always willin' to oblige."

Hank Lang started around the table angrily. But Pagger was upon his feet and confronting him.

"Back, you!" he commanded. "I've got enough of this. Can't we have a quiet little game here any more? Sit down, Lang! Salern, are you deliberately tryin' to pick a fight with him? It looks like it!"

"Why, I never met the gentleman until a few hours ago," Salern declared. "Maybe I'm a bit peevish because I'm tired."

"You're too tired to play any more to-night," Bill Pagger told him, thus ordering him out of the game. "You'd better go to your shack and get some sleep."

"You're the boss," Salern replied. "I'll cash in, then."

He turned in his chips and got his money, while Hank Lang continued to glare at him. He did not even look at Lang again.

"Good evenin', gents," he said. "Hope to see you again when we're all in a better frame of mind."

Then he puffed at his cigarette and strolled to the door and out into the moonlit night, as nonchalantly as he had entered the place. He had doubled his twenty dollars, at least.

Behind him there was silence as the game commenced once more, save for Hank Lang muttering angry threats down in his throat. Salern went slowly along the row of huts and shacks toward his own. He was wondering about the system of guards at the gap, for he guessed that Bill Pagger would not leave it unguarded at night, especially since any descending posse would be sure to strike at that time.

He came to the shack, but he was not ready yet to go to his blankets. And so he tossed a few chips on the embers of his fire, and then went into the shack and unearthed the six-gun he had hidden there, and slipped it into his holster. His pet gun had been the one Pagger had taken from him; this was a smaller affair with a bright barrel, but a serviceable weapon for all that.

Out into the night Bert Salern went again. He squatted in front of the fire with his back propped against the wall of the shack, and smoked.

"Dang it, I'd go and talk to Lizard if it wasn't across the creek and I wasn't so blamed tired," he told himself. "I wouldn't be surprised any if I'd got on that man Lang's nerves, and he's a mean hombre if I ever saw one. I reckon I'd better keep my eyes peeled for him!"

And then he was quiet, smoking and resting and thinking of nothing much at all; but he was cautious and alert. He felt that he knew the men with whom he was dealing, and he knew it would pay to be careful at least until he was firmly established as one of them and his particular status known and acknowledged. But suddenly he be-

came doubly alert. No stealthy step caused it, or anything of the sort. To his ears through the moonlit night there came a song—a soft, sweet song in the voice of a woman. And he had believed that there was no woman in this Village of Wanted Men!

Bert Salern may have been a poor singer himself, but he knew good music and loved it, knew a voice when he heard one. And this song that came to him through the moonlit night was low and sweet—and Salern was aware of the fact that it was practically new!

"Whoever is singin' that ain't been in the Village long!" he told himself. "Sounds like a girl's voice, too—not an old woman's. My good gosh! It sounds like she was little and black-eyed and neat and sweet! Here's somethin' that I'll have to investigate, seems to me. Maybe, after singin' about them girls in Sagebrush and Gold Town all these months I've come to this here Village of Wanted Men to find a real girl."

And he chuckled at the thought and spoke to himself once more. "Shucks! She's probably the wife of one of the men here and as ugly as sin. I'm dreamin' in this fool moonlight."

Yet the song intrigued him as it was continued. It was a love song, too, and Bert Salern liked such. There was a sentimental streak in his nature that would not be denied. And the song was repeated half a dozen times, until Salern found that he had memorized the air and the words of it, and might have raised his own voice, except that he wished more to listen to the other singer.

The song came to an end, finally, and he commenced to think of crawling into his blankets and getting some sleep. Yet he was none too eager, for instinct told him he had one enemy in the Village already, that Hank Lang was "a mean hombre" and might feel inclined to pay a night visit when least expected or desired. There was no door to the

shack, no protection at all for a sleeping man.

"I just know what I'll do," he told himself. "I'll take my blankets and cross the creek and sleep within a few feet of Lizard, like I've done a few hundred times before. I'd like to see any jasper get within fifty feet of me sleepin' with old Lizard on the job. He's a watchdog, Lizard is!"

He tossed away his cigarette and prepared to get up and go inside the shack for his blankets. But suddenly he was rigid, alert, every nerve on edge. His right hand dropped down and whipped the six-gun from its holster. And so he waited.

And around the corner of the shack slipped—Hank Lang!

Bert Salern deliberately whirled the six-gun with a forefinger inside the guard, so that the moonlight flashed from its barrel.

"Was you lookin' for me, Mr. Lang?" he asked in a soft voice.

Hank Lang stopped, disconcerted, then grunted gruffly and came on. He had seen the flash of the gun; whatever move he had intended making was blocked now.

"Patrollin' the camp before I turn in," he growled. "One of us does it every night."

"Oh, I see. Well, it ain't a bad idea," Salern told him. "Nothin' like takin' precautions. Me—I always take precautions."

"Yeh?" Hank Lang sneered. "What's that you've got?"

"That, Mr. Lang, is a little six-gun—small model, but she carries quite some distance, and I know how to point her when I play with her!"

"You wait till Bill Pagger hears of this!"

"Oh, I know that you'll tell him."

"It's my duty. I'm his right-hand man."

"Ain't that nice?" Salern asked. "Well, tell him."

"You'd better hand that gun to me," Lang said. "I'll tell Bill you gave it to me and said that you had it in your blanket roll and forgot all about havin' it."

"But it wasn't in my blanket roll, and if it had been I sure wouldn't have forgotten all about it, and I hate a liar," Bert Salern replied. "I simply held it out on purpose. We'll see about it tomorrow—but to-night this little six-gun sleeps with me!"

"Have it your own way, Salern, but Bill Pagger will be mighty mad. And when he gets right down mad—look out! You're startin' in mighty wrong in the Village."

"Yeh? I'm right down sorry about that, o' course," Salern told him. "It's a shame for a man to start in wrong any place. You want to remember that, Mr. Lang."

"Salern, seems like you've been pickin' on me ever since you hit the Village."

"Oh, fiddle," Salern told him. "By the way, Mr. Lang, I'd admire to ask you a question. I heard some woman singin' a while back—a mighty nice song, too. Would you mind tellin' me who she is?"

Hank Lang seemed to bristle. He bent forward, his hands became fists, and his eyes blazed even in the moonlight. For an instant he breathed heavily, while Bert Salern watched him in amazement and held his six-gun ready for instant use. Hank Lang had the appearance of a man contemplating an attack.

Then Lang seemed to control himself somewhat. He stepped back a pace, straightened up, and relaxed his hands.

"For a newcomer in the Village," he said, "you're askin' entirely too many questions, Salern. About that woman—the less you ask about her, the better it'll be for you. And you'd better understand it!" He started on, down the line of huts and shacks.

"Good night, Mr. Lang, and I hope that you have pretty dreams," Salern called after him.

CHAPTER V.

SALERN MAKES A FRIEND.

AT break of day Bert Salern crawled from his blankets, slapped Lizard on the neck and rubbed his nose, spoke a few words to the horse, picked up his blankets, and returned across the creek to the adobe shack, after bathing his face and neck and hands in the ice-cold water. He had slept well within a few feet of the horse.

He built up his fire and prepared his breakfast, which he ate with plainly evident relish and good appetite. Up and down the row of huts other men were doing the same. He remembered the song of the night before, but he saw no woman around the huts, or going down to the creek for water.

"That was a right pretty song," he mused, "and it sounded like the singer might be right pretty, too. Wonder what Mr. Lang got so fussed up about when I asked about her? Just another thing for me to find out, I reckon. Startin' in bad in the Village, am I? We'd better be careful about that."

His dishes cleaned and put away, Salern crossed the creek again and held a one-sided conversation with Lizard. It appeared that Lizard did not like his surroundings. He sniffed at the other horses in the neighborhood as though they had been his inferiors—which they were.

"How you makin' out, Lizard?" he demanded. "What's that? Not so well? Don't you like your little play-mates? Now that's right down hard luck, Lizard, 'cause we certainly got to play around this here Village of Wanted Men. 'Tain't like as though you was a wanted hoss."

His interview with Lizard at an end, Salern recrossed the creek and stood be-

fore his hut. He manufactured a cigarette, but he did it mechanically, acting like a man whose mind was far away. Two of the men of the Village passed and growled greetings at him, and Salern merely grinned. He saw another riding toward the gap, and guessed he went to relieve the guard there.

The sun appeared in the sky, a blazing ball of heat, and its rays blistered the little cup encircled by the high cliffs. Salern stepped back into the shade of the doorway and smoked and watched. After a time he saw some of the men walking toward the storehouse. He left the hut and started in that direction.

The shiny six-gun which he had exhibited to Hank Lang the night before was in the holster against his hip. He made no effort to hide it, for he knew that it would avail him nothing to do so now. Bill Pagger, he supposed, would demand that gun. He did not doubt for an instant that Hank Lang had told of him possessing it.

Along the line of huts he walked slowly, glancing at each of them in turn. The streak of sentiment was upon him again, and he was searching for the woman of the song. But he saw no woman, nor evidence of one's presence. It was as though he had been dreaming the night before, save for Hank Lang's outburst.

He entered the storehouse to find Bill Pagger there, also the elderly man who had complained of losing at poker the night before, and Hank Lang. A fourth man entered behind him.

Bert Salern walked up to the counter, leaned against it, tilted his sombrero to one side, and spoke in his usual drawl.

"I reckon, Mr. Pagger, that I'll have to buy some provisions," he said, "seein' as how I've got money won at a game called poker—by playin' a bluff."

Hank Lang glared at him, but no remark did he make. He was waiting, evidently, for Bill Pagger to speak, and Pagger did.

"You're just the man I want to see," the boss of the Village declared. "I took your gun away from you yesterday. And what's this I hear about you havin' another one?"

"Huh! I reckoned that Mr. Lang would report the matter to you," Salern declared. "Sure, I've got another gun. I've got it in my holster right now."

"Why didn't you give it to me yesterday?" Pagger demanded.

"Why, you never asked me for it, Mr. Pagger," Salern replied.

"Holdin' it out, was you?"

"Sure! I always like to have a six-gun swingin' against my hip. It makes me feel more homelike."

"You hand that gun over to me," Pagger commanded. "And don't play any more of your tricks. Hank was right—you're too fresh! You won't last long around here if you don't behave yourself."

"I'd like to keep this gun, Mr. Pagger," Salern told him. "I sure and certain don't aim to use it to massacre anybody—but I like to be prepared to defend myself. That's the way of it."

"Defend yourself from what?"

"From any wild animals that might be prowlin' around at night, Mr. Pagger," Salern answered.

"You hand over that gun, and I'll see that you ain't bothered by any wild animals!"

"I sure hate to do it, but you're the boss. Here it is, and I hope you take good care of both of 'em. They're pet guns o' mine, Mr. Pagger. When do I get 'em back?"

"When I decide to let you have them, Salern. And there's another thing, too—I understand you didn't sleep in your hut last night."

"Shucks! How did you ever guess that, Mr. Pagger? One of them wild animals must have told you."

"Don't you 'wild animal' me!" Hank Lang roared.

"Why, I didn't say anything about

you bein' a wild animal, Mr. Lang. You don't look wild to me," Salern told him.

"No?"

"Not any!" Salern declared. "I was just wonderin' how Mr. Pagger knew I didn't sleep in the hut. Well, it was too stuffy for this time o' the year, and I always like to sleep under the stars, too. So that's where I slept, me and that six-gun!"

He looked all of them over as he concluded speaking, his face an inscrutable mask. Lang glared at him. The elderly man smiled a bit, as though more than half afraid to do it. Bill Pagger growled at him once more.

"What supplies do you want?"

Salern gave him quite a list, and Pagger put them into a sack and accepted payment therefor.

"These here bundles of grub and smokin' tobacco come cheap," Bert Salern said. "I reckon that I sure can live in economy in this Village if the poker games hold out."

Hank Lang took a quick step toward him, his eyes blazing. "That's enough!" he stormed. "Don't you insult me!"

"Why, I wouldn't insult the best man on earth. And did I mention you, Mr. Lang? It seems to me that you are a mighty sensitive man. Still sore about that little deal last night? Shucks! That wasn't nothin'. You can have your chance for revenge at any time the boys are playin'. Maybe you'll skin me alive the next time."

"That's sensible talk, Hank," Pagger put in. "Dang it, I want and I demand peace in the Village. I won't have my men fightin' among themselves."

Salern picked up the sack of provisions and swung it over one shoulder. "I sure wish that I had a gun," he complained, looking at Pagger accusingly. "Can't you let me have at least one of 'em, Mr. Pagger?"

"When I get good and ready, I'll hand one of them back to you," Pagger replied.

"Then if any wild animal comes at me, I'll have to fight him with my hands and teeth, I reckon—providin', of course, that he don't jump me when I'm asleep. But that'd be a mighty hard thing to do. I sleep light, I do."

"You don't talk light," Lang snarled at him. "You talk more than any man in the Village."

"Maybe I know more words than some."

"Meanin' me?"

"Dang it, Mr. Lang, it 'pears to me that you're always tryin' to pick a fight. Did I mention you personal, Mr. Lang? Sure and certain I didn't. I wouldn't think of mentionin' you personal, Mr. Lang."

There was a veiled insult in his words, and every man there realized it. Hank Lang sputtered his rage and seemed incapable of speech, just as he was absolutely incapable of engaging Bert Salern in repartee and coming out of the engagement a victor. And, like many another man, when he could not win in one direction, he tried it in another. He turned just in time to see a smile on the face of the elderly man who had been standing behind him.

"What are you grinnin' at?" Lang demanded. "Think there's somethin' funny around here, do you?"

He started forward, and the elderly man grew sober of face and retreated a step.

"Cry baby!" Lang sneered at him. "Howlin' because you lost a little in a poker game. I'd ought to smash you one!"

He reached forward quickly, the bully uppermost in him now, and grasped the other by the front of the shirt. The elderly man put up an arm as though to ward off a blow. But there was some fire in his eyes, some show of spirit in his manner.

"Maybe I did howl at losin' in a poker game, but so did you—last night!" he retorted.

"Why, you——"

Hank Lang drew back his fist. But he did not deliver the blow he had intended. That arm was grasped close to the wrist by Bert Salern, and the grip was like that of a vise. And he half whirled around to find Salern's face within a foot of his own.

"Easy, Mr. Lang," Salern said. "You don't want to hit an old man like him. 'Tain't right. And as Mr. Pagger said, we'd all ought to be friendly in the Village."

"You——"

But Bill Pagger took control of the situation again. "That's enough, Hank," he said. "The man's right. You didn't have anything to fight about. And I'm goin' to have peace around here or I'll make the fur fly. Take a walk, Hank!"

Lang hesitated only a fraction of a second, and then, after glaring at Bert Salern again, he strode angrily toward the door and disappeared outside.

The elderly man stepped forward. "Thanks, stranger," he said, holding out his hand.

Salern grasped it. "The name is Salern," he said.

"Thanks again. Mine is Stephen Beggs."

Then Bert Salern cocked his sombrero on the other side of his head, waved his hand in farewell, and went toward the door himself. He had done what he had wished to do—made a friend in the Village to offset an enemy.

Out into the blazing sun he stalked with his bag of provisions over his shoulder—and into another adventure!

CHAPTER VI.

SALERN MEETS THE SINGER.

HANK LANG'S horse, saddled and bridled, had been in front of the storehouse. As Salern emerged from the building he beheld the angry Hank riding madly in the direction of the gap.

Unable to score against men, the bully was scoring the sides of his mount with his spurs. Salern's eyes narrowed as he watched, for Bert Salern loved horses.

"I'd admire to slap him one," he told himself. "I'd admire to use my spurs on his sides! I'd admire—yes, I'd admire!"

He stopped short and almost dropped the sack of provisions he was carrying. Up from the creek came a girl carrying a huge pail of water.

"The girl of the song!" Salern told himself. He whispered it, as though in awe.

She appeared to be no more than twenty. As he had dreamed the night before, she had black hair and snappy black eyes. Despite the heavy bucket she carried, she walked with a swinging grace that the sentimental Salern was quick to notice and appreciate.

He stepped forward, and it was inevitable that they should meet, since their paths crossed. Salern touched the brim of his sombrero and smiled his best smile.

"Pardon me, miss," he said. "Can't I carry that pail for you? It's a right down heavy bundle for a girl to be packin' around."

She came to an abrupt stop and looked him up and down with some scorn in her glance.

"I ain't aimin' to be fresh, miss," he told her quickly. "I'm aimin' only to help. We're strangers, I reckon. I only got to the Village yesterday. My name's Salern."

"Yes, I heard of your coming," she said, in a rich voice that Salern loved instantly. "I heard your name, too."

"I'm glad of that, miss. If you'll let me carry that heavy pail to your shack—"

"I generally carry my own bucket of water," she said.

There was hostility in her voice now, and Salern discerned it.

"I ain't aimin' just to make your acquaintance this way," he told her. "I just want to do you a favor."

"I don't accept favors from outlaws —from wanted men!" she snapped at him.

"My good gosh! I thought every man in this camp was a wanted man."

"Yes—murderers and thieves," she said, looking him straight in the eyes. "Men who have had to run away from the law and hide like wild beasts in— in places like this! Men who can't associate with decent men!"

Salern put down his sack of supplies and scratched at one side of his head to show that he was puzzled.

"I sure didn't mean to make you mad, miss," he told her. "I just wanted to help you. I'm sorry if you feel that a way. I reckon it must have been you I heard singin' last night. That was a right pretty song, and I like pretty songs. I hope you'll sing it again this evenin'."

"Not if I know you are listening," she replied. "Perhaps I can't help singing sometimes, when I am miserable and blue and discouraged."

"If you're in trouble, miss, and I can help you, you just say the word."

"I don't take help from murderers and thieves. I understand that you came here because you killed a man."

"I can't understand this," he said. "If you're so set agin' murderers and thieves, what are you doin' in the Village?"

"That is easily explained. I am Lorena Beggs. My father shot a man and had to come here, and he made me come with him because he didn't want to leave me in town alone, not knowing whether he'd ever be back. So I'm here, and I have to remain—but that doesn't mean that I have to associate with the despicable men of the Village. Now you know it all—so kindly step to one side and let me go on to our shack."

"Beggs?" said Salern. "Why, I met him in the storehouse a few minutes ago and did him a little service. I reckon that we're friends now."

"Possibly, but that doesn't mean I'll ever be your friend," she snapped out.

"You never can tell, miss. You may be more some day!"

He stepped back and picked up his sack, and she swept past him like a queen and went on down the row of huts. Salern noticed the one she entered.

"Little spitfire," he said, as he walked in her wake. "Pretty little spitfire, too. Gosh, I don't understand all this. What a life she must lead if she don't talk to anybody around here. Dang my hide if I don't like her! I'll have to talk to Lizard about this, but I hope he won't get jealous."

He was opposite her shack now, into which she had just disappeared. He slowed his pace as he passed. He did not glance at the hut, but he lifted his voice in song:

"Oh, I've got a girl in Sagebrush,
And another in Gold Town—"

He ceased there, but he spoke loud enough for her to hear, though he pretended to be speaking into the sky.

"I know what a rotten singer I am. My hoss tries to unseat me every time I try to warble. But if I don't hear some good singer singin' to-night I'm goin' to howl my head off and keep everybody awake."

On he went, chuckling to himself. He heard the thunder of flying hoofs behind him, and turned to find Hank Lang bearing down upon him, riding furiously. Lang pulled up his lathered mount in a small whirlwind of dust and sand.

"You—Salern!" he hissed. "I watched you talkin' to that girl—"

"Yeh! I aimed to carry her bucket of water for her, but she didn't aim to let me."

"You keep away from her, Salern!"

"My gosh, Mr. Lang, I wouldn't harm her for the world—or any other woman."

"I'm not sayin' you would—and you bet you won't while I'm around. But you keep away from her just the same. You understand?"

"Nope, I don't quite understand," Salern replied. "Just where do you come in?"

"That's none of your business," Hank Lang exclaimed. "You keep away from her or, gun or no gun, I'll swing down on you and fill you full of lead!"

"No doubt you'll swing some day, all right," Salern told him.

"And I don't want any more of your freshness, either. I've got about enough of you."

"I thought maybe you admired me, the way you come prowlin' around my shack last night. All right, Mr. Lang. You behave yourself, and I'll do the same."

Lang growled something that Bert Salern could not understand, whirled his mount, and dashed back toward the storehouse. Salern went on his way.

"There goes one bad hombre, but I've seen worse," he told himself. "There seems to be a lot of mysterious things in this here Village of nine men and one woman—one of the men bein' me. Have to look into things, I reckon, and be prepared."

Into his shack he went, and stowed his provisions away. Then, making sure that he was not observed, he extracted another shiny six-gun from the baggy place in his trousers above the boot and beneath his chaps.

"It's a mighty good thing I came here well heeled," he said, half aloud. "Bill Pagger's got two of 'em, and this is the last, and we'd better be sure he don't get this. Back you go, little gun, into your restin' place."

And back it went. And Bert Salern grinned and went to stand in the doorway and roll another of his cigarettes.

CHAPTER VII.

BEGGS TELLS A STORY.

HE rested during the day and kept away from the other men, visiting Lizard once or twice to talk to him and stretch out on the grass near the bank of the stream and daydream. If the others of the village wished to talk him over, let them!

And then the sun sank again, and the cool night came, and the moonlight. After his evening meal Salern squatted before the fire. He was debating with himself whether to visit the storehouse and engage in another poker game, and whether he would antagonize Hank Lang and some of the others again if he did.

He was wondering, also, whether Lorena Beggs would indulge in song, and telling himself that he would sing his little ditty if she did not. He chuckled when he thought of it, grinned when he visioned her angry face and pretty flashing eyes as she had scorned him.

While he debated, once more he heard stealthy steps approaching the shack. His last six-gun was stowed away where he could not get at it quickly. He sprang to his feet and stood in the doorway, in a position where he would have at least a little advantage if the one approaching contemplated an attack.

But it was not Hank Lang who crept around the corner of the shack, trying to keep in the shadows as much as possible. A low voice came to him:

"Mr. Salern!"

"Well?" Salern asked.

"This is Beggs. I want to talk to you, Mr. Salern."

"All right, Beggs. Come right ahead and talk," Salern told him. "Come into the shack, where you won't be seen."

The old man crept like a shadow inside the door and spoke in whispers, seemingly fearful lest anybody should overhear.

"You did me a favor to-day, Mr. Salern, and I want you to do me another now," he said. "I—I want you to stay away from my girl, Mr. Salern."

"There seems to be some sort of opinion around this place that I'm insultin' your daughter, or somethin' like that," Salern told him.

"I know better than that, Mr. Salern. You may have killed a man, but I'm sure you wouldn't insult a woman."

"Why, dang it, Beggs, I only asked to be allowed to carry her bucket for her."

"It isn't that, Mr. Salern. I realize all this, and so does Lorena. But she—she hates the sort of men we are. I was forced to bring her here, and sometimes, though I'm her father, I think that she hates me, too. I've wished a thousand times a day that I hadn't brought her along. And there'll be trouble if you don't keep away from her—the kind of trouble I don't want!"

"Just a minute, Beggs," Salern said. "You seem to be older than the other men here, and there's other differences, too. You talk better and you act better. You ain't exactly in their class, I reckon."

"I hope not, Mr. Salern. But here I am, and here I must remain. And it's killing me, sir. I wouldn't try to hang on if it wasn't for Lorena. But I'm afraid to think what would happen to her if—if anything happened to me. And so I have to be careful, and take insults from any and all. They've forced me to play poker. I had some money when I came here, Mr. Salern—a few thousand dollars. They've won it all—stolen it! They played a crooked game. They won my horse and Lorena's pony—compelling me to play!"

"Maybe I can help you win 'em back, Beggs. I'm willin' to try," Salern told him. "I can't imagine a man like you bein' in the Village of Wanted Men."

"I shot a man in Gold Town, Mr. Salern. I ran a store there—and he in-

sulted Lorena one day—and I shot him. His name was George Gormell. After I'd done it, I grew frightened. I got my money and locked up my store and got out of town. I brought Lorena with me. I'd heard about this place, and so we came here. I'd never have come if I'd known what sort of place it was."

"I'll bet that you wouldn't," Salern said.

"Once here, we had to remain, of course. It's torture for my girl, and for me. And now they've stripped me of everything."

"Beggs, you dratted fool! I know all about that case," Salern said. "You never killed your man at all—only wounded him. He had a bad reputation, and if you'd killed him I reckon no jury would have bothered you much about it, unless to pin a medal on you. But he's been killed since. I did it myself—in Sagebrush!"

"You—you killed him?" Beggs gasped out. "You killed George Gormell?"

"I sure and certain did, Beggs. Why, dang it, you could go back to Gold Town right this minute and never be bothered about it—except maybe made fun of a bit 'cause you went to the trouble of runnin' away."

"You're telling me the truth?"

"I ain't a liar, Mr. Beggs," Salern declared. "I'm strong for the truth at any and all times, I am."

"And now it's too late. I never can get away from here—and take Lorena away. There's always a guard at the gap—and they never let me guard there. They don't trust me, because maybe I'm a bit different. And—and there is Lorena!"

"What about her?" Salern asked.

"Hank Lang says he is in love with her, Mr. Salern—that brute in love with my little girl! Maybe he is, because he wants to go out and bring in a preacher and marry her. And that's why I want you to stay away from her, Mr. Salern.

Lang was angry because you spoke to her to-day. I've held him off so far, but he's Bill Pagger's right-hand man, and if you get interested in her Lang might go to Pagger, and Pagger would make me let Lorena marry that brute. And I—I could almost kill her, as much as I love her, before I'd let that happen."

"I wouldn't blame you much if you did," Bert Salern told him. "It sure is tough, Beggs. If you could only get away—"

"That's impossible. There is no way out for us. I—I am afraid day and night. I'm almost insane. Please say that you'll do nothing that will hurt us, Mr. Salern."

"I sure and certain don't aim to do anything like that," Salern replied. "We'll just see how matters work out. I don't like Hank Lang any too well myself—didn't when I first met him. You'd better just keep hopin', Beggs. I'm a mean hombre in a case like this. And I took a fancy to your girl even before I saw her—when I heard her sing."

"She tries to sing to keep from feeling so blue, Mr. Salern."

"Tries to sing, does she? She *does* sing! You ought to hear me burst into song, Beggs. You may at that—to-night. Now you trot along and don't worry so much. I won't do anything to hurt you or your girl Lorena. And you c'n bet that I'll do a lot to help you if I can."

"She's all right unless Lang grows insistent," Beggs said. "Bill Pagger may be a murderer, but he's a decent man at heart, and he issued orders that no man should speak to Lorena unless she spoke first—and she never does. Hank Lang is an exception, though. Bill Pagger lets him talk to her in the storehouse and down by the creek, and sometimes at our shack."

"Uh-huh! I reckon that I understand everything, Beggs. You just

leave it to me, old-timer. Gosh, if you only could get out of this and go back to Gold Town. If I could help you——"

"Don't raise your hand to help us, Mr. Salern, or you'll ruin us instead," Beggs declared. "They haven't won my six-gun from me at poker yet—and they never will! If it comes to the worst, there are two bullets—for my little girl, and for me."

"Shucks! It's right down foolishness to talk like that," said Salern. "You trot along and forget your troubles. I may go down to the storehouse later, Beggs. Maybe I'll sing some first. You tell your girl Lorena to sing at nights so I can hear."

"I'm afraid she'll not, Mr. Salern, because you mentioned her singing to-day. And, if you'll pardon me, she hates the men of the Village so——"

"Uh-huh!" Salern grunted. "Yep! I reckon that she does, from the way she talked to me to-day. You slip out and trot along, Beggs, and don't worry. Hank Lang might come prowlin' around here, and you don't want him to find you talkin' to me, do you?"

That appeared to frighten Stephen Beggs. He grasped Bert Salern's hand and then slipped from the shack like a shadow and disappeared around the corner of it, going toward the creek. Salern made a fresh cigarette and stood in the doorway thinking it over. He felt that he would have to tell Lizard all about this case in the morning.

"Poor old cuss!" he mused. "Poor little girl! It's a shame they can't get out of this."

He stepped outside and looked down toward the storehouse. Nobody appeared to be around the shacks. But presently he saw a form in the moonlight, and knew it was old man Beggs, going toward the storehouse door. And he could visualize Lorena Beggs, alone in her shack, miserable and lonesome and perhaps half terrified.

"Poor old cuss! Poor little girl!" Salern repeated.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GUN IS RETURNED.

FOR a time Bert Salern stood there in indecision. But it was not his nature to remain alone when there was companionship at hand. He went to the corner of the shack and looked across the creek and made out Lizard. Then he turned back again.

As upon the night before, the flickering lights in the storehouse seemed to lure him. After buying his provisions he had about thirty dollars left in his pocket—twenty of his own and the remainder what he had won from Hank Lang. He would not have to unearth the money he had buried so carefully in the shack. If they stripped him in the poker game, let them think him stripped!

"Dang it, I'll bet she just ain't goin' to sing," he told himself. "Well, I'm a man of my word. I'll sing if she don't. And time's up, I reckon."

He started walking slowly along the row of huts. He waited until he was but a short distance from the Beggs shack, and then he raised his voice in song:

"Oh, I've got a girl in Sagebrush,
And another in Gold Town——"

He sang with all the volume afforded by his powerful lungs. His voice echoed back from the cliffs. He sang much worse than usual. Across the stream, Lizard snorted in derision and tugged at his rope.

Walking slowly past the shacks, Bert Salern continued to sing. He sang the song to its bitter end, and commenced all over again. Abreast the Beggs shack, he reached its end a second time. He took a deep breath, and was about to start again, when a soft voice reached his ears.

"For Heaven's sake," it said. "Stop

it! I promise to sing for you to-morrow night if you'll stop now."

"It's stopped, miss," he answered, in low and guarded tones. "But you'd better remember your promise, or I'll do worse to-morrow night."

"You couldn't," she told him.

"I'll show you right now!

"Oh, I've got a girl——"

Down by the storehouse a six-gun crashed, and a bullet whined its way up toward the shacks. Bert Salern darted quickly out of harm's way, getting alongside one of the shacks and out of the line of fire.

"Stop that infernal racket," some man called. "We can't hear each other talk!"

Salern chuckled and turned off toward the creek, to follow along it and approach the storehouse in that manner. The usual poker game was in progress when he entered, and he had an innocent look upon his face.

"How's the play runnin' to-night?" he asked quietly.

Bill Pagger looked up quickly. "Not half so fast as you'll run if you start that howlin' again," he replied. "You must have a bottle of lick'er stowed away somewhere in your blankets."

"You mean my singin'?"

"If that's singin', I'm twins," Pagger told him. "What's the matter with you, anyway? I'll bet that you're wanted by some insane asylum 'stead of a sheriff and posse."

"Why, gents, I thought that I was entertainin' you," Salern declared. "People used to come for miles to hear me sing."

"Yeh, you mean they ran for miles to get away from it," Hank Lang spoke up sneeringly. "Another noise like we heard, and you'll be plugged."

"Now, Mr. Lang, let's all be friends," Salern begged. "We've had our little differences, and it's time to stop. As soon as one of these gents gets done,

I'll sit in the game and give you a chance at me. And I don't feel extra lucky to-night. But not for a minute or so. I want some cigarette papers."

"Help yourself, and bring me the change," Pagger told him, starting to deal.

It was an ordinary scene, yet there was something tense about it. Eight men in the room, including Salern, and six of them were watching Salern and Hank Lang. The man on guard at the gap, Salern thought, probably had heard his outburst and was wondering what it was all about.

Back to the table he went, and watched the play. There happened to be nothing extraordinary about it at the moment. As a game of poker, it was rather slow moving and stale. Beggs sat at one side watching.

"Mr. Beggs, ain't you playin' this evenin'?" Salern asked.

"I haven't anything to play with, except my six-gun, and I won't bet that," Beggs said.

"Don't blame you a bit," Salern remarked. "Is that the gun you used when you killed your man?" He winked at Beggs as he said it.

"That's the gun," Beggs replied.

"And which one did you use when you killed yours?" Lang snarled out.

"The one I gave Mr. Pagger first."

"You didn't tell us much about what you did," Lang insinuated. "Maybe it wasn't anything to brag about."

"Not much, Mr. Lang. A man got in the way of a couple of bullets that came from the business end of my six-gun, that's all. His name was George Gormell."

There was silence for an instant, then a roar half of surprise and half of laughter.

"Yeh?" Hank Lang sneered. "You can't put that over on us. You might be chased by a posse for cattle rustlin', or somethin' like that, but not for killin' George Gormell. You danged fool liar,

old man Beggs, sittin' there, killed George Gormell in Gold Town."

"Yeh? Maybe he shot him in Gold Town, but I killed him in Sagebrush," Salern declared. "I ain't lyin' about it, gents. I sure plugged him, and the next time you get news from Sagebrush, you'll know it."

Pagger spoke up. "Then, if you're tellin' the truth, old man Beggs didn't have to come here with his daughter at all. That's rich! Here he is, and here he'll stay, 'cause he ain't one we'll trust to leave."

"And here his daughter'll stay, too," Lang put in, laughing uproariously. "Thought he'd killed his man, did Beggs."

"I never heard tell what you did," Salern said quietly, eying Lang. "Maybe you're a danged fool liar, just as you called me."

"Huh! I reckon every man here knows what I did, unless it's you," Hank Lang replied. "I pulled off my little stunt in Cactusville. A nice little gray-haired storekeeper tried to make me pay a bill I owed. So I plugged him."

"I ain't heard the details," Salern reminded him. "His name, for instance."

"His name was Peter Burgen."

Salern looked at him. His eyes bulged. His features contorted. And suddenly he burst into a roar of laughter.

"So you killed Peter Burgen, did you?" he cried. "Who's the danged fool of a liar now?"

"What you mean?" Lang demanded. "'Course I plugged Peter Burgen."

"Dang it, I was near Cactusville at the time, workin' on a ranch, and I heard all about it," Salern remarked. "Some guy walked into Burgen's store and shot the old man in the back, like he'd been a dog that'd got in the way. It was the talk of the county two years ago. But let me tell you this, Mr. Lang. The man who killed Peter Burgen was

named Henry Rendel. Who's the liar now? Maybe you was only a cattle rustler!"

"I know what I did," Lang replied. "My name's Hank Lang here in the Village. But maybe it was Henry Rendel in Cactusville."

"Yeh—maybe!" Salern sneered at him. "But I ain't hearin' you confess that it was. I ain't hearin' you tell me and these gents right out in meetin' that Henry Rendel is your right name."

"You're hearin' me now," Lang cried. "My right name is Henry Rendel—and I killed Burgen."

Pagger spoke up again. "That's correct, Salern, as I happen to know," he said.

"Then I'm apologizin' to Mr. Lang for doubtin' his nerve, and he's apologizin' to me for the same. That right? Thanks, Mr. Lang. Now I'll just sit in this game and see what happens. I see one of the other gents is done."

An hour and a half later Bert Salern stood up from the box upon which he had been sitting and looked across the table at the grinning Hank Lang. He spread his hands wide, as though inviting the others to search him.

"Gents," he said, "I've got two pockets in my pants and two in the breast of my shirt and an empty money belt. Them pockets are empty of coin and currency. Gents, I'm cleaned!"

Lang laughed at him. "You was easy," he said.

"It was done neat," Salern replied. "I ain't got a kick in the world, gents. When I sit in a game of poker I take all that's handed me, and try to hand it back."

"You aimin' at anything in particular?" Lang demanded.

"Not sayin' a word, except that I'm cleaned," Salern replied.

"And now you'll learn one of Pagger's rules," Lang said, the nasty snarl on his face once more. "You've been pretty fresh since you dropped in here

a couple of days ago, but maybe you won't be so fresh now. It's a rule that when a man's cleaned out he's the slave of the village. You'll carry water for all of us, and you'll come when we whistle—like a hound dawg. That's you, Mr. Fresh Salern!"

As he finished speaking Hank Lang started to get to his feet, as though expecting an instant attack. But Bert Salern's face did not go white at the insult. He made no wild lunge to get at the other man's throat. He merely grinned, while the others looked at him in amazement.

"When I said that I was cleaned, gents, I meant of what I had on me," he explained.

"What else you want to gamble?" Lang asked. "That hoss of yours?"

"Not any! I'd slave for ten villages before I'd gamble him."

"Your guns?"

"Nope. Nor my blankets, or supplies, or pots or pans. Never mind, gents. The game's breakin' up, but I'll be here to-morrow night, if you insist, and I'll have somethin' to gamble with."

He saw Pagger and Lang exchange glances and their eyes glow suddenly. They thought, he knew, that he had some hidden funds. And they believed that, whatever he had, they would get in time.

"In that case," Pagger said, "you'll have your chance, Salern. Show up to-morrow night with whatever you've got. But if you're tryin' to fool anybody here——"

"I ain't foolin', so let's change the subject and talk of somethin' pleasant."

"Yeh, let's talk of old man Beggs," Lang said. "Ran away and come to the Village, he did, and didn't have to do it. And brought his daughter along, the fool. And here they'll both stay. Him and his pretty daughter, Lorena."

"It isn't anything to laugh about," Beggs said, from the depths of his misery.

"I can see plenty to laugh at," Lang declared, and he really did laugh. "Here you are, and you can't get away, and you're broke. Camp slave for yours, Beggs. And you didn't have to do it. That's rich! The dirty drudge of the Village from now on—that's you, Beggs! Now maybe you won't aim to hold up your nose so high—you and your fancy line o' talkin'. You and your fancy girl. Maybe you won't be objectin' so much now to me marryin' her. And, if you do object any more——"

The sentence was never ended. With a roar of rage, Bert Salern was upon him. He hurled Hank Lang to the floor as the others got out of the way. He jerked Lang's revolver from its holster and sent it spinning across the room, where Lang could not get it. Then he sprang up, and jerked Lang upon his feet.

"Fight, you cur," Salern cried, and he slapped him with an open palm. "I'll show you, I reckon, how to talk about nice women!"

Salern's hot southern blood was aroused. Lang roared his rage and charged, and received a blow in the face that rocked his head. He charged again, and then they stood face to face and foot to foot and fought. They rained blows at each other, but Lang seldom landed one. And Bert Salern slowly began to cut him down, to punish him cruelly.

But Hank Lang was no weakling. His was a brute nature that could endure pain and punishment. There was nothing delicately sensitive about Hank Lang. Salern would be no easy victor here.

The other men did not interfere. Beggs stood to one side, his face almost white, sensing that no good could come to him and his from this combat. Pagger watched as a referee watches. The others exulted, because they hated Hank Lang.

Blow after blow! Both men were

staggering on their feet after a time. Both had faces badly bruised. Each was breathing in labored gasps. And suddenly Bill Pagger was between them, hurling them aside.

"That's enough," he declared. "It was a pretty good scrap. Salern, you've done it now. I know Hank, and I know what he'll do to you the first chance he gets. So you wait a minute."

He hurried to the counter as Salern staggered back against the wall and Hank Lang collapsed on one of the boxes. And he returned with Bert Salern's favorite six-gun.

"Here, Salern," he said. "I'm givin' you this. It's strictly up to you two gents from daybreak to-morrow mornin'. You hear that, Hank? Daybreak to-morrow mornin'—and not before. Here's your pet gun, Salern. Take care of yourself!"

CHAPTER IX.

A DUEL AT DAYBREAK.

BILL PAGGER held a revolver also, and he watched both men carefully. The others stood back, for this was a thing for the boss of the Village to handle.

"Hank, go pick up your gun and put it in your holster," Bill Pagger ordered. "You stand where you are, Salern. Remember, both you men, that there's a truce until daybreak. After the first streak of dawn, you c'n go to it. And if either of you makes a move against the other before that, I'll plug him myself. All you men except Hank and Salern go home, now."

Out they filed, old man Beggs in the lead. He was eager to get away from the scene. His only hope, as he saw it, was that Bert Salern would come out victor in the duel. If he did not, there would be no mercy for Beggs and his daughter.

Hank Lang picked up his gun and returned it to its holster. Through blood-

shot eyes he glared at his enemy. He started to speak, but Bill Pagger stopped him with a gesture.

"Salern, go to your shack, or wherever you wish," Pagger commanded. "I'll let Hank go five minutes after you. And remember what I said—not until daybreak!"

Salern walked slowly, staggeringly to the door, and went out. He turned up the trail through the moonlight, going toward his own shack.

"My good gosh," he said to himself. "This is a pretty mess. Now I've got to make good, if I ever did in my life. What made me go loco that a way and spill the beans? If I don't win now——"

"Mr. Salern!" It was a woman's voice that spoke to him from the darkness at one side of a shack. And there was only one woman in the Village—Lorena Beggs. He looked up quickly and realized that it was the Beggs shack he was passing.

"Yes?" he asked, through bruised lips. "Father has told me—everything," she said. "I—I want to thank you so. I'm sorry if I was rude to you yesterday. But I can't help it if I felt that way."

"That's all right, miss. I reckon that I understand."

"Is it true what you told father—that he did not kill George Gormell—that my father is not a murderer?"

"It sure and certain is true, miss. Your father must have been a rotten shot, if you'll pardon me sayin' so."

"Oh, you don't know how happy that makes me," she said, stepping closer to his side. "To think that my father has no blood guilt upon his soul! And you—you——"

"Yes, I killed George Gormell, just as I said."

"Of course, I can't be glad. But I can be glad that it wasn't my father. That isn't wrong, is it? And you—you fought for me to-night. Oh, I

know! You fought that—that beast! And now you'll have to shoot it out, father says. That is terrible. If you do not win——”

“I'll do my best, miss,” Salern promised her.

“It is so hopeless, though. We are in this terrible place, and must stay here always. I don't know how I'll ever endure it. And to think that my father is getting old—that some day I may be left here alone.”

“It ain't right and proper, miss, to think of things like them until it's necessary,” he told her.

“I—I just wanted to thank you for clearing my father's name. So I watched for you to come along on your way to the shack. And now I must hurry inside again. Thank you again—and I hope—hope that——”

“I understand, miss, and let me thank you.”

“For what you have done I could almost love you if you were not a—if you had not killed a man.”

“I reckon that you're a law-abidin' little lady, and that's right,” he told her, trying hard to chuckle a bit. “But officers of the law kill men every day, and you don't call 'em murderers, do you?”

“That is different and can be forgiven. They do it because it is their duty, and to protect other people. I—I must go now.”

“If it wasn't so late, and I didn't have so many things to do, I'd ask you to sing,” he said.

“Oh, I'll do it to-morrow night, gladly, if——” And she hesitated.

“If I'm here to listen to you?” he asked. “Well, I hope that I'll be here, miss. Good night.”

“Good night,” she breathed.

Salern went on along the row of shacks, his heart singing, for, despite the predicament in which he found himself, his sentimental streak was at

work again. When he reached his shack he went inside and lighted one of the candles he had purchased at the storehouse. By its dim light he inspected his old six-gun carefully, found that it was in excellent condition, and returned it to his holster.

Then he extinguished the candle and left the shack, this time to go to the creek. There he knelt and carefully bathed his bruised face and bleeding knuckles. He knelt again, and took a deep drink of the cold water. And then he crossed the creek—to Lizard.

He stood a short distance away for a time, drinking in the bracing night air. Then he went on—to the horse he loved. Lizard saw him coming through the bright moonlight and went forward to meet him. Lizard seemed to think it peculiar that Salern did not have his blankets with him to-night. But he thought it wonderful when Salern put his arm around his neck and his cheek against his nose.

And then came the voice that the horse loved: “Lizard, old hoss, there's hell poppin' now, sure and certain. I'm in one hades of a mess, old hoss, and I've sure got to get out of it. There's goin' to be a gun fight at daybreak, and I'm one of the fighters, Lizard. What do you think of that? I ain't carin' so much for myself, but I hate to think what might happen to you if I'm a little slow on the draw or get outgeneraled. But I'll do my best, Lizard.”

For a moment Salern clung to the horse's neck, almost sobbing. He stroked the muzzle of the animal that had carried him over so many miles of desert and waste land, through heat almost insufferable—the horse beside which he had slept so often out beneath the stars.

And then: “Please, Lizard, don't get jealous this time and cut up. Just let me whisper it to you, Lizard:

“Oh, I know a girl in Sagebrush,
And another in Gold Town——”

"That's right, old hoss! You didn't even bat an eyelash that time, did you? I hope that I'll be able to sing it a lot more times, Lizard. And maybe some day you'll hear a girl sing, too—a real girl and not a make-believe one in a song."

He pulled away, took a deep breath, straightened his shoulders, and threw up his head.

"You'd better go to sleep, Lizard," he said, in his usual voice. "Dang your hide, you make me sentimental! I'm not goin' to sleep here to-night. I'm going down by the creek and think over my sins—and wait for daybreak!"

He patted the glossy neck again, and then he turned away abruptly. Not once did he look back. Down to the creek he went, and along it for some distance. He looked at the row of huts in the moonlight; he noticed that the lights in the storehouse had been extinguished, and he supposed that Bill Pagger had put up the big door and had barred it, and had gone to his blankets.

And then he tried to map out a plan of campaign. He knew the location of Hank Lang's shack, but he could not be certain that Lang was there. Hank Lang might be out in the open, the same as Bert Salern. But he knew well that Lang would not be telling his horse good-by. He had seen how Lang treated his horse.

He tried to imagine what Hank Lang would do when daybreak came, tried to put himself in the other man's place. The little cup among the cliffs was not large; there were few places where a man could conceal himself except in the huts.

He thought of a hundred plans, and rejected them all. "I'll just have to trust to luck, I reckon," he told himself. "I wish it was daybreak now. This waitin' for it is worse than gettin' it!"

Salern actually dozed for a time, curled up on the grass at the edge of

the tiny stream, behind a protecting clump of brush. He felt some better when he awoke. He guessed that daybreak was less than an hour away.

Going down to the stream he bathed his face again, especially his puffed eyes. The blows that Hank Lang had sent home had not been light ones. But he had the keen satisfaction of knowing that he had sent more home to the countenance of Hank Lang.

And finally he left the stream, rounded a jumble of rock, came to the creek again, and crossed it to the side where the row of huts stood. Not a sound reached his ears. He did not know whether this daybreak duel was to have an audience. Bill Pagger might have ordered everybody to remain in the shacks until it was over.

He crept slowly to the row of shacks, through the shadows like a shadow himself, and almost as noiseless as one. Along the row he went—and came to a stop behind the hut of Hank Lang!

The deathly stillness of the desert night filled the air. Not a lizard scampered, not an insect sent its tiny call through the darkness. It seemed as though the whole world was waiting for some tragedy.

"I wish it would come—wish it would come," Bert Salern kept repeating to himself. "Hope nothin' bad happens to Lizard if this Hank Lang plugs me for keeps."

He crouched against the rear wall of Lang's shack and listened. There were no apertures in the rear of the shack. But there was a glassless window on one side, and sounds came through it—sounds that told Salern somebody was inside.

He could not be sure whether it was Lang, but he hoped so. For more minutes he waited. And then the first light of the new day appeared in the eastern sky over the rim of the cliffs.

The moment had come. From this second on it was to be bitter war until

a victor had been determined. He heard somebody stirring inside the shack, heard somebody's boots crunch on the gravel in front of it!

It was Hank Lang. He had spent the night at home, and had come forth at break of day to meet what fate might hold for him. He crept toward the storehouse, watching carefully on either side, ahead, behind. He had planned to reach the storehouse and get to the rear of it, from which position he would view the entire village.

"Here I am, Lang!"

Bert Salern shrieked the words, and they came from behind the other man. Lang crouched and whirled, and his six-gun spat flame. A bullet shrieked past Salern's head, and another followed. And then Salern's gun crashed also, and Lang gave a cry of pain.

The bully's revolver dropped to the ground. His right wrist hung limp. Salern, dodging from side to side, ran forward. Lang stooped and tried to reach for his gun with his left hand.

"Keep away from it, Lang. Back up!" Salern called, within a few feet of him now. "You try to pick up that gun, and you're a dead man. That was some shootin' I showed you, I reckon, especially in this rotten light. Back up, Lang! You skunk, I've got you where I want you now. I've got the right to fill you full of lead. I've got the right, under all the rules, to drop you dead here and now."

He knew that the other men were hurrying from their shacks. He sensed, rather than saw, that they were watching and taking a lively interest in the scene.

"Back up, Lang! I'll keep that gun of yours for a little souvenir," Salern went on.

Forward he went, as Lang backed away. He picked up the gun of the wounded man, broke it and extracted the cartridges, and threw the gun far away, where it fell to make a little spurt

in the dirt. And then he returned his own six-gun to its holster.

"Well, that's over," he said, half aloud. "Didn't amount to much after all. Shucks! What a fool I was to go slobberin' all over Lizard like I did. He'll probably laugh at me when I tell him."

He turned his back upon his wounded enemy and started toward his own shack.

"I guess after all this that I'd better cook myself one whale of a breakfast," he muttered. "Oh, yes! And I'd better let Lizard know about this."

"Oh, I know a girl in Sagebrush—"

Perhaps Lizard heard and gave thanks his master lived. It is certain that a young woman with tear-stained cheeks listened from one of the huts, and did!

CHAPTER X.

WARNED TO KEEP AWAY.

HE had eaten his morning meal and had cleaned the dishes when Beggs came to his shack.

"Pagger wants you to come to the storehouse right away," Beggs said.

"What's up now?" Salern asked.

"I don't know, but the whole gang must be there. You are to come along with me."

"I'm ready," Salern replied. He rolled and lighted a cigarette as they walked slowly along.

"I'm glad," Beggs whispered. "And Lorena—she's glad, too. She said to tell you that she'd sing her song to-night."

"Gosh, that's more than worth takin' a chance at bein' shot," Salern told him.

"She's a mighty happy girl, Mr. Salern, because she knows that I didn't kill George Gormell, and she's grateful to you for telling me so. If—if only you hadn't—"

"Shucks," Salern said. "Let's hurry past your shack. I sure don't want her

to see me this mornin'. My face must be a sight."

"It is an improvement on Hank Lang's at that," Beggs said, laughing a bit. "I watched that little duel. You certainly took an awful chance, Mr. Salern."

"I took time for proper aim, that's all. I got him just where I wanted to get him."

"Of course I am not suggesting that you should have killed a man—but you're just where you started now. I think that's what Bill Pagger wants to see you about."

Salern was thoughtful the remainder of the way to the storehouse. As Beggs had intimated, the affair was not ended. Both he and Hank Lang still lived, and Lang had nothing but a smashed wrist that would heal soon, and which he could use again to handle a gun.

They entered the storehouse to find everybody there except the guard at the gap. Lang was snarling, as usual. His wounded wrist had been crudely dressed and bandaged. Bill Pagger had the dignity of a judge.

"Sit down, Salern," he ordered. "I watched your little affair with Lang this mornin', and I want to say that you got him fair and square. Any other man in the camp would have finished him."

"He sneaked up on me," Lang whined.

"You shut up," Pagger commanded. "He outgeneraled you, that's all. And he was fair enough to call out to you. He could have shot you in the back, like you did old Peter Burgen. I say it was pretty neat all the way through. But here's the point—we're right where we started. You men never can get along together, that's plain to be seen. You've got to go against each other again. But it wouldn't be fair to go right ahead now when Lang's wrist is out of commission—unless Salern wants to shoot him down."

"That ain't my way of doin' things, Mr. Pagger," Salern told him.

"All right. You men listen to me. There's another truce until I say that Lang can handle a gun again: Lang's got his gun back—out of the dirt—and you can keep yours, Salern. But if either of you makes a move until I say the word—well, you know the answer."

"Suits me, Mr. Pagger," Salern said.

"Lang will stand his turn as guard at the gap as usual. We won't give Salern that privilege just yet. Remember, now—hands off each other until I give the word. Everything else around the Village goes on just the same—poker games and all. That's all I've got to say this mornin'."

They trooped out of the storehouse, and old man Beggs was brave enough to walk beside Salern now. Hank Lang glared after them.

"I tell you that this here man Salern is after that girl," he told Bill Pagger. "And you promised that I could have her, Bill. You said that you'd let me go out and fetch in a sky pilot to marry us—you demandin' that we get married. I can get one in and out so he'll never know where he's been."

"I told you all that and I stick by my word," Pagger replied. "I'm not holdin' it agin' you, Hank, that Salern got the best of you this mornin'. That might happen to any man. But don't whine and say he sneaked up on you from behind. What's this about the girl?"

"He was talkin' to her in front of one of the shacks, and that is against the rules."

"He didn't know it then."

"And he's been actin' loco ever since. I can tell, I reckon. And you notice that Beggs is runnin' around with him, don't you? He kept me from smashin' Beggs, didn't he? He scrapped with me right here because I was talkin' about her."

"Well, he'll have to stay away from

her, Hank, and I'll tell him so," Pagger said. "I said you could have the blamed girl if you wanted her, if you'd marry her, and you can. What you want with her, I can't see. I was a blamed fool for ever lettin' them come here. A woman in a camp like this causes nothin' but trouble."

"Then you'll tell him to keep away from her?"

"I'll tell him. And I'll tell Beggs, too," Pagger replied. "You needn't worry at all about that."

Yet, at that moment, Bert Salern, despite his battered face, was talking to Lorena Beggs and her father behind their shack, where none of the others could see them.

"I'm glad—glad!" she was saying. "And I'll sing for you to-night, as I promised."

"Do you want me to sing back at you?" he asked, grinning.

"Heavens, no!" she said. "I'll go insane if you do. Father and I'd better go into the shack now, before somebody sees us talking to you. We don't want any more trouble."

"I'll go have a little talk with my Lizard hoss, and then get some sleep," Salern replied. "I reckon that I can sleep in my shack now without any fear of bein' massacred without me knowin' it."

He went briskly across the creek and to Lizard. Once more he fondled his mount, and then led him to the shack and put saddle and bridle on. Up and down the length of the cup he rode, giving Lizard his proper amount of exercise. Then he rubbed him down preparatory for the night, and staked him out again.

He spent some time looking at the other horses, too. There were eleven, counting Lizard. That counted for the nine men, one of whom had been executed according to Pagger, the girl and himself. And then Bert Salern, pretending to be doing nothing much at all,

did some deep thinking. After which he went back to the shack and took a good sleep.

It was almost dusk when he awoke, and he was ravenously hungry. The meal he cooked was enough for two healthy men, yet he devoured it. He speculated as to whether he should engage in the poker game that evening or not. He remembered that he had promised to do so, but he hoped to avoid it.

His fire banked, he squatted before it and smoked—and waited. His waiting was not long. Once more he heard the liquid notes as Lorena Beggs sang her song. Three times she sang it, and then was still.

"She's some girl," Salern told himself. "Some girl to be in a place like this. I'd better dig some money out of the dirt and go to the storehouse, I suppose. Maybe I'll see her when I pass her shack."

He got a couple of bills from the spot in which he had buried them, and strolled slowly along the line of shacks. The lights of the storehouse flickered as usual, but to-night they did not seem to lure him so much.

"I'm gettin' sentimental again," Salern told himself. "I've got to quit it, I reckon. Wish I could sing that song of mine, but I'd better not. It might make her mad."

All the men of the Village were in the storehouse when he entered, but the poker game had not started. Pagger called to him from one end of the counter, and he responded immediately.

"I want to have a little private talk with you, Salern," the boss of the Village said. "I understand that you're gettin' somewhat interested in the Beggs girl, and it's got to stop."

"My good gosh! Can't I even speak to the lady?" Salern wanted to know.

"It's against the rules," Pagger informed him. "I promised Hank Lang

that he could have the girl if he'd marry her. He wants her, so that's that. After you two get through with your little scrap, Hank will go outside and bring in a sky pilot to do the work—that is if he is here after the scrap is over. If you happen to get him, I may consider lettin' you have the girl, but not until then."

Bert Salern's eyes narrowed a trifle. "Why not let the young lady do some of the decidin' herself?" he asked.

"I'm the boss here, Salern, and you'd better remember it. What I say goes!"

"All right—you're the boss."

"Stay away from the girl. And you needn't get so danged friendly with her father, either. He don't stand very high with me. And you might, later, Salern. You're the style I like. Hank Lang is my right-hand man now, but you never can tell what might happen."

"Mean to say that you're hintin' you might give me Hank's job?" Salern asked.

"I said you never can tell what might happen—and that's enough. Now go on and play poker, if you want to do it. Got any money?"

"I've got another twenty dollars."

"Where'd you get it?" Pagger demanded.

"Oh, I just had it tucked away," Salern answered. "I didn't want to lose all my money, so I left some of it at home."

"Huh!" Pagger grunted. "I don't know whether I like you or not. Sometimes I do and other times I don't."

Bert Salern grinned and turned toward the poker table. Hank Lang, he noticed, had decided not to play. Neither did he remain long watching. Out into the night he went, a wounded, sore, disgruntled man. Salern wondered whether he had gone to annoy Lorena Beggs.

But he knew that he could not follow without being noticed. So he gave all his attention to the game—and won.

CHAPTER XI.

SALERN PLANS.

ANOTHER beautiful night after a day of doing nothing except exercising Lizard!

Once more Bert Salern cooked and ate his evening meal and then sat before the fire and smoked—and dreamed. So Hank Lang was to marry Lorena Beggs, was he? And Bill Pagger had managed the affair, had given the girl to his right-hand man as some king of old might have handed a lady-in-waiting to a favorite courtier.

Salern did not fancy the idea. He explained to himself that he needed that girl. To get her, Hank Lang must be eliminated. The idea of such a girl marrying the man who had shot an aged storekeeper in the back appalled him, aside from the fact that he wanted her himself.

So now he dreamed before his fire and waited for the song he hoped she would sing, as she had the night before. He hoped, also, that Bill Pagger would not see fit to deny him the song, at least. And finally it came, and sentimental Bert Salern drank it in, like a music lover at the opera drinking in some aria by a famous singer.

When it ended, he began to feel lonesome.

"It's a danged tough life, this, and I'm goin' to tell my Lizard hoss so tomorrow," he declared to himself. "Nothin' to do all day except eat, and nothin' to do at night except sleep unless a man wants to play poker. I like to play poker, but not when it's forced down my throat, as a man might say."

But there seemed nothing to do except to go to the storehouse, and he was lonesome. So he left his fire and wandered down the line of huts. And once more a soft voice came to him out of the darkness.

"Good evening, Mr. Salern," it said.

He whirled toward her, saw her stand-

ing there in the semidarkness, where the moonlight did not strike quite full upon her.

"Thanks for the singin'," he said. "You don't know how I admire to hear it. I'll listen for it every night, miss."

"Why don't you call me Lorena?" she asked. "That is my name, you know."

"Yep, I know. But I didn't have the nerve," he explained.

"Hank Lang calls me Lorena."

"Oh, he does! Hank Lang is fixin' to get shot!"

"It is horrible that you have to fight him again. Oh, if you could only get away."

"I wish that you and your father could get away," he said.

"And I wish it, too—oh, so much. I am afraid. This terrible place! And father could go back home, and have nothing to fear."

"It's a right down shame that you can't get away. But I wouldn't worry about it too much, if I was you. It don't pay to worry. There's always some way out."

"I can't see any way out for us," she said.

"Always some way out of everything you want to get out of," he declared again. "We never know what's goin' to happen to-morrow. Generally it's somethin' we don't expect—and two thirds of the time it's somethin' good. Now let's talk about somethin' pleasant. Honest, don't you ever want me to sing for you?"

"If you dare, I'll never speak to you again," she told him. "I don't want to be insulting, but—"

"Oh, I know," he interrupted. "There's lots of people, and some of them mighty fine musicians, too, who ain't educated up to my singin'. Singin' like mine is a gift. Did your father go down to the storehouse?"

"Yes," she said. "They make him go down there, when he would a lot

rather be here at home with me—if you can call this a home."

"I don't blame him," Salern said. "In his place I'd want to do the same. If I had somebody like you at home, I'd never go anywheres to play poker."

A harsh voice came to them out of the darkness at the rear of the shack.

"That's enough. Stand away from my girl, Salern!"

"Who are you?" Salern demanded, though he knew. Lorena had given a little cry of fear.

"It's Hank Lang, Salern, and you know it. Stand away from my girl. Pagger told you to stay away from her. He'll hear of this pronto!"

"Oh, sure," Salern said. "I'll be right along with you, and we'll tell him."

"If it wasn't for his orders, I'd plug you right here in front of her," Lang shrieked.

"Providin' I didn't smash your wrist with a bullet first," Salern reminded him. "Come on, Lang, and we'll see Pagger."

He wanted to get Lang away from the frightened girl, and he had instant success. On toward the storehouse Salern went, and Lang hurried after him. Salern's mind was working rapidly. He realized that something serious might come of this. It had been an accident, of course, but he blamed himself for talking to her so long. He did not care for himself, but this affair might bring trouble to Lorena and her father.

Lang entered the storehouse first and found Pagger behind the counter. Bert Salern waited, smoking one of his cigarettes as usual. Finally Pagger beckoned him. Salern walked the room slowly, his manner almost an insult.

"Salern, I told you to keep away from that girl, and you've just been talkin' to her," the boss of the Village accused.

"Why, gosh, she spoke to me as I passed her shack, and what could I do but pass the time of day?" Salern de-

manded. "A man's got to listen when a lady talks, ain't he?"

"I told you, warned you, and you've broken the rule," Pagger said. "This is a sort of show-down now. Lang, you'll stand guard at the gap as usual to-morrow night. And the next night you can start and get your sky pilot. And when you do start, I'll see that Salern is put under guard until you're back. Then I'll give you a month of fool honeymoonin' before callin' off the truce."

"Thanks, Bill," Hank Lang said, his eyes glowing.

"I'll tell old man Beggs in about a minute, and if he howls about it any I'll fix him, too. I'm about fed up on everything! Am I boss around here, or not? Salern, everything has gone to blazes since you hit this camp. I'm a fair-minded man, but right now I'm hopin' that when you and Hank do pull off your next fight it won't be Hank who gets plugged!"

Salern knew that it was useless to argue, so he turned and walked away. From a position on the other side of the room he watched the conversation between Pagger and Beggs, saw the look of fear and horror in the old man's face, and the gloating that flashed across Lang's.

"Gosh, I've got to do somethin' to help them folks," Salern told himself. "It's time for me to make a move, I guess."

He watched the game for a time, but he did not play. Beggs left the building, and Salern knew that he had gone to carry the news to the girl. He could imagine how she would take it. And while he stood against the wall, watching the play, the gloating Hank Lang came up beside him.

"I reckon I ought to thank you, Salern," he said, in whispers. "Everything is playin' right into my hands. You can be what they call the best man, if you want the job."

"The thing isn't over with yet," Salern told him.

"Nothin' can stop it now. I said you'd get in bad in the Village. Well, you sure have. Bill Pagger is workin' his brain right now thinkin' of what to do to you. But he'll let you live to see my weddin' first."

"Get him to call off the truce, and there won't be any weddin' as far as you're concerned," Salern said angrily.

"I ain't so sure about that, either," Hank Lang declared. "Things might come out different the next time. You goin' to play poker to-night?"

"Not to-night. I'm goin' to crawl into my blankets."

"Yeh? I'll walk along behind you, Salern, and make sure that you don't stop any place on your way home."

"Suit yourself. But don't forget the truce and shoot me in the back, like you did poor old Peter Burgen."

"It's all I can do to hold my hand, Salern, truce or no truce!"

"Start somethin', if you want to see it ended," Salern advised him. "That's the best way."

He turned and strolled along the wall and through the door into the night. Hank Lang followed close behind him. Salern walked rapidly once he was outside. He did not glance at the Beggs shack as he passed it, but he could imagine the scene inside.

Into his shack he went, then turned swiftly and peered out. Hank Lang was standing in the moonlight before the Beggs place, looking at it. And presently he turned and hurried back to the storehouse and went inside.

Sitting before his dying fire, Bert Salern watched and waited. He wanted to talk to Beggs, but he did not want to be caught at it. Hour after hour he waited, until the men came from the storehouse one by one and went to their shacks, until Pagger closed the place and went to his own.

The moon was sinking by then.

Salern crept silently from his place against the wall, going a few feet at a time, stopping now and then to listen. When he reached the Beggs shack he stopped for a time in the rear of it. He heard nothing, saw nothing to cause him alarm. And finally he stepped up to the window.

"Beggs!" he whispered. "Beggs!"

As he had expected, Beggs was awake, thinking miserably. He came to the window at once.

"This is Salern. I don't want to be caught here, so listen and I'll talk quick."

"All right, Salern. But I—I——"

"Stop your moanin' and listen," Salern commanded. "We're goin' to get out of this."

"We can't. There isn't a way."

"Do you want that beast to marry your little girl?"

"No! I'd kill her with my own hand before that."

"Then listen. Do as I say and leave everything else to me. This time to-morrow night, go across the creek to the horses. It'll be dark then, no moon. Get saddles and bridles on two for you and your girl. I'll tend to my own hoss and another I want for a certain reason. That takes care of four of them. You hear?"

"Yes, I hear."

"That'll leave seven horses. You fasten 'em together with the ropes, so they can be led. Understand?"

"Yes. But what——"

"Don't talk! Listen, and do exactly as I say. If you don't, or if you make a mistake, your little girl will have to marry Hank Lang. Remember that! When you get them horses fastened together, you tie the lead rope to that small tree over there. Then you and the girl get on your own horses and slip through to the gap."

"The guard——" Beggs began.

"The guard will be Hank Lang, and I'll tend to him. You do as I say, if you

love your little girl. Get to the gap—and wait there for me. That's all!"

"But——"

"No argument, now. I know exactly what I'm doin'. I've got it all figured out. It's your last chance to save your girl and yourself."

"I'll do it," Beggs said. "I remember everything—and I'll do it. About this time to-morrow night."

"That's it, Beggs. Make no mistake!"

"You can gamble on that."

Without another word Salern slipped back into the shadows and journeyed to his own shack in safety. He rolled up in his blankets, but he did not sleep. He thought and thought until dawn streaked the eastern sky. Then he turned over and slept, for his plans were complete.

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER SONG.

ANOTHER night, and Bert Salern visited the storehouse and acted in a commonplace manner, taking part in the poker game as usual and neither winning or losing much. He left with the others when the game broke up, aware of the fact that Bill Pagger had been watching him closely all evening, and also aware of the fact that the boss of the Village had been caused to feel a false security. Hank Lang had not been there, being on guard duty at the gap.

Salern went straight to his shack and got into his blankets, but not until he had unearthed his money and returned it to his money belt. No thought of sleep entered his head this night. He watched through the open doorway until the moon dropped. He spent most of the time wondering whether Beggs and Lorena would do as he had instructed, and without being discovered.

Finally he crawled from his blankets and crept silently across the creek. He

located Lizard, picked another horse, and got them across and behind his shack. During the day he had spotted Lang's saddle and bridle on a box behind his shack, and now he got them, and his own, and prepared both horses for the trail.

It was some time yet before the hour he had set for Beggs and Lorena to do their work, and that was as he wished it. Taking a coil of rope over his arm, he went silently and rapidly down the trail that led to the gap.

Once away from the shacks, he went as swiftly as possible. But when he came to the mouth of the gap he slackened his pace and became alert. He did not know exactly where to find Hank Lang, and he certainly wanted to locate him.

It was Lang who betrayed his own position, betrayed it by a whiff of tobacco smoke carried on a vagrant breeze. Removing his boots, Salern crept toward the man across the rocks. He saw the sudden flare of a match as Lang lighted his pipe.

The darkness was causing Lang to concentrate on what was in front of him; he thought not of danger from behind. And suddenly a blow struck on the side of his head, and he moaned and tried to turn. To his fading senses came a message.

"I've got you, Mr. Lang. You'll marry no young woman who doesn't want to marry you, I c'n tell you that. Now we'll just tie you up, Mr. Lang——"

That was as much as Lang heard before he descended into unconsciousness. Bert Salern worked swiftly and in a thorough manner. He bound his man well, and gagged him effectually, then carried him back over the rocks and put him down beside the trail.

Back to the village he hurried then. Beggs and Lorena passed him, but he stood aside, and they neither saw nor heard him. He did not wish them to,

for he had no time to explain. The fact that they were there, riding as he had instructed, told him that his plans had been carried out.

He reached his shack in safety and found nothing disturbed. The men of the village appeared to be asleep. Salern hurried across the creek and found the other horses tethered together, the lead rope fastened to the little tree.

He knew that this was one of the perilous moments. He had to lead those seven horses across the stream and to the rear of his shack, and do it silently. He got them started and to leading properly, went slowly, and finally accomplished it.

He stopped again to listen, but heard nothing. He mounted Lizard, took the rein of the other saddled horse, and started his cavalcade around the shack and down the line of shacks.

Salern got as far as the mouth of the trail before disaster occurred. And then one of the led animals, resenting the near presence of another, squealed and kicked and fought.

One of the men of the Village evidently was sleeping poorly that night. "Horses!" he cried. "Up, everybody!"

A gun spoke, spoke again. Harsh voices answered the call. Salern kicked Lizard in the ribs and urged his horses to greater speed. Behind him, guns roared as the men of the Village fired wildly in every direction. They could see nothing, but they could hear; and some of them were directing their shots at the mouth of the gap.

He could have released the led horses, but he did not want to do that, for he had an object in taking them with him. So he took his chances with the flying lead. Behind him a horse squealed, and Salern knew that it had been wounded. But it did not drag, so it was not wounded badly.

He was getting better speed out of them now. Lizard was snorting in de-

rision at the scene. The led horses were kicking and squealing with fright. The sounds of the roaring guns grew fainter, and Bert Salern sighed in relief. His plans seemed to have met with success.

On through the gap he dashed, but managed to stop the animals within a short distance from where Beggs and his daughter were waiting. He called to them, and they galloped back to him.

"Beggs, take this rope and lead this bunch of horses out of the gap and wait for me there," he commanded. "Everything is all right. We're goin' to leave this here hell hole pronto. That you, Lorena? Want me to sing?"

"If you dare——" she began.

"Hurry it up, Beggs," Salern cried. "I've got some work of my own to do right about here, but I'll be with you in a few minutes. Hurry it up!"

He turned over the led horses and retained the one he had prepared for the trail. And then, as Beggs and Lorena took the horses away, Salern dismounted and took the two animals forward to the spot in which he had left Hank Lang, bound and gagged and helpless, beside the trail.

Lang had regained consciousness now. He was tossing from side to side, moaning, groaning, trying to express his misery because of his helpless position and the pain in his head.

"How do you feel, Mr. Lang?" Salern asked him. "Like takin' a nice little ride across the waste places? Because that is what you're goin' to do, Mr. Lang. I've got a hoss all ready for you. I'll untie you now, Mr. Lang, but you'd better not make any hostile move when I do. Because my six-gun will be out of its holster and mighty handy, and every time I think of you it makes my trigger finger itch."

He removed the gag first, and Lang gasped in relief. "What's—all this——" he moaned.

"That's to be explained later, Mr.

Lang, all at the proper time," Salern replied, as he worked at the ropes. "Can you feel the muzzle of my six-gun pressin' against the back of your neck, Mr. Lang? If you can, you know what it means. If you can't, just take my word for it that it's right there and ready for business! Now I'll help you to your feet, Mr. Lang. I love to be polite!"

He had unlashed Lang's legs, but the man's hands remained bound behind him. Salern helped him to his feet, none too gently, and guided him toward the horses.

"I don't know what you're doin', but Bill Pagger will sure fix you for this," Lang threatened.

"I'm not one bit afraid, Mr. Lang. But we'll hurry, just the same, if you don't mind. Some of your friends, I s'pose, are comin' through the gap to find out what it's all about. Get into that saddle, Mr. Lang."

With the six-gun pressed against him, Lang dared not refuse to obey. He got into the saddle stiffly, Salern aiding him because his hands were bound.

"You're some acrobat, Mr. Lang," Salern commented. "Now I'll just lash your feet under this horse's belly, and we'll be fixed."

He acted almost as swiftly as he spoke. He could hear men running in the distance, and knew that they would be upon him soon. Into his own saddle he sprang, grasped the reins of Lang's horse, and urged the two animals to speed.

Out of the gap they dashed, Hank Lang cursing in a characteristic manner. They caught up with Beggs and Lorena and the led horses.

"Beggs, I've got Mr. Lang here with me," Salern said. "I'll explain later. We'll ride ahead, and you and Lorena follow, and don't lose those led horses. There ain't much use in hurryin' now. The enemy is far in the rear."

He chuckled as he took up his posi-

tion in the lead with Hank Lang riding beside him.

"I'd admire to get ahead as far as possible before the sun comes up," he called back. "It'll be mighty hot ridin', and them led horses are goin' to hold us back some. But we'll manage to get to town some time to-morrow night, I reckon, and then we'll all take a rest."

Lang cursed again.

"Mr. Lang," said Salern, "if you open that foul mouth of yours once more, I'm goin' to smash it. There's a lady ridin' behind us, and she ain't used to no such language. Just take a tip, Mr. Lang. The butt of a heavy six-gun crashed against your teeth don't taste like a piece of angel-food cake!"

Silence, then, for a time, as they rode onward, Bert Salern picking out the trail. On they went, mile after mile. And after a time, in the east, there showed a streak of light, heralding the coming of the false dawn.

And then it grew lighter and brighter, and colored streamers flashed into the sky.

"Here comes the old sun!" Salern cried. "Here's another and a better day, I reckon, for all of us except Mr. Lang. But he won't be worryin' about the days much longer."

And suddenly the day was upon them, and Salern called a halt. There they sat in silence for a moment and regarded each other.

"Well, here we are, safe out of the Village of Wanted Men," Salern said. "Ain't it grand?"

"It's wonderful!" Lorena cried. "But why did you bring that horrid man along—and all the horses?"

"Oh, yes! I reckon that I'd better explain that," he told her. "You see, I happen to be a ranger."

"What?" Beggs shrieked.

"Sure! A very active ranger, as perhaps you've noticed."

"You said you were a wanted man——" Lorena began.

"I am. I'm only a probation ranger, you see. I'm wanted to be a regular member of the force. My goodness and gosh! Did you think that I'd lied? I never told a lie in my life!"

"But—about killing that man——" she began.

"Sure and certain!" Salern interrupted. "I shot that pest of a George Gormell while he was resistin' arrest and tryin' mighty hard to shoot me. I had an idea that I could find this here Village of Wanted Men, and I asked to try. They want this Mr. Lang pretty bad, for killin' a defenseless old man. I came to get him."

"And you did!" she cried.

"I did!" he confessed. "I coaxed him into confessin' that he was really Henry Rendel, who's wanted for the crime. I'd never seen him, you see, but there's plenty in Sagebrush as have. Yep, I've got Mr. Lang, and I reckon he'll swing for what he did. And that ain't all, either. We've got all these horses, you see. And how are those poor criminals back there at the Village goin' to escape over the burnin' sands? They ain't! They're goin' to stay right there until I take a posse back and smoke 'em out!"

"You darling!" Lorena cried.

"What's that?" Salern snapped. "Of course, if you mean that, your father will please ride forward and keep an eye on this Mr. Lang. And I'll come back there and ride with you and tend to them led horses. Right forward, Mr. Beggs!"

Mr. Beggs did, and Salern rode back to join the girl. Forward they went once more.

"I don't care what happens, I'm goin' to sing," Salern declared.

"I'll let you just this once," she agreed.

"And if this Lizard hoss of mine starts side-steppin' while I'm doin' it, he'll just naturally feel the cut o' my quirt. This once, I'm goin' to sing!"

Yes, sir, that is just what I am going to do.

"Oh, I knew a girl in Sagebrush, And another in Gold Town—"

"What did I tell you, Lizard, dang your hide! You make another move

like that and I'll lam you one on the head. I told you once that them was only make-believe girls. Turn your head, Lizard, old hoss—turn your head and look at a real one. I'm lookin' at her now!"



ANCIENT INDIAN SKELETONS FOUND

THE pioneer days of Kentucky were vividly recalled recently, when twenty-one skeletons of Indians were unearthed in the vicinity of Mays Lick by scientists from the University of Kentucky. Most of the graves which the archaeologists discovered contained two or three bodies. All were lined with stone. According to one member of the party, Doctor W. K. Funkhouser, the presence of more than one body in a grave was an indication of the prevalence of the ancient Indian practice of killing other members of a chieftain's family and interring them with him, when he died.

In addition to the skeletons, a number of shell-and-bone decorations such as have never been seen before were dug up. The graves were found in a cultivated field, and the positions in which the skeletons rested pointed to their having been buried in a sitting position.



ORIGIN OF THE TOMBSTONE "EPITAPH"

THIS year the famous old Arizona newspaper, the *Tombstone Epitaph*, celebrated its forty-fifth anniversary. The *Epitaph* was established in May, 1880. At a dinner given at that time, the question of a name for the new journal was brought up. All the prominent people in town were present, including John Hays Hammond, then a young mining engineer.

"Your town is called Tombstone," Hammond is reported to have said. "Well, why not take your cue for naming the paper from that? Call it the *Epitaph*."

The suggestion was adopted.

The town of Tombstone is believed to have been christened in a somewhat similar manner. Ed Schiefflin, a prospector in the early days, was accustomed to go out alone on his prospecting trips, although the country thereabouts was filled with bloodthirsty Apaches. One day an old-timer asked him what he was doing on his lonely trips.

"Oh, just looking for stones," Schiefflin replied.

"Well," retorted his gloomy acquaintance, "you keep on and you'll sure find your *tombstone* out there some day."

When Schiefflin made his famous discovery of rich ore in the fall of 1878, he recalled this conversation and in a spirit of grim humor, called his mine the Tombstone.



Some Town

BY *Ray Humphreys*

Author of "No Shots," etc.



"SHORTY," said Sheriff Joe Cook of Monte Vista to his deputy, Shorty McKay, as the hot August day began to cool with dusk, "I've had something

on my mind to say to yuh fer a long time, an' now I'm a-gonna say it. I wants yuh to spend more time around this office, at yuhr official duties, an' less time up to the telephone exchange blabbing with that Haynes gal!"

Shorty, who was sitting back in a comfortable chair, feet cocked up on his desk, cleaning his revolver, brought feet and chair to the floor with a simultaneous thud.

"Says which, boss?"

"Yuh heard me the fust time, Shorty, but I'm obligin' an' willin' to repeat—I says I wants yuh to spend less time up thar chinnin' with that Belle Haynes operator an' more time here where yuh is paid to be!"

"Why, what——" sputtered Shorty, flushing a bit, but the sheriff made haste to cut him short.

"What fer, yuh're gonna say, eh? Waal, fer one thing, that gal doesn't give no 'too good service up thar at the exchange nohow, an' it ain't helpin' matters none to have yuh up thar disturbing her further, an' fer another thing yuh ain't givin' the taxpayers o'

Monte Vista no good fer their money when yuh're up thar instead o' here. When I wants a subpoena served or a notice tacked up, yuh ain't here to do it, an' besides, I wants yuh hangin' around this office when I'm out, so that in case o' an' emergency——"

"Yes, sir," said Shorty respectfully.

"Now, this evenin' I'm headin' fer the depot an' then to the Red Spruce Hotel," said the sheriff, "where I goes into conference with a coupla big cattlemen from Denver, aimin' to sell 'em that bunch o' three-year-old white-faces I got back in the hills. Yuh stay here in case anything happens; mind, I mean here, not at the telephone exchange!"

"But, boss——" protested Shorty.

"She'll just have to git used to bein' lonesome up thar by herself ef that's what yuh're gonna say," cut in the sheriff. "I'm plumb sick o' yuhr sentimental nonsense, Shorty, an' besides, that gal wouldn't make nobody no wife. Now, ef it was Susie Kirk, the day operator, yuh was sparkin'——"

"Well, it ain't," said Shorty crisply.

The sheriff arose and put on his black hat and made for the door, turning to cast a last look at his unhappy deputy.

"Waal, I'm headin' fer the depot," he remarked. "The six forty is about due; I'll be at the Red Spruce after that ef any one wants me, an' yuh stay here,

fer, while I don't place much stock in them anny-nominous letters, still——"

The sheriff paused, drew his lips tight, turned and went out, banging the office door after him.

Shorty, again at the task of polishing up his gun, although only half-heartedly now, scowled as the banging door told him his peevish boss had departed. Shorty knew what Sheriff Cook had meant by his last unfinished remark. The sheriff had received an anonymous letter two days before, and it was worrying him a bit, evidently. The letter, unsigned and undated, had simply stated, tersely, that the writer had overheard the plans of several gunmen to make a cleaning in Monte Vista. That was all. There were no details. And while Sheriff Cook ordinarily, as he said, took small stock in such missives, still——"

"He's worrying about *that*," moaned Shorty unhappily, "an' that's why he orders me to keep open house here in the office while he entertains his cattle buyers! Now how about Belle, up thar at that lonesome telephone exchange all alone like she is? Pore gal—an' glory be, what eyes she has! Great big blue sparklers! An' her hair—golden as a five-dollar gold piece just outten the mint—pore little gal."

Shorty drew his big watch from his pocket and glanced at it. Six forty-five, almost time for Belle to go on duty. Just fifteen minutes more and she would be on duty. Shorty shrugged his shoulders and sighed. He'd call her up then. Maybe, too, if he could screw up sufficient courage, he'd disregard his orders and go up there. Belle would be lonesome, he knew. Besides, she was a pretty girl—and—well, Shorty was very fond of her.

Meantime the puffing narrow gauge had pulled in and disgorged its passengers into the arms of the town, for all of Monte Vista made it a point to be at the depot for the arrival of the six

forty from Denver. The two cattle buyers whom the sheriff had been expecting swung off and Sheriff Cook spotted them and made them welcome. They all climbed into the creaking old bus from the Red Spruce and rattled up the street to the hotel, where the sheriff was host at supper. And after the meal, which was a good one, the sheriff and his guests retired to a secluded spot in the lobby, to talk over the proposed deal. The fate of more than a thousand head of prime white-faces, back in the timber, was to be decided. The sheriff produced three fat cigars.

Meantime, too, other train passengers had come straggling into the Red Spruce and registered. There was an extra large quota this evening, it appeared, and the cattle buyers, who had struck up an acquaintance with some of the passengers on the train en route, pointed out various comers to the sheriff.

"See that feller with the whiskers just registerin'?" asked Bill Grant, one of the cattle buyers. "Well, he's a jewelry salesman from New York—says he's got a small fortune in jewels on him. Shouldn't think he'd be safe carryin' stuff like that around this country. Told him so, but he laughed."

The sheriff fixed a glassy eye on Grant. "He's safe enough; I'm sheriff o' this county, Mr. Grant, an' that bird's safer here than he'd be in New York City!"

The cattle buyers exchanged significant glances and changed the subject. The jewelry salesman went up to his room. Other guests scattered to the dining room and to the street, and the old-fashioned clock over the clerk's desk boomed out the hour of eight o'clock. Old Jerry Curtis, the clerk, seated at the hotel telephone switchboard, munched an apple and glanced over *The Clarion* between calls from the various rooms for ice water, letter paper, envelopes, and other free donations. Sheriff Cook, expounding the cause of

his good white-faces, glowed and grew eloquent, intending to say plenty before the buyers put in a bid. The sheriff had sold plenty of cattle before.

"Hullo," yipped Jerry Curtis complainingly. "Ya, this is the clerk hisself talkin'. Our new safe ain't been installed yet. Awful sorry. Just hide 'em somewhars in the room—under the carpet or back o' the dresser—sure!"

The clerk clicked off.

"Huh," said the sheriff, growing interested, "an' who was that, Jerry, callin' about valuables?"

"That New Yark salesman up in 308," said Jerry, "wanted to store some jewelry in a safe overnight. I told him to hide it under the carpet or back o' the dresser."

"Sure, what is he afraid of in Monte Vista?" demanded the sheriff with pride. "I'm sheriff here, an' ef I do say so, we ain't got no thieves an' robbers here—no, sirree, boys."

"Well, sheriff," said one of the cattle buyers, "let's come to terms on those white-faces. We'll take yuhr word that they're all yuh say—prime—an' now, delivered here, on the hoof, an' loaded into cars, billed to us—"

The sheriff held his breath. The bid was coming.

"All right—go on," he said.

"We figger, Grant and I, that the company can pay yuh—"

The cattle buyer paused, for effect, the sheriff instantly decided—and the sheriff waved him on.

"Yes—go on!"

But the buyer did not go on. He was staring with wide eyes and slightly opened mouth toward the sheriff. A full minute and still the fellow did not go on. Sheriff Cook blinked. The other buyer, Grant, was also staring. For a minute the sheriff was puzzled before he realized that both men were staring not at him but past him. He turned for a look.

In the doorway of the hotel, rifles

leveled, stood a group of dusty men. Just as the sheriff saw them the leader, advancing gingerly into the lobby, bawled out a thunderous command.

"Hands up, everybody—good an' high, too!"

There wasn't a bit of doubt in the minds of all who heard him but that he meant it. Hands accordingly went up—and high. Sheriff Cook reached for the ceiling along with the rest, for he had been taken from behind, and by surprise as well. Old Jerry Curtis, the clerk, sprang from his chair at the switchboard and straightened up on his tiptoes, so as to be able to reach all the higher. The bell hops reached, too. The silence was ominous as the leader advanced farther into the lobby and the pack at his heels followed him, eyes and rifles sweeping to all sides.

"Nobody moves," said the bandit leader loudly, "unless they are tired o' livin'. Fust, we want whatever guns you—"

The leader didn't finish. One of the men behind him darted out and quickly frisked the guests in the lobby, as well as the clerk and the bell boys. The guns were piled on the counter.

"Joe," said the leader, "git on that telephone board an' see no calls goes outta here while we're workin'. Better start callin' the rooms an' tell 'em that the proprietor is comin' up to inspect the rooms er something, so they'll open up fer us."

Joe obediently took his post. He plugged in a line and opened the plug. It was plain that he knew something of switchboards.

"Marty," said the leader, "yuh an' 'Pug' search these gents in the lobby here, an' guard 'em, while me an' 'Blackie' goes around to the rooms an' collects. Remember, Joe, yuh watch that board, fer them bazoos will start yelpin' as soon as we gits around past 'em—yuh kid 'em along gentle till we gits down."

"Sure," said Joe.

The bandit leader, followed by one assistant, strode for the stairs and vanished, while the two men left in the lobby began a systematic search of Sheriff Cook, Clerk Curtis, the cattle buyers, and a group of salesmen who had been chatting in an alcove.

Meanwhile the man at the switchboard did his stuff and kept up a running fire of talk.

"Yep . . . this is the Red Spruce Hotel . . . Mr. O'Neill, no, he ain't in just now . . . call later . . . all right. Hello, room 312? Well, say, this is the clerk downstairs speakin'. The proprietor is comin' up in a minute to see yuh; open up when he raps, will yuh? All right! Hello, yes, this is the clerk . . . ice water, 402 . . . right away! Hello, room 313 . . . this is the clerk downstairs . . . the proprietor is comin' up to see yuh in a minute . . . open up when he raps, will ya? All right."

"Well, well," said the bandit who had been searching the sheriff, "looky this, gents—blamed ef this party ain't got a badge on—purty one, too—sheriff, by gum. Well, ain't this nice. How are yuh, sheriff? No, never mind shakin' hands. Yuh keep yuhr hands up or yuh'll be shakin' hands with Saint Peter. We don't mind sheriffs at all, mister. We robs them, too."

"Hello," the man at the switchboard was droning, "yes, this is the clerk. What's that? Yuh was just robbed? Well, keep still an' stay right thar until the sheriff gits up. What room . . . 211? All right . . . yes, the sheriff is right here in the lobby now . . . all right, all right . . . don't get so excited! Hello! Yes, this is the Red Spruce Hotel. No, nobody here by that name. Nope . . . good by! Hello, room 314 . . . say, this is the clerk speakin' . . . the proprietor is comin' up . . . will yuh open up, please?"

"Sufferin' snakes," groaned the sheriff weakly, as the perspiration stood out

on his forehead, "yuh birds must be the Hollis band I got a letter about. I never thought yuh'd have the nerve—like this—in a big hotel."

"We like 'em big, sheriff," smiled one of the gunmen coolly. "So yuh got a letter about us, eh? How nice."

"I didn't put much stock in it," gasped Sheriff Cook, and then, under his breath, to Grant, the cattle buyer, who was shivering at the sheriff's left, he muttered—"now whar do yuh reckon that fool deputy o' mine is, eh? Sparkin' that phone gal I'll bet a hat, an' leavin' us to be robbed an' insulted!"

"Hello! Hello!" the man at the switchboard was rasping, as the little lights began to flash all over the board, signaling. "Room 218 . . . all right! Yuh say yuh just been robbed? All right, the sheriff will be right up! Yuh stay right thar. Hello, yes . . . this is the clerk. Yes . . . room 220 . . . all right . . . robbed? All right, wait thar. I'll be right up . . . hello . . . hello . . . 221 . . . yes . . . just been held up . . . well, remain right there. Hello . . . yes, this is the Red Spruce . . . no, not here. Hello . . . room 221 . . . yes, I heard yuh . . . just been robbed . . . yes . . . stay right there!"

The bandits known as Marty and Pug, having searched the victims in the lobby and relieved them of all valuables, stood back now and grinned at their comrade, Joe, at the switchboard.

"Yuh is *some* operator, Joe," cried Pug. Yuh sure can talk fast'n plenty, I'll say!"

"Plenty, heck!" whooped Joe, jerking off his headpiece long enough to grin at his pals. "I'm losin' ground. Thar's forty people on here tryin' to talk at once, reportin' a robbery! Reckon the boss is makin' fast work o' it! Two or three hollerin' in my ear at once—to say nuthin' o' outside calls comin' in, too."

"Quiet 'em down," advised Pug

softly. "Tell 'em to stay put in their rooms. We don't want the buzzards swoopin' inter the lobby. We could handle 'em, all right, but it might look bad from the street to see a lot o' excited people crowdin' around. Get talkin' an' tell 'em to be calm an' stay put!"

"I'll open the whole dog-gone board," said Joe with sudden decision, "so that they can all hear me at one time. Hello, everybody! Yes . . . this is the clerk speakin'. We know thar's been a robbery . . . everybody stay right in their rooms until the sheriff arrives. Remain quiet . . . fer a few minutes . . . yes . . . hello! Yes, this is the Red Spruce Hotel. *Yuh quit ringin' in my ear.* Who tol' yuh to put in, anyhow. We ain't got no Mr. O'Neiff here. All right. Good-by . . . everybody stay quiet now . . . best thing."

Joe ripped off the headpiece again.

"Somebody rung in from outside an' near busted my eardrum," wailed Joe. Dog-gone it, Pug, things is gettin' hot upstairs. Thar goes the signal from 401—the boss has reached the top floor. Thar's 402! He's sweepin' right along handsomelike!"

Meantime the sheriff was wilting with mortification, but there wasn't a chance in a thousand that Shorty would happen along and be able to handle the situation—no, the bandits would soon finish their wholesale plundering and depart, leaving the sheriff to be shamed before the whole county.

"The money we was to pay yuh down on them steers," whispered Grant, the cattle buyer, "it's gone—and the deal's off!"

"Hello!" shouted the bandit at the switchboard, and he held up a hand to attract the attention of Pug and Marty, the other outlaws, and he winked at them. "Yes . . . this is the clerk . . . oh, yes, 308 . . . oh, yes . . . yuh say yuh're the man asked about the safe place fer yuhr jewelry? Oh, yes. I

told yuh to hide it under the carpet . . . yes . . . an' yuh did . . . yes . . . an' the bandits never found it, yuh say? Well, well . . . that's great . . . room 308, eh? Fine . . . leave it right thar under the carpet, mister. That's right!"

The bandit operator whirled and yelled at Pug. "Beat it up to 308, Pug—gent thar phones down to thank me fer tellin' him to hide his stuff under the carpet. He says the robbers missed it. Git yuh up thar an' grab it. The boss overlooked a good haul. Hurry, Pug!"

"My gosh," wailed Curtis, the clerk, "that's that New Yark jewelry salesman that I told to hide his stuff!"

Pug, with a sneering look at Curtis, ran up the stairs.

"Great stuff," chuckled the bandit at the switchboard, doubling up in mirth. "The boss overlooks a bet an' the pore sucker calls down to brag about it an' Pug goes right up an' gits it!"

'Ain't had so much fun in a year!" agreed Marty, shifting his rifle a bit, "and this is some killing, too."

"Liable to be ef yuh move!" whooped a strange voice from the rear, and Marty and Joe felt their blood freeze in their veins. "Yuh, with the rifle—drop it. Thanks. An' yuh, at the switchboard thar—hands up high. Now stand up—thanks!"

"Shorty!" whooped Sheriff Cook, and he swayed, only to start like he had been shot at the next words of the newcomer.

"Pick up that rifle, boss—and herd that pair o' slickers one side. All right, fellers, come on in!"

The next minute a young army swarmed in—armed with pitchforks, rifles, shotguns, revolvers, and clubs. They were townsmen in various stages of dress and undress. A posse!

"Scatter behind chairs, er curtains—an' the counter," ordered Shorty. "The rest'll be comin' downstairs in a minute."

Sure enough, grinning happily, Pug,

a handful of jewelry clutched to his chest, came romping down the stairs.

"Elevate 'em, mister!" cried Shorty, rising from behind the counter with a pair of six-guns—and Pug did. The next minute the sheriff had another cowed gunman under the muzzle of his rifle.

"More comin'," said Shorty, as running footfalls sounded immediately overhead, and the next minute he was popping up from behind the counter again, covering two surprised gunmen.

"That's all, Shorty," cried Sheriff Cook, quickly recovering his poise. "Thar was only five. We got 'em all!"

"Thar was six," corrected Shorty tersely. "We nabbed the lookout outside as we come up!"

"I was hopin' yuh'd come, deputy," beamed the sheriff, as he collected the outlaws' weapons from where they had dropped them. "Ef I could have gotten a phone call to yuh—"

"Huh!" sneered the bandit leader, still pretty cocky. "We thought o' that—we took no chances—we cut the wires right outside yuhr office, sheriff, as we came in. We didn't know yuh was here. Yuh couldn't have gotten yuhr deputy nohow."

"I was at the office, boss," said Shorty, and he reddened a little, anticipating the bellow he knew would come. But before anything more could be said, a pajama-clad form bounded down the stairs, half a dozen at a time. It was the New York jewelry salesman. He saw his jewelry on the floor, where Pug had dropped it when Shorty had covered him. He pounced for it and clutched it tightly to him.

"Some town!" he howled sarcastically, as he glared around at Shorty, the sheriff, the clerk, the posse, and the captured bandits. "Fine town—where

they ain't no safes fer valuables an' the clerk tells yuh where to hide 'em an' yuh telephone down to tell the clerk everything is all right an' thar's a bandit on the switchboard who sends up another bandit to rob yuh before yuh has time to turn around."

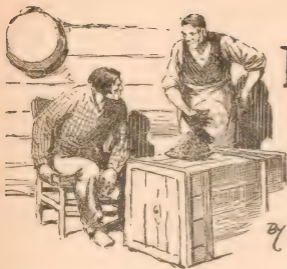
"I wasn't at the office, boss," repeated Shorty, ignoring the New Yorker. "I went up to the exchange to keep Belle company, she bain' lonesome, an' she wasn't feelin' very well, so I told her to go home an' I'd handle the exchange, so she did, an' I kept tryin' to ring up the Red Spruce here, to tell yuh whar I was should yuh need me, an' I couldn't get no answer—until finally I does get in—and then I hears a strange voice shouting fer everybody to stay quiet in their rooms until the sheriff arrived—that doesn't sound good, so I collects a posse in town—"

"Some town!" whooped the bandit leader crazily. "Some town—whar they have deputy sheriffs fer centrals. No wonder we got caught, fellers. Joe, yuh shouldn't have answered any o' them incomin' calls."

"Further," broke in Shorty, "I suspected right off this was the birds yuh got the anonymous letter about, boss. It was from Belle, that letter. She overheard some talk on the wires. She didn't dare sign her name because she figgered yuh didn't like her and she didn't want to give away the fact that she had listened in, fer fear I wouldn't like it, but to-night she tol' me. I put two an' two together, boss, an' when Belle went home an' I heard—"

"Belle is a dandy fine gal, Shorty," whooped the sheriff, and he patted Shorty on the back. "Wonderful gal—make some feller a splendid wife. Yuh better stick around close to her, Shorty—splendid gal, that Belle!"





Beans for a Bully

By *Kenneth Gilbert*
Author of "Ol' Three Toes," etc

THE inspector of Northwest Police at Fort McLeod looked over the four men ranged before him, and a light of understanding friendliness shone forth brightly in his eyes.

"Prospectors, eh? And you want to go into the Little Loon Lake country, eh? We have no objection, of course, although I'm glad that you men are familiar enough with the North to understand that by checking off with the police before entering that region, you will enable us to keep track of you, and render assistance, if the latter is needed.

"Still, I am compelled to warn you of possible trouble. The Fish River Indians have been a source of worry to us for a year past, ever since that half-breed, Clunotte, came from the Tanana to live with them. Our orders are to handle the situation with diplomacy. I'm not questioning the policy of headquarters, you understand, but I'll be frank enough to say that so far our course hasn't proved entirely satisfactory. On the other hand, there are a few white men scattered from here to the arctic, and if the Indians were stirred up, these same white men might be wiped out.

"So, if you go into the region, you do so at your own peril, and with strictest orders against making trouble with the Indians. As a whole, they are a peaceable people, but they worship Clunotte, and even the old chief, Odana, can't do much with them. Clunotte's hold on them seems to rest largely in the fact that his contempt of white men is very intense—he has enough *voyageur* blood in him to account himself as good as the rest of us. If, somehow, he could be shown up to be the rank coward that he is, I doubt whether the young men of the tribe would follow him as blindly as they do now. But so far we haven't been able to solve that problem.

"He avoids trouble with us, of course, because he knows that we stand for authority. But with prospectors, you'll find him different. And you'll have to go through their country, over High Pass, in order to get into the Little Loon Lake region.

"Break his hold on the Fish River tribe, and you'll not only throw that whole region open to development, but you'll lighten the burden of your humble servant very materially."

The inspector paused, and glanced over the sheet of paper on which they had written their names.

"Dan McGivens. That's you, eh?" and he nodded to the tallest of the party, a rangy, wind-burned man with a grizzled mustache.

"Right, inspector," said the man addressed, "but it's a hard task you've given us. I've been prospectin' close to forty years, and I've never let no fish-eatin' Siwash run a shindy on me yet. I'm goin' into that country, and no Injun is goin' to——"

"That'll do, McGivens!" snapped the inspector. "You've heard the instructions under which I'm acting. If you shoot a Fish River Indian, I would advise you to have plenty of witnesses to prove that it was in actual self-defense, and that the attack on you was unprovoked."

The officer's eyes returned to the paper again. "Sam Francis."

"That's me, inspector," said the second man.

"Buck Whitham."

The third man, old in looks but young in bearing, and with the steady gaze of one who has schooled himself to look for the unexpected, stepped forward.

"Then your name," and the inspector turned to the last of the quartet, "must be nothing less than 'Sandy' O'Hara."

He smiled as he swiftly appraised the short, stocky little man with the red hair and twinkling, blue eyes. O'Hara was dwarfed by the others, but there was depth to his chest, and solid thickness to his shoulders.

"Ever been North before, O'Hara?" went on the officer, quick to perceive the difference between the fourth man and the others.

"Not so far, your honor," returned the small man, "but if the boys will bear with me ignorance of miner's ways, I'll stay with 'em."

McGivens spoke up. "We're figgerin' that Sandy, here, is goin' to be our antidote for 'cabin fever,' when the rest of us get so sick of lookin' at each other that we want to commit murder. Sandy

joined up with us at Edmonton. What he don't know about prospectin' would fill a well. He's been a boxer, a sailor, a longshoreman, and about everything else except a miner. Maybe he can learn that game. But he's good-natured, and he can sure cook."

The inspector smiled again.

"Well, good luck to you, boys! There's plenty of gold up there, if you know where to look for it. But remember; no gun play with the Indians! Get along with them, somehow."

McGivens grunted, but said nothing. His eyes seemed to say that he was not convinced by the inspector's words; the proposal to tolerate a truculent Siwash was much too improbable to consider. McGivens had been accustomed to putting any and all red men in their proper place. But it was plain that he wished to be gone.

The four men, led by the tall prospector, filed out of the inspector's cabin, gathered their pack horses, and struck out for the North.

High Pass swept grandly upward for a full two thousand feet; a steep climb, a fight every inch of the way, and at its summit the snow lay in drifts, even though the midsummer sun blazed down fiercely. The prospectors camped, while they sized up the situation.

"Seems like you got the wrong dope on the Pass, Dan," ventured Sam Francis, casting a critically appraising eye over the steeps before them. "We can't take horses up there with a full load, anyway. Reckon we'll have to do most of the packin' on our back. Wish some of them dog-gone Siwashes that policeman told us about would show up. Maybe we could hire 'em as packers."

It was true that they had seen no tribesmen since arriving at this spot. Beyond the lofty crotch of the Pass lay the country of which the inspector had spoken cautiously; a region of shallow lakes, good-sized rivers misnamed

creeks, and valleys scoured by glacial action, if meager-detailed stories concerning it were correct. Likewise, these same stories had recounted that the Little Loon Lake country was a land where much coarse gold had been found along the old levels of its creeks. The Indians there did no mining; they were content to hunt, fish, and dig roots, and perhaps do much trapping in the winter. But they were zealous guardians of their land.

Sandy O'Hara came out of the tent as McGivens replied: "We'd have to take the horses over pretty light, if we got 'em over at all. Maybe we could leave 'em here, and send Sandy back with 'em."

Concern showed in the blue eyes of the little Irishman. "And I'd get no chance to see the country beyant?" he queried. "Listen to me, Dan McGivens. I'm goin' through that Pass, and no Siwash or any other man is goin' to stop me."

He turned away toward the tent, and his pots and pans, for Sandy had a knack in preparing food, although he scorned the task as being beneath him. Nevertheless, he was glad to make a concession in order to stay with the party. He liked this life; the great outdoors, the frowning mountains, with here and there a glimpse of valleys so expansive that they suggested the sea.

"You was wishin' for Siwashes," said McGivens to Francis, when O'Hara had gone. "Here they come now."

Down the slope of High Pass a headless, dark snake writhed and twisted; a file of men, perhaps twenty of them, black against the whiteness of the snow. They came on rapidly, for it was clear that they had spied the prospectors' camp. At their head marched one who towered over the rest—a veritable moose of a man, McGivens saw, as the newcomers drew up and stopped.

The leader stepped forward. He was one of the biggest men McGivens had

ever seen; tall, and at the same time broad and powerfully built. He had a dark face, hard, cruel. The man was unarmed, save for a Hudson Bay sheath knife, which swung at his right hip. McGivens guessed that this must be the half-breed, Clunotte, of whom the inspector at Fort McLeod had spoken.

The man stared boldly at the four prospectors and strode up to McGivens, who seemed to be the leader.

"Were you go, huh?" he asked. "You maybe go by Inchen country, over High Pass, huh?"

McGivens, although he reddened at the cool effrontery of the Indian, nevertheless remembered the inspector's warning; that there must be no trouble. Else he would likely have knocked the half-breed down, and booted him away from the place. But that would likely have meant bloodshed.

"We're goin' over High Pass," replied the prospector. "We're willin' to pay well for packers, if any of you men want to work."

The half-breed spat contemptuously. Still, he replied: "We take your packs over—two dolla's a pound, huh?"

McGivens' face grew black. "Why, you thievin' blackguard—" he began, but the half-breed held up his hand.

"Huh, I no 'fraid of you!" he declared contemptuously. He looked around at his followers; they were enjoying this dialogue. Admiration for his courage at baiting these white men was written clearly on their faces. Clunotte grinned.

"Two dolla's a pound," he announced firmly. "And you pay hundred dolla's tribute for goin' t'ru Inchen land, huh?"

Sam Francis stepped forward and laid a placating hand on the aroused McGivens.

"Careful, Mac," he warned, sinking his voice low. "Better strike a bargain with him, even at that price. 'Twill pay us, once we get over where the gold is. Remember our instructions. Only"—

and his teeth gritted—"I'd like to make that big buck dance with a few bullets under his soles."

McGivens swallowed hard, and glared at the leering half-breed. "I'll pay what you ask," he declared. "But understand this: we'll stand for nothin' else. We're goin' into the Little Loon Lake country, and you're not goin' to stop us."

A sudden clamor broke out from behind the tent, where a number of the Indians, young men, had sidled in close.

"Out av this, you scuts!" came the voice of Sandy O'Hara. "Oh, Dan!" he called. "These red divils are stealin' our grub!"

McGivens, with a muttered curse, reached for his six-shooter, and charged in the direction of the noise.

"Careful, Dan!" yelled Sam Francis. "Remember——"

"That's right, Dan!" chimed in Buck Whitham, who had followed.

The knot of Indians had moved away from the tent, but the prospectors glimpsed a side of bacon which the bucks were trying to conceal. McGivens swore sulphurously for a minute. But he jammed his gun back in its holster.

"Oh, well, I guess you boys are right, after all," he agreed. "But it does seem hard to be stuck up like this."

Sandy O'Hara came up.

"D'yuh mean to say we've got to stand for this?" he demanded. "Where's the manhood in yuh, Dan McGivens?"

The tall prospector scowled. "What do you know about it?" he retorted angrily. "We've been told not to use force, and we've got to make good, or get into trouble with the police. We can't use our guns, and these Indians know it.

"If it's gettin' too tough for you, turn back right now," he went on bitterly. "Sam and Buck and me are goin' through, just the same."

Sandy's face hardened. "I'll stick as

long as any av yuh!" he declared. "No Siwash or any other man can make an O'Hara quit!" He went inside the tent, and they heard him rattling the cooking utensils.

"That's what comes from havin' a greenhorn along," declared Sam Francis. "He doesn't savvy things up here. Outside of rustlin' grub, can you figure what use O'Hara is to us?"

"None whatever," replied McGivens. "It's brains, and a cool head, that count now.

"Well, we're stuck, all right, but we've got to be game. Look at that infernal half-breed," he went on, indicating Clunotte, around whom the Indians had gathered in adulation. "If I knew of some way to take him down a peg, everything would be cleared up. There's plenty of gold back there, just as the inspector said. This country could be opened up, and something made of it, if it were not for that big lump of a Tanana. These Fish River Indians ain't so bad, but they're follerin' him like a lot of kids.

"It'll take all our money to pay for packin' over the Pass, and payin' that tribute. Likely, too, they'll steal more grub off us, before they're through. And all on account of that 'breed!'"

He turned away toward the cook tent. "Come on, 'Useless!'" he called to O'Hara. "We're hungry. Want somethin' to take the taste of these Indians out of our mouths."

O'Hara replied: "'Tis comin' up directly."

He was less truculent now; apparently he sensed that he was in the party by tolerance only, and he was anxious to adapt himself, after the tilt with McGivens. The odor of cooking food emanated from the tent.

From the group of Indians came a sort of chant, a song with a joyous lilt to it.

"What's that they're singin'?" demanded McGivens of Francis, who, as

the tall prospector knew, understood some of the jargon of the Northern Indians.

Francis swore. "Near as I can make out, they're havin' a sort of celebration over Clunotte," he replied. "They're praisin' him as a man without fear. Wouldn't surprise me if they clean us out of grub entirely, before we've gone far into their country. They're sayin' that we're milk-blooded pale faces."

McGivens turned away. "Well, we'll eat, anyway," he declared.

But Whitham interposed: "Wait a minute. Somethin' is up."

The prospectors saw that Clunotte had broken away from the group of Indians and was marching directly toward the tent. The other bucks lingered there, as though in indecision.

"He's hungry," whispered Francis. "Now, what in thunder is goin' to happen?"

"Happen?" echoed McGivens. "It means that we've got to wait second table, for a half-breed Siwash! If word of this ever gets out——"

"Better watch Sandy O'Hara," counseled Whitham. But O'Hara needed no watching.

Clunotte confidently thrust aside the tent flap and entered.

The heart of the small man was bitter within him as he busied himself at the menial task of cooking. It was no task for a real man, he told himself, but he liked these prospector friends of his, even though he couldn't win their esteem. They appreciated men who had been tried in the crucible of the North; men who knew the country and its ways. He was merely a chechahco of the greenest sort, and he knew it. Yet in his way, he knew himself to be as good a man as any of them.

He marveled at the way they had truckled to the domineering half-breed and his followers; yet Sandy understood that perhaps these prospectors

had a better grasp of the situation than he did. For one thing, they were ready to hearken to the word of the Northwest Police in an amazingly respectful way. Sandy himself had been too prone to regard all policemen as nuisances. Up here, however, they were more martial, and their word carried authority. The prospectors regarded them as the sole symbol of man-made law, and the police were backed by all the power of the Dominion. So when the word had been given that there was to be no trouble with the Fish River Indians, there was nothing to do but obey.

Yet Sandy reflected upon the injustice of it, as he lifted the lid of the big pot on the stove and observed that the beans he had prepared were now thoroughly cooked. From a box he produced a quantity of baking-powder biscuits that he had baked with considerable skill that morning. On the cover of the grub box, which served as a table, he arranged cups, and picked up the coffeepot, preparatory to filling them with the aromatic brew. He turned, as he heard some one at the door. He saw the eager face of Clunotte.

For a moment Sandy stood transfixed with puzzlement, and the half-breed, reading the Irishman's hesitancy as intimidation, came inside. His eyes scanned the array of food hungrily. Without a word he walked over to the table and plumped himself down on the flour box and began to eat. From a platter of cold caribou roast, he helped himself plentifully, seizing a hunk of the meat, and wolfing it down. For as much as a minute he ate, and then looked up inquiringly at the little Irishman, who stood there with jaw agape, coffeepot still in his hand.

Clunotte indicated that he would have some coffee.

Still staring at the half-breed with eyes filled with awe, Sandy filled a cup, and pushed it in front of his visitor. The half-breed drank gustily, and sig-

nified that he wanted more. The three prospectors, now grouped at the tent door, watching the tableau, saw Sandy comply. Even the Indians had edged up close, yet still keeping a respectful distance from the men at the door. The natives stood in admiration of Clunotte's daring, but they were unaccustomed to treating white men with such effrontery, and they couldn't overcome a natural fear of pushing matters too far.

Clunotte drank the second cup of coffee and finished what remained of the flaky biscuits. He sighed, and from his hip pocket produced a handkerchief. A gasp as of disbelief came from the prospectors' throats as they saw the half-breed calmly scoop up the double handful of lump sugar on the table—the lump sugar that they had packed so many miles, and which helped satisfy their craving for sweets—dump it into the handkerchief, and thrust the package inside of his shirt. He rose from the table, licking his lips in a satisfied way.

"Good grub," he commented. "Inchen like good grub."

Sandy O'Hara, who had seemingly recovered from his astonishment, nodded at the compliment. Almost deferentially he pushed the half-breed back into the seat.

"Thank yuh, sor," he said, "but there's more yet. Here's a whole potful of beans that yuh've overlooked."

McGivens turned horrified eyes on Francis and Whitham. "Why, the fool is goin' to give him all of our dinner!" he exclaimed.

But Francis laid a cautioning hand on his shoulder. "Wait!" he whispered.

Clunotte cast a doubtful eye on the bean pot and rubbed his stomach reflectively. But apparently, glutton though he was, he had eaten quite enough.

"Inchen no want beans," he replied, and rose once more.

"Oh, but yah do!" protested Sandy.

"No!" said Clunotte emphatically.

"Yes!" insisted the little Irishman, a gleam in his eye.

"N——" began the half-breed, and then——

Smack!

The blow caught Clunotte full on the chin, and with a startled look on his face, he went over backward, sprawling toward the door. But he was big, and tough, and the punch, although scientifically delivered, did not knock him out. Like the bounce of a rubber ball, he was on his feet, knife half drawn.

Smack! This time Sandy's fist caught the half-breed on the mouth, crushing the lips, and snapping his head backward. Like a stricken ox he fell, and his head collided with the spruce tent pole. He lay stunned.

Stooping over him, Sandy jerked the knife from the nerveless fingers, lifted the stove lid, and thrust the weapon into the glowing coals. McGivens whirled, gun in hand, as the other Indians crowded close. But the tribesmen evidently had no intention of interfering. Astonishment was written on their faces at the ease with which the small, red-headed *tyee* had downed the hitherto invincible Clunotte.

Sandy caught up a bucket of water and soused the head of the stupefied half-breed. The latter sat up dazedly; then struggled to his feet, groping for the doorway. But Sandy's freckled fingers caught in the Indian's shirt collar.

"Lots of beans to eat," purred the little Irishman.

Clunotte shook his head. "No can eat," he declared. "Inchen heap sick." He shook his head.

"Oh, but yuh must!" insisted the small man.

Clunotte's snakelike eyes went blacker, and his hand flew to his hip.

Smack! went Sandy's open hand across the bully's mouth.

"Yuh'll eat beans, just as I said!"

It was too much for the big breed.

Whipped, cowed, he staggered to the table, and sat down. With a spoon which Sandy flung to him, he scooped up a mouthful of beans and swallowed them with an obvious effort.

"Inchen sick," he complained, getting to his feet. "No can eat." Then he sat down again, hastily, as Sandy's right arm swung back threateningly.

Clunotte ate the beans, ate them until he could eat no more; ate them until his efforts became ludicrous, and all the while the three prospectors writhed in silent mirth at sight of the solemn little Irishman feeding his unwelcome guest. Moreover, the other Indians peered at the spectacle through the open tent door, and grinned in obvious delight. The proceeding savored of torture, and they could understand and appreciate that. Moreover, as is customary with arrogant, self-appointed leaders of the type of Clunotte, there has been and always will be plenty of less assertive followers who glory in another's downfall, and the downfall of Clunotte was complete.

He ate and ate, until the last bean was gone, and then Sandy suffered him to stagger to his feet, and weave toward the door. Plainly the bully was in distress. For the first time Sandy grinned, somewhat commiseratingly.

"Them Indians will jump us now!" whispered McGivens, fingering his six-shooter.

"Never fear," returned Francis, who understood the ways of the red man better. "Watch and see."

Before his followers, Clunotte paused, and haltingly began to harangue them, pointing toward the tent. But they drowned his address with jeers; he was a fallen idol indeed. A man who could be cowed by a little red-headed *tyee* commanded no respect in their eyes. Francis stepped forward and caught the half-breed by the shoulder.

"Down that way is where you come from," the prospector declared. "On your way! And if you ever show up around these parts again, we'll have Sandy make you eat a whole horse!"

Clunotte stumbled away, and one of the bucks spat after his retreating back.

McGivens clapped Sandy on the shoulder. "Son," he declared, "I take back all that I said. There's a place for you with us, sure as shootin'. We'll have no trouble with these bucks now."

But Sandy, although his blue eyes grew suddenly misty with the feeling of comradeship that surged within him, did not unbend. Never again would things be quite the same as they had been. Hereafter, he was an equal with these friends of his, and he knew it very well.

"Now, Sandy," began McGivens, "if you'll just rustle us some more grub——"

Sandy snorted. "I'm quittin' that job," he announced. "Hereafter we'll take turns. 'Tis your turn now, Dan. So get busy. I'm hungry meself. What say, boys? Is Dan elected cook for the day?"

"He is!" declared the others.

MURDER CREEK CANYON DEER REJOICE

THE deer roaming the portion of Grant County, Oregon, that is known as the Murder Creek Cañon district, recently found cause for rejoicing in the fact that two large cougars had fallen victims to the prowess of Edgar Watkins, a government hunter. Watkins had trailed the big cats for three days with gun in hand and a dog at his side, before he finally treed them. The cougars were killed with deer meat in their mouths, and it is believed that the running down of this pair of marauders will save the lives of many deer in the district, which is an excellent winter range.

Pioneer Towns of the West Sioux City

By *Erle Wilson*

Author of "Tacoma," etc.



SEVENTY-FIVE years ago Sioux City began life as a trading post. But almost half a century before its birth as a frontier settlement, the site had been visited by Lewis and Clark. When in 1804 these famous explorers were penetrating the wilds of the vast unknown West, their boats traveled up the Missouri River to where that stream is joined by the Big Sioux. There a member of the party, Sergeant Charles Floyd, died. He was buried on a high bluff which now stands in the south part of Sioux City. The tall white stone which marks his last resting place is also a monument to the first appearance of white men in western Iowa.

At this time the ground upon which the future city was to stand was the favorite spot for the Indians to camp. It afforded fuel and fresh water as well as protection from the cold winds of the plains, and was a familiar retreat to the red men who hunted the wild buffalo on the prairies and in the valleys of the Missouri and Sioux Rivers. And then in the summer of 1848 the red man's domain was invaded by William Thompson, a pioneer filled with the adventurous spirit of the men who made the West. He settled on Floyd's Bluff, so

named for the discoverer who was buried there fifty years before. So far as is known, this was the first settlement of Sioux City, called by its founder Thompsonville.

The following year a French-Canadian trader, Theophile Brughier, built himself a log cabin at the mouth of the Big Sioux, several miles from the Thompson settlement. This pioneer had been at one time an employee of the American Fur Company. Later he gave up his job and threw in his lot with the Yankton Sioux Indians, marrying the daughter of the celebrated chief, War Eagle. This redskin was friendly to the white settlers of the trading post, and it was a cause of real grief to them when he died in 1851. He was buried on a high hill at the western edge of what is now Sioux City.

Little was heard of this crude settlement on the outskirts of civilization until 1854, when Doctor John K. Cook, who had a government contract to survey a section of northwestern Iowa, landed there. Greatly impressed with the advantageous location of the trading post, he staked a claim and set about laying out Sioux City. A year later there were only two log cabins on the present site of the city proper, most of the new settlers living in tents. Then

the first steamboat from St. Louis arrived, bringing a cargo of provisions and of ready-framed houses.

The river town began to grow. In 1857 it was incorporated by an act of the legislature, being named for the Sioux Indians, a tribe of plains redskins celebrated for their strength and courage. At this time the population of the town was four hundred. The country to the north and west was uninhabited by white men, and occasionally parties departed from Sioux City intent upon establishing new villages farther up the river. Gradually the surrounding country was dotted with trading posts, villages, and rather large farms.

In these pioneer days there were no railroads west of the Mississippi, all travel and transportation being by water. A city that was not located on the banks of a river was almost unknown. Sioux City, being situated on two important streams, was the center of frontier commerce. As the Northwest was settled, this town expanded. Canny pioneers soon discovered that corn flourished in the immediate territory around the city. Beyond the corn-growing belt stretched the vast prairies offering opportunity for the grazing of stock, and citizens of the town became owners of herds of cattle. Being the closest river point to the grazing territory as well as the oldest settlement in the vicinity, Sioux City gained importance early in its history as a stock-trading center.

In 1868 the first railroad entered the town. Then a few small factories sprang up. A little later a packing plant opened its doors. From this time on the development of the city was rapid. In the late eighties street cars, water works, and electric lights appeared, and the small river village was well on the way to becoming a progressive modern city. The panic of the early nineties would probably have brought disaster

to a less hardy set of men than the pioneer citizenry of this Western town.

That their courage never failed, however, is proved by the Sioux City of today, which at the confluence of the Big Sioux and the Missouri, in the State of Iowa, is a metropolis of the Northwest. It stands in the midst of a great agricultural region, sometimes called the "Breadbasket of the World." This Iowa city has a population of eighty-five thousand, over ninety-six per cent of whom are white. It has an average elevation of one thousand, one hundred and fifty-eight feet above the level of the sea, and an invigorating climate. While the winters are cold and snappy, they are not damp and slushy, and the hottest July night is made bearable by cooling breezes.

The lone cabin of three quarters of a century ago is now the leading manufacturing city of Iowa, and ranks as one of the sixty-five great factory centers of the United States. For over half a century Sioux City has been one of America's recognized centers of meat packing, and her giant packing plants are the foremost industry. Following in importance are the dairy products, this city being the home of the largest creamery plant in the world. This Iowa city is the largest brick manufacturing center west of Chicago. It is one of the foremost jobbing centers of the Northwest, serving a large territory. Located in the heart of the grain-producing country, it is rapidly becoming one of the leaders as a grain market. Sioux City also does a large business in the manufacture of automobile equipment.

The industrial section of the city follows the north shore of the Missouri River, extending northward along the valleys of the Floyd River and Perry Creek. At the base of this U-shaped valley is the business section. Spreading out in fan-shaped fashion to the north, east, and west are the residential

sections of the city, occupying the hills and bluffs. This Western city is a modern progressive metropolis, with well-equipped stores, adequate theaters, up-to-date hotels, towering office buildings, and imposing churches. Its large and attractive parks also help to make it one of the most beautiful places to be seen in the West.

Even before this pioneer town was incorporated as a city, a school was in progress. To-day in addition to the splendid system of public schools, the city has two colleges, Morningside and Trinity, as well as a business training school and an automobile and tractor school. It also has an efficient library system, consisting of a main building and seven branches.

The steamboats of the Missouri River and the old stage coaches of early days have been replaced by the six trunk railroads which serve Sioux City. Surrounded by hundreds of hard-surfaced roads, this Iowa city has been called the "motorists' paradise."

In 1901 Sioux City adopted the commission plan of government, providing for a paid council of five members who devote their entire time to the management of city affairs. One member is the mayor; the others are commissioners of public safety, finance, parks, and public property, and street and public improvements. These councilmen are elected for a term of two years by the voters of the city. The mayor at the present time is Stewart Gilman.

The water supply is municipally owned and controlled, a series of deep wells supplying pure water. Street railways, electrical service, gas, and telephones are owned by private corporations.

The dauntless spirit of the pioneers who founded this Western town has come down to its present citizens. Among the prominent characters of Sioux City are "Wild Bill" Ohlman, "High" Schultz, who is six feet, eleven and one half inches in height, and "Rattlesnake Pete" Hatfield.



TEXAS HOMESTEAD HAVEN OF LIQUID GOLD DODGER

MOST men are anxious to strike oil, or "liquid gold," as modern phraseology terms this new source of wealth, but "Uncle Nap" Brown is not of this number. His full name is Napoleon Bonaparte Brown, and he was born eighty-one years ago. He is a Confederate veteran, having served in the Fourth Louisiana Cavalry in the Civil War.

Uncle Nap has twice been overwhelmed by riches as a result of oil being found on his property. He is worth half a million in consequence, and owns nine automobiles. The first strike was on his old homestead near El Dorado, Arkansas. Twenty wells, with as many shrieking and pumping engines drove him to seek peace and quiet on another farm about four miles east of El Dorado. He had hardly got a crop planted when the fields intended to bloom with corn became the scene of another oil rush. Soon seventeen wells and seventeen pumping engines set up their roar and rush.

The old veteran was anxious to find a place where he could be at peace from the oil rush, so he selected a tract of eight hundred acres in Gaines County, Texas, near the Seminole reservation, as his new home. Here he continues to live in the hope that oil will never be struck on his land again. He prefers the peace of his agricultural operations to the noise and bustle of the oil machinery.



The Squaw Boy

By

Peter Henry Morland

Author of "Beyond the Outposts," etc.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHITE HAWK, THE SECOND.



WHEN the dark came, he struck away for some low hills, covered with trees—rocky upthrusts through the level surface of the prairie. As he rode, he came upon a slight trickle of water, where a stream ran down from the base of one of those hills. That assured him of a good camp, and Red Wind was sadly in need of water, while the roan snorted with eagerness when it smelled the stream.

So Lost Wolf kept smoothly on his way, paying no heed to the thirst of his horses. For this was ingrained in his soul—that no matter what the comfort of the dumb beasts might demand, the comfort of man himself was of the first consideration, and he had not yet examined the hills for a hunting ground.

He wound suddenly around a shoulder of the first hill when he saw before him a pale glint of a running form. He snatched at a revolver and fired. There was a yelp, and the streaking form ducked out of view in the face of the rocky slope.

But living, moving animals do not

disappear in the face of solid rock. Lost Wolf pitched his camp at that very spot and built his camp fire just at the mouth of the narrow tunnel which he found. And, when he stretched his head into the tunnel, he caught the rank odor of wolves.

Lost Wolf laughed with a cruel satisfaction. That cave faced east, and when the morning came, he would have plenty of light for the work and pleasure which lay ahead. So thought Lost Wolf. Besides, what is better than a wolf skin for a saddle blanket?

It was not a particularly easy night which he spent, for at every moment he had to open one eye, as it were, and cast it north and east toward the moon-flooded plains. Out of that horizon the Pawnees might come, and if they found his traces——

However, when the morning came, there was no trace of Indians, and the shaft of light from the sun was streaming steadily into the throat of the cave.

He prepared a revolver in both hands, because when one enters a wolf cave, one never can tell, for it may be only one old veteran, living a solitary existence. Or, again, it may be a mother and a number of helpless whelps. Or, still again, it may be a mother sur-

rounded by yearlings almost as big and savage as herself.

He crawled through the entrance, therefore, and then lay flat on his belly so that his body might not cast an inconvenient shadow before him, to dim the work which he had to do. He saw all that he wanted, at once. The cave shelved back from a considerable height to a sandy-bottomed alcove not more than a foot and a half in clearance. And at the farther end he saw a gray mother wolf, no doubt she whom he had hit with a bullet the night before. Yes, now as she turned and snarled at him he saw her limp. The other three were big cubs, and the biggest of the three was a great white one so huge that it would have made the dead White Hawk a puny thing beside it; and so white that White Hawk would have seemed yellow in comparison!

He settled the mother with his first shot, and then a very strange thing happened. For you must know that wolves, on the whole, are skulkers. They do not rush on danger. They generally cower before the unknown, and there are very few lion hearts among them. But there are exceptions and the white giant was a notable one. For, with the crack of the gun, he bolted straight at the face of the danger. Lost Wolf had time to put a bullet through the monster. It bored through his neck and then traveled down his back, but he came in with great fangs prepared, and Lost Wolf was lucky indeed to down him with a blow of the revolver which landed in a vital section of the big fellow's skull; but as their brother lay quivering, still in a stupor, twitching himself forward at the enemy, the two remaining wolves crouched merely lower than before. Lost Wolf, in contempt, shot them neatly through the head. Then he turned his attention to the fallen wolf.

Its heart beat; it was not dead. He took out his hunting knife, ready to cut

its throat. Then he hesitated. For it was a magnificent pelt for this season of the year. And, when he ran his hand through that pelt, he felt beneath the hair a hard-muscled, big-shouldered body. This was what White Hawk had been, except that this was far better than White Hawk. This was a king of his kind—a very emperor, whereas White Hawk had been a fighting prince, one might say! White Hawk, indeed, was half dog, and the hand of man had debased the breed from its pristine strength.

However, it is impossible to train a wild wolf. So say the books; but Lost Wolf had seen it done. And he was very willing to try it himself.

He regarded the monster with a keen glance. Then he tied his feet securely and dragged him outside of the cave. After that he brought out the other three bodies and skinned them, while the big white fellow looked on snarling and trembling as though the knife and the strong hand were removing the pelt from his own living body.

But when the three pelts had been taken, Lost Wolf disposed of the bodies by whirling them around him and casting them among the rocks of the hillside. Then he came back to pay closer attention to his captive. It cost him just half an hour of careful study and thought to make up his mind. A touch of his knife would convert this creature into a very fine bit of saddle blanket. On the other hand, a great investment of care might transform him into a servant like White Hawk. If he were even a tithe as useful as White Hawk had been, he would be worthy any investment of effort. And then again, being big and white, might he not pass as a sort of reincarnation of the dead dog with which the Cheyennes had last seen him?

That suggestion decided Lost Wolf. It tickled his fancy immensely, and straightway he began to dress the

wounds of the big animal. It was no easy task. A wolf can take off a man's hand at the wrist, you know, with about as much trouble as you clip a twig off a tree with a sharp knife. And the head of this white giant was free. Purposely Lost Wolf left it free, because he knew that neither men nor beasts can learn very much when all their bodies are imprisoned in ropes.

It took him three hours of steady labor to wash and dress the raking wounds of the big fighter. When that time ended he was well exhausted, and so was the wolf. But they knew each other fairly well. And Lost Wolf had lost all impatience. For he found that he could sit and look at his captive for hours at a time, satisfied and smiling.

And there he sat, every day, all day, week after week, and month after month.

I am sorry that I have referred to Lost Wolf, somewhere, as an impatient fellow. I mean, that he was impatient compared with an Indian, or a hunting wild beast; but compared with his white cousins he was as patient as the deeply rooted-hills! I say that he remained there on that rocky little hill, like an island in the midst of the immense plains, until the wolf cub—not much more than a yearling in the first place—grew very close to maturity, though a wolf does not reach a hardened maturity until it is two and a half years old. But in the meantime, this second White Hawk gained formidable dimension and a weight of thirty pounds over the hundred. In fact, even a white man might have been tempted to spend the dreary months waiting for the new White Hawk to reach more amiable manners and a better disposition all around.

How much danger Lost Wolf accepted in this task of training and taming, I dare not think upon. And what frightful beatings the second White Hawk absorbed, it would be impossible

to narrate. What is true, however, is that tenderness would not convince White Hawk that he had met his master. But cruelty would, and the instant that Lost Wolf made that discovery, he spent cruelty upon the giant lavishly—with both hands, so to speak. He so awed the second White Hawk that the brute stopped cringing. Cringing is a form of begging. But White Hawk, the Second, came to understand that no sort of supplication was of the slightest use. If there was a whipping in the offing, that whipping he would get—every stroke of it!—and it was vain to attempt to dissuade the master. He stopped cringing, then. And he would stand erect, with his lips snarling back from his terrible long fangs, and his mane standing up and his jaw muscles, like points of hard rock, trembling with his fury. Many a time, when the eye of the wolf was green, his master stood by and logged him until the green light died through the exhaustion which torture brings at last.

These floggings filled the first month only. After that it was a matter of time and much patience. The excellent Lost Wolf kept at his task until White Hawk, the Second would run always ahead of his master, sliding along with an effortless trot. Or striving in vain to rival the headlong gallop of Red Wind. But, on these occasions, there was no danger that White Hawk, lost beneath the horizon, would take this opportunity to get his liberty. No, the training which Lost Wolf had given him was much too thorough for that. He dared not stay away from the master long; but he had a deep longing, while he was close at the side of the master, to take the unguarded moment and sink his teeth in the soft gullet of the man.

However, it was extremely difficult to discover just when the master was really entirely off his guard. Three times, in the black of a moonless night, White Hawk had crept toward the sleeping

master. And three times, as he lowered his head above the sleeper, he had received across the tender snout the clublike weight of the leaded end of Lost Wolf's quirt. And that blow was always followed by a beating so frightful that for some days White Hawk could not tell whether it was better to live or to die!

He could not be sure, then, when the master was on the lookout even though all the signs were of utter sleep, say!

At any rate, Lost Wolf, at the end of the summer, was jogging across the plains oddly accompanied.

He jogged on foot, because five years with the trapper and trader had taught him to love a round lot of exercise, and that jog trot of Lost Wolf would have seemed like very hard running to most white men. In front of him loped White Hawk. Behind him Red Wind followed at a trot, and, led by a lariat attached to the pommel of Red Wind's saddle, followed the roan. Not until the morning was half worn away and the starting point many a mile behind them, would Lost Wolf swing into the saddle!

CHAPTER XXXV.

LOST WOLF MEETS THE TROOPERS.

A WEEK later, skimming across the plains, he came at noon in sight of a lone line of dust against the horizon, and when he came closer, he knew that it was composed of mounted men. Straightway, Lost Wolf disappeared into the face of the prairie by dismounting and lying flat and making the horses follow his example. The white wolf ran fifty strides ahead and lay down in turn to keep a nearer lookout.

In the meantime the riders approached at right angles, drawing nearer and nearer until he saw—by the speed with which they traveled and the regularity of the pace they held, as well as the even order of the men, that these were white soldiers. He had had mere

glimpses of them, before, but none closer than this. But now as they drew nearer to him, he remembered that it was by a Pawnee that the owner of the roan horse had been slain; and the chief who ruled the white men from the far East would be interested in the story which he might be able to tell them.

For he had heard enough from Danny Croydon and he had read enough geography to know the facts of the world; but, having known nothing but the plains since his days of memory, all these facts out of books remained to him mearest dreams and fantasies. However, yonder were the trained warriors of the white men. And a great yearning possessed Lost Wolf to speak to them face to face.

However, that was a dangerous business. One could never tell what the white men would do. At least, the Cheyenne averred to him that this was the case. For sometimes they would act like cowardly village dogs. And sometimes they would fight like madmen. Sometimes they were the fairest of the fair in all of their dealings, and again, they were treacherous, cunning and wary as so many foxes. Lost Wolf hesitated as to what he should do. It was dangerous to come too close, because these men might have very long-range rifles, and in that case, they were apt to use him as a target for practice, so soon as they made out that he was only an Indian.

However, he could not resist the temptation which was stirring in him more and more every moment. He stood up and raised his trio of animals. On the reins of Red Wind he tied the well-cured scalps which he had collected on that happy trip from the mountain camp to Zander City.

In the meantime a section of four troopers had swung out from the line of march and whirled gayly toward him. He held up his hand and gave the signal

to halt; but they rushed on at him, as though vying one with the other in getting to him. He could not take such a chance as this. He whipped Red Wind around with a mere jerk of his knees and instantly he was flying across the plains and leaving the well-mounted troopers a yard behind him for every two he covered. When he saw them despair of the chase, and half a mile of running was enough to convince them that they were hopelessly outclassed, he turned his horse again. They had stopped, and now he advanced toward them slowly, waving a bit of white rag. Such was said to be the flag of truce among white men. They, in turn, produced a handkerchief and signaled back. And he came straight on until he was within twenty or thirty paces from them. Then he turned Red Wind sidewise and rested his hands on his hips, so that they would be near the two revolver holsters. In this position he was turned sidewise to them and gave them a smaller target. They seemed to realize it, and one of them, who seemed superior to the others, waved back the three who rode with him and advanced still closer, holding up a hand in sign of amity.

With a sharply barked command in Cheyenne, Lost Wolf stopped him. To his astonishment, the white man replied instantly and very fluently in the same tongue. He declared that he was a friend to the Cheyennes and that his enemies were the enemies of the Cheyennes. In a word, he was hunting for the Pawnee band led by none other than Standing Elk.

What a thrust of joy went through and through the heart of the boy when he heard that! For he registered Standing Elk in his heart as his oldest and his greatest enemy, the man who, in return for the saving of his life, had sold him into five years of slavery!

"I am Lieutenant Macreary," said the white man.

"I am Lost Wolf," said the other.

The lieutenant tossed up his head and grinned broadly. He seemed a scant twenty or twenty-one to Lost Wolf.

"You're the lad who made the trouble in Zander City?" he asked.

"Have they sent you to hunt for me?" asked Lost Wolf.

"No," answered Macreary. "If you go back to Zander City, you'll find them ready to give you a vote of thanks for what you did there! And I'll give you a vote of thanks if you can teach my greenhorns how to shoot straight!"

"Give them a great deal of powder and lead, and a great deal of time, and teach them to pray to Tirawa!"

The lieutenant laughed. "Only," said he, with a suddenly darkened face, "how do you come by that horse—and that saddle?"

"It was a white man's horse," said Lost Wolf.

"And he lost it?"

"He was killed."

"Lost Wolf," said the lieutenant gloomily, "this is bad news to me, and it may be bad news to you."

"I did not do it."

"Can you prove that?"

"I took it from a Pawnee. There is a white man's scalp in the right-hand saddlebag. There is his blood on the saddle."

The lieutenant was only a moment in making sure of the truth of these assertions. Then he asked bluntly: "Lost Wolf, I believe you. And I can make the major believe you. But—tell me why you told me so much? Do you know that it is my duty to take the horse and the saddle and the guns in the saddlebag?"

He had his hand on his own revolver as he spoke, but Lost Wolf smiled.

"I shall tell you why," said he. "It is several moons since I got that horse. And I have not ridden him, because I cannot be happy in a saddle where a white man was murdered."

The lieutenant exclaimed.

"I have hunted for men to give him to. Tirawa has brought me to you," said Lost Wolf.

They rode in to the column of troopers, White Hawk hanging in the rear, and there Lost Wolf was brought to a pleasant-faced man, very red, very sweaty, and damning the sun with what seemed to Lost Wolf a dangerous fluency. He was introduced as Major John Beals, and then the lieutenant made a little speech to him—in English, of which Lost Wolf, of course, understood every word! But it was easy to keep a straight face while he heard the lieutenant say:

"Major, I've hooked a prize for us! This is a Cheyenne, and I know that he's a red-hot one not only by those three scalps that he wears on the reins of that horse, but by the horse itself. No common Indian ever rode a stallion like that. Besides, I've heard of him and you have too. This is Lost Wolf, who shot up a dozen thugs in Zander City a few weeks ago. He hates the Pawnees so much that he wants to help us. One more thing—he can't ride in the saddle of that fine roan because a white man owned that roan and was murdered in the saddle! I call this a queer Indian, major!"

The major agreed, and then he thrust out a fat hand to Lost Wolf and tasted the grip of that young Hercules with a grunt.

"Tell Lost Wolf," said the major, "that I'm glad to have him with us—that he shall have the best of everything—and that if he can bring us to the camp of Standing Elk, I'll make him rich!"

The lieutenant translated with his broad, Irish grin, and so Lost Wolf was taken into the camp.

I don't mean that it came about as easily as all this. There had to be a process of initiation, of course. In the first place, Lost Wolf was only a boy,

and in spite of his muscles, he did not look any too large to a number of the troopers in that command. Besides, the Indian seat in the saddle does not set off the figure of man or squaw. The short stirrups bring the knees to the withers of the horse and put the rider back on the small of his spine. There he sits hunched up, looking straight ahead of him, but not missing a stir of wind in the sky or of grass on the earth! And so it was that Lost Wolf rode hunched with the train.

They made their camp at a rivulet long before dark. And Lost Wolf smiled to himself. No wonder that these punitive expeditions of the whites never reached their goals. For an Indian troop would have marched on and on and into the night, reckless of their horses, and taking a chance to find water—or else turning a pony loose at the end of the march, and following to see if it would not bring them to water.

And, while he journeyed with them, Lost Wolf wondered at the big, strong-stepping horses of the cavalry. They were well made, but exceedingly heavy for such work as this. They could not forage for themselves as an Indian pony could. They would starve where ponies grew fat. And they lacked the verve and the nerve which the very wildness gave to the ponies.

He saw these things, and he saw, also, that the big soldiers were passing jokes freely back and forth and roaring with laughter and insults. He understood every word. He even understood that the scalps which dangled from his bridle reins were actually abhorrent to even such rough fellows as these!

"I'm going to have a fall out of him," bellowed a huge corporal, "before it's dark—major or no major! I want to choke the murdering redskin!"

Therefore Lost Wolf, when the camp was made, was only a trifle more wary than a tiger in a cage with lions. And,

after dusk had gathered, sure enough a hand fell on his naked shoulder.

He turned. There was the big man making challenge in dumb show and with savage faces; while a semicircle of grinning and expectant troopers stood behind him, waiting for the fight.

Lost Wolf merely whirled on his heel and slapped the big man lightly across the mouth. There was a snort, a growl, and a hurried lunge forward. For what white man expects an Indian to understand the merest rudiments of fist fighting?

Lost Wolf smote him at the base of the jaw and then stepped aside to let him fall.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RUNNING DEER'S TEPEE.

AFTER that feat, there was no more question of the ability of Lost Wolf to take care of himself as a man—even a white man, and when it was learned that he could speak English like any white, the respect for him increased a hundredfold. There were a hundred and twenty odd troopers in that little command, with Major John Beals at the head of them, two captains, and three or four lieutenants, for in Indian warfare, where there was such an endless amount of detail work to be done, there was a great necessity of many officers. And as they journeyed across the plains—with Lost Wolf to guide them now—he took note of those troopers with great care.

Two things astonished him. The first was the apparent self-respect of every man, as though he was a chief of note. The second was the willingness of these proud men to obey the orders of their officers and do work which even a squaw would have grumbled at. Lost Wolf tried to put these two things together and understand them, but he could not. And he knew that if an officer spoke to him as they did commonly even to corporals and sergeants, his knife or gun

would be out on the instant. So he gave up trying to understand these men—he merely studied them as a race apart—always wondering that he himself could be of their very blood!

In the meantime, he was driving the column straight toward the old camping grounds of the Pawnees, but where they might actually be he could not guess. And, when he picked up a broad trail of travois five days later, he turned up the trail until they came to a fire, and near the signs of the fire a broken arrow was found.

Lost Wolf studied it with care, and there was a reward for his study. No two Indians make arrows in the same fashion. And by the chipping and the binding of this arrowhead, he felt sure that he had picked up a spent shaft of none other than that dashing young brave, Running Deer. If that were so, unless Running Deer had changed his allegiance to another band, this was the path made by the band which Red Eagle led.

They followed up that trail for two days at a round gait, and as they journeyed, he kept his counsel to himself. For it seemed to him that the white men were foolish in speaking their mind so much.

The major himself had expostulated with Lost Wolf on his silence, and Lost Wolf had answered, in all honesty:

"A man who always talks, is always likely to make mistakes."

"Come, come!" said the major. "You Cheyennes are as talkative as women when you're camped for the winter, say!"

"In the winter," said Lost Wolf, "a man tells a story. Do you believe the stories that you read in books?"

The major was stumped.

In the evening of the second day Lost Wolf, scouting ahead, saw something like a buffalo wolf jump up ahead of him. White Hawk waited for one approving call and started in pursuit. He

walked up on the other as though it were standing still; and by the time Lost Wolf came up, White Hawk was licking his chops and lying grinning with content near his kill. The mystery was explained easily enough. It was no wolf at all that White Hawk had killed but an Indian dog which had roved too far afield in search of game and had found it to his cost.

So Lost Wolf ran Red Wind back to the column which was halting to camp for the night, and told Major Beals that he was riding ahead to scout and might not be back until midnight. The Major pulled down a fringe of his short mustache so that he could bite at it.

"Lost Wolf," said he at last, "I'm trusting that you don't find trouble and bring it back on us. And I'm trusting the lives of a hundred men to you, along with mine! You understand?"

The eyes of Lost Wolf glistened. There was indeed such a thing as trust among the whites that the Indians knew not of. Danny Croydon had taught him something of that, in the first place. And as he rode off into the night, there was a lump in his throat as he thought of Danny, and how with Danny's own tricks and Danny's own teachings, he had been able to beat the sturdy trapper down. Now he found trust again in the major, and it was a sweet-bitter taste in the mouth of Lost Wolf. For among the Cheyennes, where would he find it?

He sent Red Wind softly ahead, for he did not wish to use up too much of the strength of the stallion. If he had to make a retreat, it was apt to be a hurried one! There was no cause for a long trail, however. In four miles of riding, when the light had faded from the sky and the stars were out, he saw the fires of the village.

He left Red Wind and White Hawk a quarter of a mile away and sneaked up to the nearest lodge. When he peered under the loose edge of a buffalo

hide, he found that he was looking into the tepee of Three-Trees-Standing-by-the-Water, a respectable warrior who had taken three wives to his bosom and had a flock of six children—it was one of the largest families in the village. They had ranged from infants to adolescence when he was with the band before. Now there were two young braves old enough to have lodges of their own. And the smallest of the lot was a little girl helping two of the squaws at cookery. Three-tree lay on his belly with his face on his folded hands and listened to the chatter.

It was like everything—and like nothing. It told nothing and yet it told everything. He learned in fifteen minutes that the great medicine man, Black Antelope, was still living. He learned that Red Eagle still lived and led the band. He learned a score of other things. But what pleased him most was not the information—it was just the chattering of the familiar dialect, for five years almost unheard. It was the smell of the buffalo hides, soaked with wood smoke. It was the odor of the boiled buffalo meat from the corner of the tent. Even now, the little girl ran to it and dipped in her hand and took out a handful. The mouth of Lost Wolf watered!

So he crept from tepee to tepee, forgetful of time, until he noticed that the lodge fires were waning, as though for the night. And here he found the thing he wanted—his old companion in war, Running Deer. But what a change was in Running Deer! He had been a boy when Lost Wolf left the camp. Now he was a tall, magnificently made warrior of two and twenty. And a lodge all of his own!

Ah, but the treasures of that lodge were not to be scanned from a distance. They must be looked at and examined openly.

"Close the flap!" he heard Running Deer say to one of the women, and a

sprightly girl leaped up—and another sprang to rival her—and there was a musical chattering of voices as they reached for the flap.

At that instant, springing around the side of the lodge, Lost Wolf was before them. They gave him not a look but shrank back into the lodge. For those were Cheyenne manners, in the old days. No Pawnee or Arapahoe freedom of ways and speech when a woman was near men, but even if he who approached was a known friend, so long as he was not of the family, a whole group of women and girls would rise at his approach and retreat into the tepee!

A whispered scurry of voices as they shrank into the lodge and then the tall form of Running Deer stepped into the space of the open flap.

Lost Wolf raised his hand:

"How?" said he.

Running Deer made a step nearer: "What are you, brother?" said he.

"The fire will help you," said Lost Wolf.

Running Deer stood back and followed him into the lodge. They confronted each other on opposite sides of the fire.

"I have not seen you—but yet I have!" said Running Deer.

Lost Wolf stepped to the still-open flap and whistled between his fingers. That blast, if all went well, should reach the keen ear of White Hawk and bring him on the trail.

Ay, when he turned back to the fire and faced Running Deer for a moment, a heavy breathing sneaked to the opening of the tepee, and there stood the mighty head and shoulders of the new White Hawk. It brought a gasp from Running Deer. His dignity melted from his face and from his rigid body. He threw up both hands with a faint cry.

"White Badger! And the White Hawk!" cried Running Deer.

"The Pawnees gave me a new name."

He could not pronounce it. For is there a greater height of ill-manners in an Indian than for him to utter his own name, except after a new coup when he chooses to re-christen himself?

"Lost Wolf!" exclaimed Running Deer, and as Lost Wolf smiled, Running Deer caught him in his arms.

Oh for some believer in the stoicism of Indians to have looked in on that scene and beheld Running Deer weeping and laughing and crooning like a mother over a child at the return of this long-vanished companion in arms. And around them the two young squaws hovered, laughing, wringing their hands in sympathetic joy, and embracing one another—until a child set up a tremendous squawling in the corner of the tepee. One of the girl brides leaped for it and covered its nose and mouth—the good old way of producing silence in one's descendants!

But that noise was enough to furnish the necessary interruption.

The youths stood apart.

"You, Lost Wolf—grown so mighty—with a man-look in your face and more wisdom than ever—and White Hawk made never to die. Is he not eleven years old, now? How the tribe will shout for you when they know that you have brought yourself and your medicine back to us. Oh, brother, there is such happiness in my heart!"

"Show me what is yours. I see the feathers in your hair. You have become a chief under Red Eagle. Not under him long! These robes are all yours—and the knives—and the beads—and the quill work—and the guns—ah, Running Deer, you have become a great warrior! And these wives—ah, and a child! A daughter. Running Deer?"

"Waugh!" said Running Deer in disgust. "Look!"

In a stride he was at a folded robe on the ground and from it he drew

forth a naked boy and cradled it in his arms over the firelight. The mother came softly at his side and in anxiety held her arms under his—as though he might let that treasure fall. And then mother and father looked at Lost Wolf with a laughing joy in their eyes.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BACK TO CAMP.

IT was as happy a lodge as Lost Wolf had ever seen. They were comely girls which Running Deer had taken as his squaws. He took the hand of one and the hand of the other.

‘For this one I paid six strong ponies. And for this I paid eleven ponies, which her father came and selected from my herd.’

‘You are rich, Running Deer!’

‘Yes, I am rich—and also—’

He pointed to a lodge pole and there were three scalps. Rich and a great, proved warrior was Running Deer in the twenty-second year of his life.

‘But you, Lost Wolf! Where have you been? What have you done? You have been to a place where men grow older but wolves do not! For White Hawk looks younger than when I saw him last—but bigger and stronger, I think! And what has made you come sneaking into the city? Why have you not come shouting? Why has not Red Eagle heard that you have brought back your medicine among us? He would be a glad man, for the Pawnees have beaten our band three times.’

‘It is Standing Elk, is it not?’

‘It is Standing Elk. He has become like a hundred buffalo bulls. Three times he has come—so!’

He pointed to his thigh, his breast, and his cheek. There were three scars, and the one on the cheek was new.

‘Still,’ said Running Deer sadly, ‘you are the White Badger of old. You will not talk! You will only make us wonder!’

‘Come into the darkness with me. I cannot talk before women!’

They stepped out into the cool of the night; the hand of each was on the broad shoulder of the other. They said with one voice:

‘Oh, brother, it is happiness to have you beside me!’

Then: ‘Hear me, Running Deer. There are six scores of white braves a little ride into the night.’

‘Ah! There will be scalps for you and for me, Lost Wolf!’

‘No, they are my friends. But they ride on the trail of Standing Elk. Can you find that trail for us?’

‘Let me carry the tidings to Red Eagle. It will make his heart swell. All of us will ride with the white men.’

‘No, but you only, if you know the way.’

‘I know the way, Lost Wolf. But it is not an easy way to travel.’

‘Are there many warriors with Running Deer?’

‘There are twenty scores of warriors. The best of the braves of the Pawnees leave their chiefs and come to him. He will soon be a famous man. He is famous already. What other Pawnee has made the Cheyennes turn their backs?’

‘You do not love him?’ smiled Lost Wolf.

‘I would have his heart!’

‘You or I shall have it. Have you a fast horse?’

‘It leaves the wind behind.’

‘Bring it, then.’

‘You do not go on foot?’

‘Red Wind carries me.’

‘I have not forgotten! They cannot escape from you if you wish to take them. They cannot follow you if you wish to fly. What guns will you carry?’

‘I have a rifle that speaks twice at one loading. I have two revolvers as well.’

‘You, too, are rich. But there is not a bead or a quill on your clothes! Will you go to the lodge of Rising Bull?’

"I shall not go. Tell me only that he is contented.

"He has lost many horses. But he still has a few. Little Grouse works very hard for him. They live!"

"But they are not happy?"

"They had a great treasure; it has been gone for five years. It would have filled their lodge with fine painted robes! Will you not go to your father and your mother?"

"Running Deer, I have come out to this village to find you only. I have come to get you as eyes for the soldiers. Then when we find the Pawnees, there will be a great killing. And this is what I know—that I shall find Standing Elk in the fight and that I shall take him. Then I shall bring him back to Red Eagle. I shall give him to the women. I shall watch him die slowly. I shall taste his death for many hours, like a sweet honey. After that, I shall give many things to Little Grouse and Rising Bull. And after that I shall go back to my people."

The clutching hands of Running Deer were like points of iron in the flesh of Lost Wolf.

"Do you leave us?"

"Ah, brother, my people are men with white skins. I have come into this country to be an Indian for the last time! I have come to take you with me and to fight our last fight side by side. Is it well?"

But Running Deer could not make an answer. He turned with a bowed head into his lodge and came out again and closed the flap while he showed to his friend revolver and rifle. Then he went out to his horses, of which the finest were tethered with lariats near to his lodge. He selected what looked to Lost Wolf like a shaggy, most commonplace beast, but he did not have to ask to know that a rare spirit and a rare turn of speed must be in this chosen pony.

So they left the village and went out onto the plains, Lost Wolf running be-

side his friend until they were well cleared from the village. Then he whistled, and out of the darkness before them the form of a galloping horse loomed suddenly and came to a pause near Lost Wolf.

"Is it Red Wind?" asked the young Cheyenne, filled with excitement.

"Kneel!" said Lost Wolf, and the horse kneeled.

"It is he!" cried Running Deer. "There will be a great happiness in our nation when they know that you have returned. There will be a great sadness when they know that you have come back only to leave again. Is it for some white-faced squaw? Come back to us, Lost Wolf. I shall find you six squaws! They will be happy to come to the tepee of such a famous warrior!"

"A squaw," said Lost Wolf scornfully. "is a good thing for a man that wants many robes made in his lodge and many children crying and scolding. I, for one, do not wish for such things. No white squaw could ever take me half a day's ride out of my way!"

"Then why do you leave us? I shall be sad without you!"

"And I shall be sad without Running Deer. I have thought of you every day, for five long years. But I have heard it said that what a man is born, he is bound to be. I was born white, and I must live as the white men do."

"I wish," said Running Deer savagely, "that all the white men on the plains were killed and their scalps burned, and all memory of them left away from us!"

"But if you killed them on the plains, there would still be many more to come. You have heard, Running Deer, of the big cities of the white men along the great river?"

"I have heard many lies about them! I have heard that all the Cheyennes and the Pawnees and the Dakotahs, even, could be gathered together into one village, and still it would be smaller than

one of the white villages along the great river, where they build forts of wood and stone and each man has a little fort for himself and his squaws!"

"Those lies are true lies. But if the great cities along the river were all wiped away and all the people in them dead—do you know what it would be?"

"Tell me, brother, for I shall believe you!"

"Believe me, then! Imagine all the Cheyennes gathered together and they send out before them three men to scout. It is not many?"

"It is not many."

"And suppose that they are all killed? We would be sorry, but it would only make us wish to fight the harder to revenge them?"

"That is true."

"And if the great cities along the big river were blotted out it would mean no more to the white men than the loss of the three scouts to the Cheyennes!"

They rode along for a time in silence, and once or twice, Lost Wolf heard the deep sighs of his companion as he struggled to believe this prodigious thing which he heard, and as he struggled with an untrained mind to gather such conceptions of figures and muster them as matter of fact.

At last he merely said: "I cannot talk. I cannot think. I try to understand you. It only makes me sleepy. Let us talk no more to-night, Lost Wolf!"

They talked no more, then, but followed the ghostly form of White Hawk, the Second, floating vaguely before them through the starlight as he ran straight as an arrow on the back trail toward the encampment of the soldiers.

They reached the camp; the challenge of the sentry was answered by Lost Wolf; and the sentryman's companion flashed a lantern in their faces.

"We know you, Lost Wolf. But who's your friend?"

"Running Deer will take you to find

Standing Elk and all his men. Bring him to the major, now!"

"The major will sweat the freckles off my nose if I wake him up now."

"The major will be glad to listen to Running Deer."

So the sentry took that word and marched Lost Wolf to the tent of the major—marched Lost Wolf and his friend with the glimmering saber naked behind them and a revolver in the other hand.

"But are we safe?" whispered Running Deer.

"We are safe!" said Lost Wolf. "The white man does not strike from behind. And his word is a strong law!"

"Ah," sighed Running Deer. "They have stolen you away from us. For that I shall never forgive them!"

The first words of the wakened major were profane enough, but when he knew who waited for him, he fairly dragged the two into his tent and turned up the light of his lantern. There, for an hour, he sat whispering to Lost Wolf, who translated questions and answers softly, back and forth. And not a soldier's sleep was broken; while White Hawk kept guard at the flap of the tent; and the plan for the battle formed swiftly in the major's mind. In the major's own tent the two slept that night.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ATTACK.

OF the plan of Major Beals for the battle, I shall content myself with giving the opinion of that hardy young warrior, Running Deer. For he said:

"If the battle is won by the white men, then their chief will be called very great. But if it is lost, he will be called a great fool."

For the plan of the major was simply to divide his force and so to attack the Pawnees upon two sides, the moment that they should be found. The first thing, however, was to find them; but

Running Deer took care of that. His hatred for Standing Elk made him doubly keen upon the trail. For eleven days they wandered across the plains, with Running Deer and Lost Wolf ever far ahead scouting. So, on the eleventh day, when the soldiery began to question the skill of these young guides of theirs, the two scouts saw a pair of warriors on the dim distance of the plains. They started out in pursuit at once.

No doubt those other men were brave enough, but the Indian has no desire to rush into a hot encounter when he sees an equal force attacking him. These two trusted to the speed of their ponies until they found Red Wind and his rider fast overtaking them. Then they whirled about to charge before Running Deer could come up. It was the old story. They came shrieking on to frighten Lost Wolf—he who could strike a tree stump easily at three hundred yards in quick fire! One of them was waving a blanket above his head to frighten the stranger, and Running Deer was yelling wildly in the rear in his grief at being left out of the shock of battle, while White Hawk danced on the side, eager for the strife. But it was over very quickly. For my part, I would as soon jump over a cliff as come running within three hundred yards of a rifle in the hands of Lost Wolf. And those two men had reason to follow my judgment. For when the rifle of Lost Wolf came into his hands, his shots followed in quick succession, and then there were simply two riderless horses rushing toward him.

He hurried on toward the men on the ground to count coup. Neither was dead, but White Hawk reached one and finished him with a single slash. Luckily, Lost Wolf got to the other before the wolf.

It was what he wanted—a living, breathing, talking Pawnee—and no hero who would die rather than speak. Lost

Wolf tied up his wound and then showed a knife-under his eyes. The poor brave found his tongue readily enough. He could tell where the Pawnee camp of Standing Elk was to be found half a day's journey away. He could lead them to the place, for the price of his life!

In the meantime, with true Indian thrift, Running Deer had ransacked the clothes of the other Pawnee and taken his scalp. After that, they captured one of the runaway horses and mounted the Pawnee on its back with his horse tethered to the pommel of Red Wind's saddle.

He was only a youth. He had a young squaw and a young son. And Lost Wolf could almost understand why a man should be a coward under those circumstances. As for the other, who had been scalped by Running Deer—that was Big Cloud, a warrior of eminence in the Pawnee tribe.

As for Major Beals, he was so delighted when he saw the captive that he ordered a fifteen-pound present of powder and lead to each of the captors. Then he went into conference with the prisoner, with Lieutenant Maccreary of the omniscient tongue to act as interpreter. The conference was short. Then the troopers started on in haste, and the wounded brave was carried in a horse litter between two riders.

Lost Wolf went back to the major.

"He is your man," said Lost Wolf, "but when the battle is over, he is mine. Is that true?"

"What would you do with him?" asked the major, frowning.

"Running Deer has a scalp," said Lost Wolf. "But I have none. I have counted two coups, but I have no scalp."

The major brushed a hand across his face as though he would wipe out a most unpleasant impression.

"I have promised him——" he began.

"You have not made a promise of his life," said Lost Wolf. "Because that is

mine. I have loaned him to you. Is not that true?"

The major swallowed hard. "Have it your own way, Lost Wolf," said he. "I'll—I'll be honest with you—after the battle!"

There was such a strange look in his eyes, and there was such a strange intonation in his voice, that Lost Wolf was stirred with strange fears and forebodings. And yet he vowed to himself that he must not take such thoughts into his mind. For he knew that the major was an honest man—a very honest man! He had seen his dealings among the troops every day. He could have laid down his life in a wager on the honesty of the major.

And with a sudden, rare outbreak of emotion, he laid his hand on the arm of Beals: "Yes," said Lost Wolf. "For I know that you are honest. I have trust in you. There is more to trust in you than in any Indian. Do you know what that is doing to me? It is drawing me away from my father and my mother—it is taking me from the Cheyennes—it is taking me back to life like a white man among white men."

"Lost Wolf," said the major, more troubled of face than ever before, "are you not part white?"

"All!" said Lost Wolf.

"All?" cried the major. "But there is a reddish tint in your skin——"

Of course there was, for the one thing that Lost Wolf had carried away from Zander City, outside of sorrow and a sense of loss, was a liberal leathern bottle filled with a reddish stain. The trace of it rubbed into the skin lasted long. Only wear would take it out. And now Lost Wolf said: "Hold out your hand!"

The major took off his glove and obeyed; and presently Lost Wolf stretched out beside the major's a hand with a palm as white as his. And he looked with a grin into the eyes of Beals.

"My Lord!" whispered the major. "And yet you are living with——"

Luckily the wind had blown up at that moment, and that whisper was not heard by Lost Wolf. As for the major, he reined back his horse and called up Macreary.

"Mack," said he, "the darnedest thing has happened that I ever ran across. That Pawnee prisoner, Lost Wolf is going to claim from us after the battle!"

"For what?"

"He wants that scalp—because Running Deer got one out of the same mix-up. Lost Wolf has only *loaned* us the life of that man, to squeeze all the information we can out of him—make whatever promises we want to him—and then turn the poor beggar over to the captor!"

The lieutenant spat. "That is sweet!" said he. "These cursed——"

"Wait! That boy is trusting in me to do what he wants because he says that he knows that I am honest. And our honesty is the thing that is going to bring him back to live with white men."

"I'd rather have a panther for a neighbor! These redskins——"

"Man, man, that's the frightful part of it; He's as white as you or I!"

"Are you daft?"

"I saw the palm of his hand—it's as white as mine—or was! In another minute he'll have it stained like the rest of his body. He's really white, Macreary!"

"And living in a nest of swine and murderers?"

"Ay, that's it! Mack, we've got to get him away! What's to be done?"

"We make a flying start with him by keeping the Pawnee from him?"

"Of course I can't turn over that poor youngster to be murdered by the boy!"

Macreary threw up his hands so that his horse shied violently, but the lieu-

tenant was a flawless horseman and sat unshaken.

In the meantime, they were drilling through the plains at a round pace; and the day wore old when Running Deer rushed back to them out of the horizon.

He bore word that the Pawnee had spoken the truth. The village had been located on a broad highland between two dry ravines. Which complicated matters a great deal—for the major's plan. But he stuck to it grimly, for a man of few ideas is sure to prize any one that comes to him!

He split up his party out of sight of the village. Running Deer was assigned as guide to one of them, and Lost Wolf to the other. They rode furiously almost at right angles to their trail and then circled around, through the dusk, until they were on opposite sides of the village. There they halted and there they made dry camp and slept as much as they could—which was not a great deal. For it was known through the ranks that they, with their little force divided, were to attack four hundred Pawnees under the great war chief of the tribe. No wonder that there were stirrings of the heart!

As for Lost Wolf, who accompanied the contingent over which the major had command, he regretted one thing above all—that he could not stay behind with the red stallion. As for the outcome of the fight, he had seen Pawnees in battle before this, and he knew how they worked!

Long before daylight the ranks were up. A few troopers were left behind to keep and guard the horses. The rest, including officers and Lost Wolf, numbered exactly sixty men. And they started forward on foot, with muttered groans. For all cavalry disdain the torment of marches afoot! They struggled over three steep-sided ravines. And then Lost Wolf—scouting a little ahead, smelled the wood smoke from the lodges—the wood smoke of the dying fires,

and came scurrying back to the head of the column. The gray was just beginning around the rim of the horizon. The troops in mortal silence were deployed in a double line, and they began to climb up the side of the last ravine. They did not reach the top unnoticed, however. For suddenly out of the darkness above them, a man's voice chattered at them rapidly in Pawnee—and then a bow string twanged loudly and an arrow whirred.

The next instant the yell of the scout echoed wildly through the air and was answered by a hundred distant shouts from the village.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FALL OF STANDING ELK.

IN the first gray of the dawn, those wild yells out of the distance made the heart of Lost Wolf leap in his throat; and he himself gladly would have raced toward the rear—but here was the major himself at his side! He could not turn. And yet he wondered greatly that any sixty men could be found in the world, able to hear the terrible war yell of Pawnees who really outnumbered them almost ten to one.

If he had wondered at the sixty troopers before, what was his astonishment, when he heard them answer the terrible, beastlike cries of the Pawnees with a cheerful shout. And then, with Macreary leading them, three regular and thundering cheers which, even though his eyes were fixed upon them, magnified them in the sight of Lost Wolf. And he guessed at another strength in the white race—a quality that sprang out of their trust in one another—a quality that gave each one of ten men the strength of the whole ten. They were marching into this battle exultantly, not in terror!

But when the two lines crawled over the upper lip of the ravine, they saw

enough to offright them even had each man been a hero.

An Indian can dress himself with a single gesture. His horse waits outside his lodge. His arms are ever at hand. And a village can be ready for battle thirty seconds after the first alarm. Ready for fighting, but not in order! That requires time! But now, like wasps whirring up out of their nests in the ground the Pawnees flooded out into the open ground from the lodges, shouting and shrieking and brandishing their arms, and looking larger than human against the light of the distant horizon. There should have been a solid volley thrown into that whirl of horsemen, but instead of that, some soldier fired and then a random fire ran down the line. It brushed the Indians from before them like a wave of the hand, but it left only a single brave on the ground. There may have been other casualties; but an Indian will cling dying to his horse so that he may be carried away to safety among his friends. Otherwise, if his body is left and his scalp is taken, his soul lingers in the dust forever!

Thrown back on the village, the Indians whirled in pools there for a moment, and then, in greater numbers than ever, shot away in two separate bands, one taking the right and one to the left; and so the soldiers hurried forward onto the level and that was the greatest mistake of all that stupid Major Beals committed on that day, for had he remained at the ravine, even a fool could have seen that the gulch would have afforded shelter for his rear. His excuse afterward was that he hardly recognized the overwhelming force of the Pawnees and that he had hoped to throw them into confusion by directly charging upon the village! As though it would have been anything better than insanity to confuse that little body of troops among the lodges where the Indians would butcher them in detail and the squaws with their terrible knives

and clubs could take a share in the struggle!

However, when the major saw the Pawnees lurching at him like two thunderclouds, one from either side, he halted his men and made them scatter in a loosely formed circle. There they had barely time to kneel in place when the double torrent burst upon them. Lost Wolf cast one glance into the sky, which he was sure he would never see again; then he paid attention to what was happening around him. He saw Lieutenant Macreary walking back and forth with a revolver dangling idly from his hands, while he called out to the men:

"Steady, lads! These fellows look devils coming and like babies going!"

And there was the huge voice of Major Beals: "Wait for my word! Wait for my word!"

Lost Wolf could not have spoken. His throat clave together; he was mute. But there was a cheerful shout from the cavalry men. And their guns were marvelously steady in their hands. Lost Wolf stuck the butt of his own rifle into the hollow of his shoulder and then the double wave of Pawnees loomed above them and was followed by a shrieking and a shouting that filled the ears of the boy with roaring. He sank to the ground. He was ready to fight with most—but Indian style had been his schooling!

"Fire!" thundered Major Beals, and half the rifles crackled.

"Fire!" and the other half were spitting fire and lead.

But the Pawnee charge? It vanished as a cloud of steam vanishes when cold water is flung in among it. Back went the warriors yelling, and not unaccompanied. When Lost Wolf saw the Indian charge stagger before these few whites, his heart became suddenly as cold and as stern as steel. A riderless Pawnee pony whirled just in front of his place in the line and scrambled to

start back. But it started back only with the clinging body of the boy on his back. He was ten yards, and hardly that, behind the rearmost verge of the main body, and in his hands were two revolvers making play! A yell of delight and savage laughter rose from the white troops and Lost Wolf, whirling the pony about like a flash, shot back toward the cavalymen with his body flattened in Indian style along the side of the pony. And, stooped over as he was, a swinging blow of a revolver barrel counted coup on two warriors whom he had shot out of their saddles. What a shower of arrows and bullets whirred after him, and what yells of sublime rage from hundreds of Pawnees. They brought their fleeing horses up on their hind legs and sent them plunging back after Lost Wolf.

And as he sprang from the pony that poor little brute, shot through and through with half a dozen bullets intended for its last rider, dropped dead. There was no sentimentality in Lost Wolf. He used the fallen pony as a rifle pit and from behind its body leveled his rifle. Straight before him the Pawnee charge was sweeping, looming higher and higher as the soldiers looked up from the shallow shelters which they had scraped for themselves in the ground. But the blast of their first half volley shot away the forefront of the charge, and before the second round was poured in, the well-known waver went through their whole body which precedes a flight. For Indians in the fiercest charge are poised and ready to escape the foe.

Then, out of the shuddering mass of naked bodies, that commanding form of Standing Elk which Lost Wolf knew so well, shot through to the front and waved his followers on. There was no doubt that he wanted to send this charge crashing home in white man's style. And, if the front ranks of the Pawnees could ever summon enough courage to

close, it would be over in a twinkling for all of the three score men in the little circle. But the heart of Standing Elk was not in his men. They began to sit back on their horses, and already the foremost ranks were swerving to either side.

Then, his heart beating fast, Lost Wolf clutched his rifle to his shoulder and fired straight at the big target. Then he shouted in dismay. At thirty paces he had missed a target he could not fail to strike at two hundred! With a thrill of the very soul he told himself that a charm hung over the life of the chief. He took a lower aim with the other barrel of his gun. Just in front of the knee of the rider he took his bead and fired.

The war pony of Standing Elk dropped in the very instant that his master was swerving him to the side, despairing of sending that charge home like a driven nail. The horse dropped, and Standing Elk was flung head over heels and finally lay unconscious ten short strides from the line of the soldiers.

It was the most dangerous accident that could have happened, for the Indians were sure to make a vigorous effort to redeem the body of their senseless chief. Already they were swirling toward the spot where he lay, coming in the maddest confusion, as the front ranks strove to charge their direction, and veer from flight to a new charge. Ay, and there was Standing Elk beginning to rouse himself, and staggering on his knees.

At that instant the half-naked body of Lost Wolf leaped from the line and bounded to the side of the chief. A blow from the clubbed butt of a revolver dropped the chief, and behind Standing Elk's own pony as a fortress, Lost Wolf opened fire with both guns.

The soldiers, half maddened by this crazy act of courage, poured in shot as fast as they could load. But nothing

could have stopped the vengeful thrust of the Pawnees now. Not the loss of half of their numbers—nothing could have stopped them and nothing could have saved Lost Wolf at that moment except the very thing which happened. From the village itself from the face farthest from the battle there arose a wild clamoring, and then a universal scream. And, in another moment, a hoarse blast of rifles fired in unison.

The second division of the major's men was coming into action, even thus belated. But never more welcome. Half of the men around the major himself were wounded or dead from the pitching fire of the Pawnees. But this second half of his attack ended the battle instantly. The Pawnees in the very act of thrusting home the charge which would have saved Standing Elk and would have swamped the soldiers, heard the rear attack on the village, and the whole force turned with frantic yells, each man to save what he could—wives, children, mothers, fathers, horses—only living things were worth saving at such a time as this!

So they went smoking into the village and they found sixty soldiers lying in the center of the circling lodges, each comfortably at rest, with leveled rifles—ay, and revolvers at their sides if any foolish group of Pawnees wished to drive home a charge!

Before the withering blasts of those rifles, the Pawnees curled up like leaves touched with fire. They did not strive to get on to children and parents and horses now. They turned to flee, or to scatter to the sides—and as they did so, Major Beal's frantically cheering men came swiftly in upon them, too panting, too exultant to shoot straight, but sending a dreadful panic through the Pawnee host—and in five minutes the only Pawnee warriors who remained in the camp were the dead and those who were too wounded to ride.

The major's plan had won! It was

so completely successful that the oldest Indian fighter in that command was staggered. None had seen such a victory before. There was a colonelcy in it for the major. But he was not thinking of that. He was at work now with three times the energy he had ever shown in the battle, though he had been headlong enough in that. He was using his efforts now, however, to bring swift relief to the wounded.

And the only soldier in the lot who thought of Standing Elk, was Lieutenant Macreary, who ran back to the spot and found the chief tied of hand, with feet hobbled, and a rawhide lariat around his neck—a bruised, dusted, dirty figure, his whole side raked raw by the fall from the pony, and now led along by Lost Wolf!

CHAPTER XL.

BACK TO THE CHEYENNES.

IT meant tragedy for Lost Wolf, of course, but he could not tell that, and when he met Running Deer with two scalps in his belt and the red devil in his eyes, Lost Wolf merely laughed and pointed to his captive!

And then, when all the swirl of victory was ended, and the lodges ransacked for plunder and for captives, and while the wounded lay thanking God for their first drink of water and for the coolness of the shade, Lost Wolf was brought by grave-faced Lieutenant Macreary before Major Beals.

"I'm bringing in Lost Wolf," said Macreary gloomily. "He wants his other captive—and a pair of Pawnee horses to mount them on."

The major lost at least three shades of color.

"Not two horses—but a hundred, Lost Wolf," said he. "You shall have a hundred horses, my son, but what are these two captives to you, compared with a hundred good ponies! You shall have the pick of the entire camp!"

Lost Wolf stared as one who cannot comprehend a simple thing.

"And you shall have guns, Lost Wolf," said the major, perspiring most profusely. "You shall have beads and quill work. Pick out what you will. For it is yours."

Lost Wolf drew himself rigid and folded his arms. At that sign of certain Indian obstinacy, the major altered still another shade.

Lost Wolf said: "I have not asked you for pay. I have had no gifts from the soldiers or their chiefs. I have guided them. First I returned to them the scalp of a dead companion. They can find his body and put the scalp on it, and his soul will be free! I gave back a good horse, too, and a saddle and other things of great value, and yet I had won these things in open fight from many Pawnees. I did a lot of these things, because I wished to make the white men my brothers. After that I joined you and lived like a brother with you. But you can tell if I lived from your food or did I not kill game for myself and for fifty others, also. I guided you to a Cheyenne camp. I, who stand here, am a Cheyenne. If I had not been your friend, I could have brought many Cheyennes—and they are great warriors. You see Running Deer? There are hundreds like him, terrible and silent fighters in the night. They could have made a harvest of your scalps, but I, your friend, would not bring them back. I took only one man to guide you. I brought you to the Pawnees. I carried you softly to their camp. They were beaten. And in the fight I counted coup on two Pawnees, and others fell before my rifle—but two I killed and counted coup upon them. Ask your warriors if it is not true. I did not do this thing in secret or behind a bush but out where many men could be witness. Then the great chief, Standing Elk, rode on our lines—I shot him down! I stood up; there

were many scores of his friends riding hard to bring him a new horse and to save him. I ran out from the line and I knocked him down. I fought over him, and the Pawnees did not take him again. He is a great war chief. He is worth many scores of men. And he has had me in his hands. And I, also, have had his life under my knife when I was a boy. In those days I was called White Badger, but afterward I gained a better name which Standing Elk gave to me when he found me sick and weak. And he carried me away to his camp where he wished to give me to the women—but a white man was there and saved me from that death and took me away. For his sake I have loved the white men, because they are just.

"Then I bought my freedom from this man in the coin which he wished for. I became free. I found you and joined you and served you. In the battle I was not the worst fighter. But I do not ask for any reward except two ponies, where there are so many. I do not ask for victims and scalps. I ask only for this man I took with my hands. Also there is another man I took with my hands. I do not take anything from your pocket."

"I only ask you this, Lost Wolf, and that is: What will you do with them?"

"I take them home to the Cheyennes and show them that Lost Wolf is not a child any longer but that he works like a man with a man's hands."

"And then?"

"Then I go to the cities of the white man to make them my brothers."

"Good," said the major, "but what becomes of the two captives?"

"How can I tell? I make them my gift to the Cheyennes. They are mine. They are not yours. You cannot ask what I shall do with them, and when I give them to the Cheyennes, I cannot ask what they will do with them!"

The major turned his back with a groan.

"You, Maccreary. You talk their lingo better than I do. For heaven's sake, talk to him."

But Maccreary merely mopped his brow, as one very glad to escape from such a position as this.

"Do your best, old man," said he in a soft voice. "No man can do more."

"But he's logical, clear, exact—not a lie in anything that he has said. Only—he's wrong! But how am I to tell him that he shouldn't have these two men? How can I explain to him that humans aren't property to be traded back and forth like knives!"

"You can't do it, man. Simply state the facts and then let him do what he wants to do!"

The major found a better way. He picked out from the great herds of the Pawnee village a hundred ponies. And he heaped a load of some kind upon the back of each—robes, guns, powder and lead, and all manner of Indian finery which was, to be sure, of little use to the whites. He marshaled this array of great Indian wealth. Then he had the two prisoners put beside it.

"I give you your choice, Lost Wolf. Take the prisoners, or else take the ponies."

Now Lost Wolf stood for a long time staring into the face of the poor major. But at length he threw his blanket over his head and turned and walked slowly away.

Running Deer followed him soon, but paused only to say: "White chief, you will wish that Tirawa had made you more honest. Lost Wolf is gone to make a great medicine. He shall take white scalps like blades of grass in the mouth of a buffalo!"

Maccreary understood the words. The rest understood the fierce gesture. And a chill of silence passed over the camp.

From that riding there remained to Running Deer, three scalps and two coups, and to Wolf no fewer than five coups—but no scalps at all—only the

three which hung from his bridle reins. More in riches of reputation had fallen to that pair in this adventure than in all the life of many a noble warrior. They rode side by side toward the Cheyenne camp, and Running Deer was silent.

And, after their days of travel, they came to the village. They entered under the blanketing dusk. And before the third lodge, Lost Wolf saw his foster father, Rising Bull. He dropped from the back of the stallion and greeted the older man with a raised hand.

And then came a storm of excitement!

It was only a storm of leaves to Lost Wolf, however. He did not see the face of Little Grouse. He did not hear her exclaiming over her dear son who had returned to her. He did not see the neighbors thronging in about them.

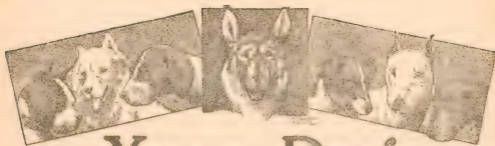
For all was known. Rumor, like a prairie fire, had swept across the plains to the Cheyennes. Ay, and there was the voice of Red Eagle himself as he came running to greet the most famous warrior of his tribe—Lost Wolf!

But the face of Lost Wolf was a face of wood.

He retreated to the corner of the lodge. He wrapped himself in a blanket and bowed his head. After that all of the lodge was filled with silence except for the whisper of the feet of Little Grouse as she went about some cookery for the returned.

That food was placed before him, but Lost Wolf did not stir to taste it. So he remained until Little Grouse and Rising Bull went to sleep whispering to one another: "He speaks with Tirawa!"

The utter blackness of midnight fell over the village. But still Lost Wolf did not move. But all that silent time he was turning back to the ways of his childhood. He was growing Indian indeed, and all Cheyenne to the depths of his heart.



Your Dog

By David Post

Author of "The White English Terrier," etc.

THE MALTESE TERRIER



IN the days of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the Maltese terrier was a favorite lapdog. It is mentioned by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who lived and wrote three hundred years before the Christian era. The breed, believed to have originated either on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea, or on Melita in the Adriatic Sea, is several thousand years old; indeed, it is the oldest of the lapdogs of the Western world.

A tiny dog—sometimes in maturity weighing as little as three pounds—the Maltese does not adapt itself well to dry climates. It thrives best in a damp and cold country. For that reason not many of this breed are seen in the United States. There are more in England and in Canada, but they are not so popular now as they were thirty years ago. Perhaps the reasons for this are that the Maltese usually is not very intelligent or useful, is rather snappish, and requires much care. It is a handsome dog, being covered with long, silky, pure white hair; but this coat needs daily brushing to keep it in perfect condition. Some of the Maltese terriers are so delicate that they are

kept in glass cases to protect them from drafts.

The American standard for the breed is as follows:

Head—Should not be large for size of animal, although, because of its profuse covering, it may look large. The skull should be broad, large, and round. The lips and the roof of the mouth should be black.

Eyes—Large and as dark as possible, they should be absolutely round, set wide apart and low in the head. The eye rims should be jet black.

Ears—Should be small and carried dropped at the sides of the head. When the dog is at attention, however, they should be raised slightly.

Nose—Should be a pure black in color.

Body—Should be short and cobby—compact, with little space between the ribs and hips—and low to the ground. The neck should be rather long and arched proudly, while the back should be straight from the top of the shoulders to the tail. The chest should be deep and wide, the ribs flat and deep, and the loins full.

Legs and Feet—Short and straight, the legs should be set well under the body. The feet should be small and

thin and the pads of them should be black.

Tail—Short, profusely covered with very long hair, and set high, it should be carried curled over the back or over one hip.

Coat—Should be silky and fine, perfectly straight and very profuse. The longer and more nearly even it is, the better. Each hair should be of the same thickness; there should be no coarse, woolly, or curly hairs and no undercoat. The whole of the body, including the face, should be covered with this fine, silky hair.

Color—Pure white. The skin should be pink and quite free from any black spots.

General Appearance—Should be of a sharp terrier appearance, with a lively action.

Size—The weights most to be desired are from three to nine pounds, the smaller the better; for the Maltese should not really exceed ten pounds in weight.

In next week's issue a foreign terrier breed, the Doberman Pinscher, will be presented to you.



MORE SCHOOLS FOR HOPI AND PUEBLO INDIANS

PLANS are now being drawn up by the Indian office for the construction of a new two-room schoolhouse and teachers' quarters for the Hopi Indians at the Polacco day school in Arizona. These improvements will increase the capacity and provide for an additional enrollment of Indian pupils.

Among the Southern Pueblos in New Mexico, too, plans are under way to provide a new plant for the Incinal day school, to include an adequate schoolhouse and teachers' quarters. New construction, including a school building and other quarters, will be started at the Sesma day school in New Mexico.

For the Northern Pueblos, the Tesuque day school, which was opened by the Pueblos themselves in an old building with a native teacher, will be taken over by the government at the request of these Indians. A new modern schoolhouse and teachers' quarters will be erected, increasing the attendance at this village to a considerable degree.



BURIED INDIAN VILLAGE ON FALL RANCH

THE ranch of A. B. Fall near Three Rivers, New Mexico, has again come into the limelight. This time it is the discovery of a buried Indian village on the property that has caused the ranch to break into print again. The find has aroused great interest in archaeological circles in the Southwest. The excavation work is under the direction of C. B. Cosgrove, and has revealed two perfect rooms. The walls of the first are nine feet three inches by nine feet six inches. The second room measures twelve feet three inches by twelve feet six inches. The smaller room contained some skeleton remains. One skeleton was that of a man buried with his knees drawn up to his chest, as was the custom of the Mimbres Indians. The second skeleton was in a semifixed position. A red-and-black bowl covered the head. This also is a Mimbres custom. The bones of the skeletons were water soaked and extremely brittle. A turquoise earring the size of a dime was found in the larger room.



Busted on the Hip

by
*Robert
Ormond Case*

LEANING back in his raw-hide-upholstered chair, "Lonesome" McQuirk let his pale-blue eyes rest unseeingly on the thin spiral of smoke rising from his cigarette to the rafters of the cabin. Across the oilcloth-covered table, his partner, "Windy" De Long, was brooding before a hand of solitaire spread before him. It was early evening. Quiet brooded over the cabin and the starlit world outside.

Lonesome had returned that afternoon from a trip to Condon forty miles distant. During the previous two weeks, the pair had not strayed from their homestead, and no casual visitors had dropped in. Thus Lonesome had returned with much general news of the county, and had enlarged upon these events detail by detail to his partner. Now, conversation had languished.

But gloom was written large on Windy's lean, hawklike face. Though he was, apparently engrossed in the cards before him, tugging reflectively at his black, drooping mustache, at intervals he shot a keen, penetrating glance at his partner. He knew from old experience that the other had not recounted all of the day's experiences.

Lonesome was holding out something, he assured himself pessimistically. And that something must inevitably relate to the schoolma'am.

Lonesome on his part, for all his seeming casualness, was conscious of his partner's scrutiny. But his expression was bland and benevolent. The light from the bracket lamp gleaming on his bald head revealed a brow quite evidently untroubled by worry or care.

His cigarette had gone out. He struck a match with a report like a pistol shot and relighted it. "Riding back from Condon to-day," he began, "I come around by——"

"Just a second," interrupted Windy. "I can tell you right now what you done on your way back from Condon. Instead of coming right home, you rode around by Shuttler's Flats, probably telling yourself it was because you hadn't seen Jim Norton for some three weeks, or that your hoss needed exercise, or something along that line. At Jim Norton's place you were quite surprised to meet up with the schoolma'am. Getting grandly over your surprise, you went and told her a lot of sweet nothings about how pretty the sunshine was in her red hair, and so forth. And what

she told you was less than nothing, only sweeter. And the two of you spent half the afternoon listening to the birdies sing." He swept the cards together, stacked them with deft ease, and leaned back expectantly. "No, sir, McQuirk, you don't need to start in telling about the honeyed line of conversation that passed between you and this red-headed gal. It don't interest me a-tall."

"As a mind reader," said Lonesome, flicking the ashes from his cigarette, "you're the best blacksmith in seven States. As a matter of fact, there was no sweet nothings passed between us. I had a little heavy conversation with Miss Emmeline."

This statement detracted nothing from Windy's gloom.

"That means more grief for McQuirk and De Long." His voice was plaintive. "Every danged one of them sweet, solemn times that you and the schoolma'am have held a little heavy conversation, has likewise been the identical date upon which came more misery for you and your long-suffering partner. What the Sam Hill have you got roped into now?"

"I'm surprised at you, Windy. All she asked of me was a little advice which I was pleased to give to her."

But Windy was still far from convinced. "If you gave her advice, and she followed it, it'll be her that needs some sympathy," he asserted. "Give us the details."

Lonesome shifted uneasily in his chair and reached for his hip pocket for his plug of tobacco.

He leaned back in his chair, his cheeks bulging, his eyes avoiding his partner.

"You know, Windy, the schoolma'am's people are all in Michigan. But she's got a sister who married a gent from Illinois. This said sister has lived in Illinois for the last twenty years. Decatur, I think the name of the town was. Well, sir, Miss Emmeline has gotten a letter from her sis-

ter in Decatur in which the said sister told her right out of a clear sky that she's sending her son Sam, an overgrown kid of eghteen or nineteen or thereabouts, out to Condon to visit with his Aunt Emmeline, meaning the schoolma'am."

"Yeah," said Windy, brightening. "That ought to keep the schoolma'am busy for a spell."

"That's just where she needed some advice, Windy," explained Lonesome. "This lad Sam has been babied quite a bit by his ma. Result is, the lad's kind of gotten out of bounds, and is pretty hard to manage. They figured it will do him a world of good to get out here in the range country, where he can learn to stand on his own feet."

"That's easy enough," said Windy. "Let Jim Norton set him to work herding around eight horses, with a four-section plow on his wheat land. A month or two of that will take a lot of fancy ideas out of him."

"But the fire burned Jim Norton's outfit," Lonesome pointed out. "He don't aim to seed but a thousand acres this fall. Norton can't use him."

"Then send him along to the Double O," Windy suggested. His mustache bristled and his black eyes glittered at the thought. "They could use him there as a roustabout. He probably don't know nothing about farming, cattle, and hosses. They could learn him to do chores about the house and farm buildings. Meanwhile them Double O boys would put him through a good general course of education. Yes, sir, he'll be a graduated buckaroo by the time them lads are through with him."

"That's just what I told her, Windy, but she takes her responsibility pretty heavy, Miss Emmeline does. She don't want him to go bellering back to his folks telling them that Aunt Em turned him over alone and unprotected to a gang of cuthroats. As the schoolma'am put it herself, she wants the lad pro-

tected against rough contact with the uncouth men of the Condon country."

His aimless gaze, which had lately wandered about the cabin as he talked, now fixed itself unwinkingly on Windy.

"The schoolma'am thought the boy had ought to be located on some nice, quiet place where he could learn a thing or two about horses and such. She didn't want him too near the Norton place where she is, or too far away, but what she could keep tab on him once in a while. She didn't come right out and say this, you understand, Windy, but she sort of hinted that the lad would be better off if he was on a place where there was nobody but a couple of gentlemanly and dependable old-timers to kind of look him over. I didn't think much of the idea at first, but she finally convinced me that——"

Windy's expression up to that moment had been as benevolent and forbearing as the dark harshness of his face would permit. He had been almost cheerful, notwithstanding his wordy assault on his partner. Now, his hawk-like features underwent a startling change. His black eyebrows gathered in a ferocious frown, and his deep-set eyes glittered as he half rose from his chair.

"McQuirk," he said sternly, "do you mean to sit there and tell me face to face that you've gone and let the schoolma'am farm out this said nephew on us? Surely that ain't what you've been leading up to all this while, is it, Lonesome?"

"It is," said Lonesome. "I knew it was a haywire idea. I fought against it. But she's got a way with her, that gal has, and I just naturally couldn't get out of it."

Windy glared at his partner. Then he sighed heavily and rose to his feet.

"No use arguing, I expect. What's done is done. You've agreed to do it, and I expect all the wild horses in Gillingham County couldn't get you to change

your mind. You just naturally can't help it. You're as spineless as an angle worm, rolling and wriggling in the dust at the schoolma'am's feet. But let me tell you this, McQuirk," and he shook a lean finger at his partner, "I expect we've got to put up with having this young pup around for a while. Well, sir, we'll get along fine just so long as he stays away from me. But just let him get underfoot too much, and get to cluttering up the landscape too enthusiastic, and I'll just naturally skin him alive and hang his hide on the fence to dry."

"You ain't so hard-boiled, Windy." Lonesome's pale-blue eyes twinkled. "A gent would think to hear you talk that you lived on raw meat, bedded down by choice on cactus, and was on speaking terms with most of the rattlesnakes and wild cats in the vicinity. But I know you better than that, old-timer. I got a hunch you and this young feller is going to be friends."

"Bring on your little playmate," said Windy darkly. "I'll let you do the entertaining. I'll sit back and watch you playing marbles and tiddledywinks to kind of keep him amused. When does this young critter show up?"

"To-morrow. He rolls into Condon to-morrow, and the schoolma'am takes him out to Norton's place. Some time during the day we ride over to Norton's with a led horse for the young feller."

"Fine," said Windy, brightening a little. "We'll pick out a critter that's kind of dainty and high-stepping. Maybe he'll fall off and we can watch him bounce."

"No, we won't," Lonesome returned with decision. "We'll pick out a hoss that's gentle and easy riding. We can't do a thing by halves. We've got to take care of the lad."

Windy muttered darkly and withdrew to the other end of the cabin. "I aim to roll in," he announced. "Seeing that

this is the last peaceful night we'll have for quite a spell."

Later, when darkness had settled over the cabin, and Lonesome thought his partner was asleep, Windy's voice came suddenly from the gloom. "What's the name of this young polecat?"

"Smith," Lonesome told him.

"Yeah?" said Windy sarcastically. "Odd name, ain't it? Funny thing, I met a gent of the same name once down in Texas. He was a son of a gun, that feller. Must have been a relative of his."

"His first name is Sam," said Lonesome. "You've got to admit, Windy, the kid can't be altogether haywire when his name is Sam."

The following day they rode across the John Day Cañon and so up to Shuttler's Flat and Norton's place. With them they took a led horse which Lonesome had selected after a painstaking survey of their saddle stock. It was a horse that he himself had broken and gentled, and one known to be thoroughly dependable and easy riding.

Their first impression of the schoolma'am's nephew was distinctly unfavorable. Fat men are rare in the Condon country. It is a land of vast dimensions, and those who ride in its high plateaus and among its pinnacles, have a tendency to leanness. Blistering summers and bleak winters, the harsh environment in high altitudes, speedily strip away superfluities of flesh and manner.

On these grounds alone, the youth was alien. He was broad and thick, bulging and bulbous in all dimensions. His heavy face was clear-skinned, and his cheeks were startlingly rosy. A heavy thatch of tawny hair came low on his broad forehead, and one huge rebellious lock hung over his left eye. His broad face seemed tremendously solemn in repose, his blue eyes alert. But his grin was more than a mere facial expression. It was a colossal transforma-

tion. On these occasions, his short nose wrinkled, his eyes became mere twinkling slits, and his broad face was split like a summer squash cleft in twain. When he laughed, walls shook.

He had a habit of grinning, the partners learned, when telling a story considered humorous solely by himself. He grinned when others told him stories, even though the point, to him, was more or less obscure. He had a habit of grinning, too, the partners learned on later and more lurid intervals, when the faces of others blanched and hands stole toward guns.

"Fat," breathed Windy in a guarded and pessimistic aside to Lonesome as the schoolma'am ushered them into the living room and into the presence of the youthful prodigy. "Fat as a corn-fed shoat, and a lady-killer."

The corpulent youth was the center of an admiring circle. Two girls from a neighboring ranch, having heard that the schoolma'am's nephew was arriving from the East, had promptly decided that this was the logical time to pay a social call on Miss Emmeline. The blushing damsels were seated to Sam's right and left. Kate, the hired girl, was lingering near, hands on hips, listening open-mouthed to the new arrival's account of his journey from Illinois. Near by was seated Mrs. Norton in her rocker, but her sewing was lying untouched on her lap as she beamed on the youth. Even the stalwart schoolma'am herself seemed to have fallen under the spell. Her blue eyes glowed with proprietorship and pride. Her manner seemed to say, almost as though she had spoken the words: "Folks, this is my nephew, Sam."

It was quite evident that Sam was in his element. He leaned slightly forward, big hands resting on enormous knees. His keen eyes darted from one to the other of the attentive group. He was evidently in the midst of his story. His deep, hoarse voice rumbled.

"And this drummer says to me: 'What circus are you with, kid?' and I said: 'Circus? I ain't with any circus. I'm a traveling man.' 'G'wan,' he says. 'What's your line?' 'Cheese,' I comes back at him. 'I'm calling on the grocery trade selling 'em a machine to bore holes in Swiss cheese.' 'You win, kid,' says this drummer. 'You'll get along, all right.' 'Oh, I know a thing or two,' I told him. 'And I ain't been a traveling man very long, either.'"

The speaker's hoarse laughter boomed to the accompaniment of appreciative titters.

"Isn't he the cutest thing?" the schoolma'am whispered to the astonished partners. "Just a big, overgrown boy. You'll learn to love him, I'm sure."

The partners made no reply. They were examining the grinning Sam with the astonished interest that a scientist might display who had suddenly stumbled upon a new and distinctly irregular species of wart hog. Lonesome's surprise was mixed somewhat with kindness. The lad was the schoolma'am's nephew, after all. But Windy seemed to bristle, almost visibly, like a fox terrier, suspicious and enraged, for the first time facing a porcupine.

"There's too much of him," he muttered to Lonesome. "I never dreamed we was going to open our doors to a young elephant. He's liable to tramp on us."

The schoolma'am presented the pair to the youth. The latter rose ponderously to his feet, and straightway the room seemed crowded.

"Pleased to meet you," he boomed, blushing and bobbing his head in embarrassment. "So you're Mr. McQuirk. I've heard a lot about you from Aunt Em. And a lot more since I got into this Condon country. You ain't so awful big, either. That's where I always get in bad," he continued plaintively, turning back to the ladies. "I'm so big, folks expect too much of me. Gosh,

I wish I could lose about forty pounds."

"You'll lose it, son," predicted Windy. "By the time you leave this country, you'll probably be so thin you won't cast no shadow."

"Your education will begin right pronto," added Lonesome hopefully. "It's twenty miles to our place, which is quite a feat for a man who ain't used to riding."

"Gosh, have you got a saddle horse for me?" Lonesome warmed to the enthusiasm in Sam's voice. "I like horses. Let's get started right away."

Windy stood coldly aloof while Lonesome assisted the corpulent youth into the saddle and helped him adjust the stirrups. His mustache bristled as the boy proudly urged the horse forward a few steps to demonstrate his skill as a rider.

"That kid had ought to make an A-1 broncho buster," he muttered darkly to Lonesome. "A horse couldn't do any fancy sunfishing with a lot of excess weight like that on his back. Before we get across the John Day," he predicted, "that critter he's riding will be swaybacked."

"You can let Sam drive over to-morrow with the buckboard and get his baggage," the schoolma'am told Lonesome. "He's used to driving, but I would select gentle horses."

"I want to take that black hand bag with me now," announced the youth.

"You'd best let me take it, then, son," said Lonesome. "That critter of yours has got plenty to carry, if I'm any judge."

The hand bag in question was accordingly produced and strapped on the rear of Lonesome's saddle. The trio started forth, Windy in the lead and Lonesome and the schoolma'am's nephew bringing up the rear.

"Take good care of Sam," the schoolma'am called. "I'm trusting you, Mr. McQuirk."

Windy rode on ahead, slouching

gloomily in the saddle, disdaining to look around. The ponderous youth, riding close beside Lonesome, looked at the latter with a shy, half apologetic expression that caused the older man to warm to him immediately.

"Your partner's pretty hard-boiled, ain't he?" the youth asked, indicating Windy. "From the way he looked at me, I've got an idea he wasn't crazy to have me around. I hope it ain't going to put you out too much, Mister McQuirk, me coming in on you like this."

"Don't you worry none about that, son. And don't you pay any attention to Windy. He may look mean and tough, but so does a porcupine. He's gentle as a kitten underneath."

"He thinks I'm a bum," the boy insisted, "and I don't give a darn what he thinks. I don't mean any disrespect to your partner, Mr. McQuirk, but believe me, I'm a man that always tries to be frank."

"It's all right to be frank," Lonesome advised, "but I wouldn't be too danged frank and earnest in Windy's presence, until you get used to each other. He's kind of short-tempered, Windy is."

"I ain't going to kotow to him," said the boy defiantly. "Of course, I won't make any trouble. I knew as soon as he looked at me that we wasn't going to get along. I could see he was kind of sneering at me because I was fat."

The youth was not so dumb, after all, Lonesome decided. His perceptions were keen, and hidden beneath his good-natured and superfluous exterior, was evidently a pugnacious streak of no mean proportions.

He was delighted with Sam's boyish enthusiasm when presently the tremendous chasm of the John Day yawned beneath their feet. To himself and others who rode the brakes of the John Day, the cañon had long since ceased to be a stupendous marvel. Its im-

pressiveness and grandeur were accepted unconsciously.

But now as they rode down over the rim in the sunset, Lonesome saw again the splendor of the John Day through the eyes of the boy. The ridges and the high pinnacles reflected the golden light of fading day, but deep in that thunderous gorge violet shadows were falling. The downward trail was a steep and tortuous one, sufficient to catch at least the unconscious attention of even the most daring rider. But the boy, Lonesome noted with inward approval, had eyes only for the beauty of the scene below.

"Gosh, what a big country! Isn't this a whale of a cañon? Makes you feel about as big as a fly. If some of these fellows with big ideas of their own importance would just ride down here about this time of day, it would give them a new slant on things, eh, Mr. McQuirk?"

"Right you are, son," agreed Lonesome. "I've thought of that same thing more than once."

The pair were well acquainted by the time they reached the McQuirk-De Long homestead. Windy was moody and taciturn, saying nothing except when directly questioned, and then only in monosyllables. The boy was hugely interested in the corrals, the farm buildings, and the cabin itself. The partners, in preparation for the youth's coming, had set a single bunk opposite their own at the end of the cabin. Upon this bed Sam seated himself, and watched Windy's preparations for supper with interest.

"I can eat like a horse to-night," he announced. In the presence of Windy, his bluff manner had returned, and his deep voice filled the room. "This country sure gives a man an appetite."

"I don't doubt it," Windy agreed gloomily. "And I'm busting out another can of beans on that account. We got to lay in a new supply of grub," Windy told his partner. "Otherwise this out-

fit will be eating hay about this time to-morrow night."

"I'll tell you what," suggested Sam. "I got to ride around to-morrow to get the rest of my stuff, anyway. I'll drive on to Condon and bring back whatever provisions you want."

"That's an idea," approved Windy. "A danged good idea, in fact." His mustache bristled at the thought of the far-from-delightful trip that the boy was suggesting for himself. Forty miles to and from Condon in a buckboard. Eighty miles in all. A tiresome and terrifically monotonous trip in the heat of summer.

"Not so good," objected Lonesome. "That's too hard a trip for a feller that ain't used to it."

"Be glad to, Mr. McQuirk," Sam insisted. "It'll give me a chance to see a lot of this country I ain't seen yet."

But Lonesome still hesitated to give his approval.

"It's a two-day trip, Sam. A day coming and going. You'd have to stay overnight at Condon."

"Glad of a chance," Sam asserted. "From what Aunt Em tells me, Condon's a mighty interesting town."

In the end, Lonesome agreed, though with some misgiving.

When the supper dishes were washed and stacked away, Windy reached for his plug of tobacco and draped himself in his chair with a sigh of content. This was usually the quiet hour in the cabin, a restful interval before turning in. But he eyed Sam suspiciously. The youth had been disappointing on one count, namely, that he showed no particular effects from his twenty-mile ride. True, he had seemed stiff and somewhat shaky at first, but had recovered immediately.

Now the youth was seated on his bed, his huge body bent over as he fumbled in the black hand bag. Windy's glittering eye marked every move. It was evident that Sam was delving for treasure. Windy had a hunch of no mean

proportions that Sam was about to bring forth something that would shake his shattered nerves still further. The hunch became a certainty when Sam straightened up, triumph beaming on his broad face. In his hand was a huge harmonica, fully twelve inches long, worn from much use.

The corpulent one examined the instrument critically with the affectionate interest with which one examines an old friend after a long journey. Then he settled himself more comfortably, leaning against the wall, eyes fixed dreamily on the ceiling, and began to play.

"E-e—yow-w-w!"

It was a long and mournful howl that came from the tortured Windy.

"Smatter?" demanded Lonesome. He had not observed his partner's reaction to the boy's preparations.

"Did you sit on a tack, mister?" inquired Sam.

"Sall right, son," said Windy gloomily. "I just thought of something that gave me a pain. Go right on playing. I'm a lover of music." But as the youth again picked up the refrain, Windy beckoned to his partner. "Lonesome," he hissed in the other's ear, "I've got a feeling there's going to be justifiable homicide committed on these premises. Did you know all the while that this young toad was a harmonica hound?"

"I did not," replied Lonesome. "It's something we didn't bargain for. But give the boy a chance to do his stuff: It don't sound half bad to me."

It was indeed not half bad. In the hands of a novice, the notes of the harmonica are full, rounded, invariable. There are no minor notes, no variations from the full, reedlike tones. It is a mechanical process and soon tiring to the hearer.

But in the hands of a gifted few, the little instrument of painted wood and gilded metal becomes the medium through which pure artistry in the form

of sound is given expression. These are the artists of the harmonica. And to such an artist, it is far from a mechanical process—as far removed as the lilt-ing trill of a meadow lark, the humming of bees in full-blown honeysuckle, or the murmur of crystal water in a shady cañon.

Such an artist was Sam, as the partners were forced to concede—Lonesome immediately and Windy stubbornly and grudgingly. The cabin was flooded with melody. The boy's big mouth covering a third of the instrument, gave to each mellow note an appealing quality all its own. The very size of his hand was a mechanical aid. At times the music seemed muted and distant, as though coming from afar. At other times, through the shifting of the player's hand, martial notes blared forth triumphantly.

In rapid succession, the lad played old favorites, known and beloved to both. Listening, Lonesome sank lower in his chair, his eyes fixed unseeingly on the thin spiral of smoke arising from his cigarette. Windy sat in silence. He was no longer bristling and belligerent. His eyes, beneath the brim of his hat, were fixed on the oilcloth table before him, and his toe beat time with the music.

The boy was improvising now. There was a rhythm, a tempo, woven into the nameless melody; but the melody itself was without break or pause, like the impromptu warbling of an early songster at the threshold of spring. It was no longer a song of pathos or regret, of old men looking back toward days long gone. It was a song of youth triumphant, of soaring hopes and tremendous ambitions, dreams that rise full-grown only in the younger years. It was a bubbling, spontaneous revelation of the innermost thoughts of the heavy-faced boy.

Thus Sam, sitting hunched up on the bed with his back to the wall, played the

hours of the evening away, played the stars from the horizon to the zenith, and flooded the souls of two hard-bitten old gunmen with rich and treasured memories of the almost-forgotten past.

"I'm going to bed," Sam's hoarse voice boomed suddenly. "I didn't mean to keep you fellows up so late." Later they heard him mutter as he leaned over to unlace his shoes. "Gosh, if I could only talk as easy, I could sell gold bricks to a wooden Indian."

He rolled into bed and almost immediately his heavy, regular breathing announced that he had fallen fast asleep.

"Funny kid, ain't he?" whispered Lonesome with a jerk of his thumb. But Windy made no reply. He was staring at the recumbent form of the sleeping Sam with a look that was questioning, almost apologetic.

The following morning Windy was as brusque and taciturn as ever. He stood with his hat pulled low over his eyes, watching his partner and Sam making preparations for the latter's trip to Condon. It was only when the youth had climbed into the buckboard, the vehicle sinking beneath his weight, that he turned abruptly to Lonesome.

"Best send him around by the south road. The water's too high in Russell's Ford."

"Good idea. Listen, Sam." Lonesome addressed the youth. "I suppose you noticed the trail we came over from Shuttler's Flats yesterday was only for saddle horses. Down below here at the head of the cañon, the road forks. The one to your right will take you over a shallow ford. Then, at Ione, you turn north to go to Condon. Coming back by way of Shuttler's Flats, you don't want to turn at Ione, but keep going straight north to Shuttler's Flats. Jim Norton will tell you the best way to get across with the buckboard from there. It's easy to explain it from that side. Got it straight, have you, son?"

"I got it," said Sam. "Be back tomorrow night."

"Best walk them critters on the grades," Lonesome suggested. "Forty mile is a long haul."

They watched him go, the buckboard clattering along the rocky road. Evidently Sam had had some experience in driving, for he guided the horses with fair dexterity. Presently his cheerful whistling faded down the cañon, and he disappeared from view.

"Well, that's that," said Lonesome. "I hope nothing happens to him."

"No such luck," was Windy's response. "The horses can't run away because they're dragging too much weight in that buckboard. You can't get on the wrong road because they's only one road to take after he passes the fork. Jim Norton will see that he gets across the cañon again. No, sir, they ain't nothing can happen to him."

What the partners did not see was Sam's change of demeanor when a bend in the cañon hid the farm buildings from view. The self-assured air gradually dropped from him. The whistling ceased to a thin, piping murmur, and then stopped abruptly. The self-assurance had dropped from his manner, and he looked half furtively at the barren, crag-rimmed precipices that hemmed him in, and stared fixedly at the harsh pinnacles of the John Day upreared against the eastern sky. To the eye of the uninitiated, it was a vast and pitiless country in which no sign of life moved.

"I ain't scared," he told himself. "I ain't scared of this country at all. But it's so darned big." He shivered a little involuntarily at the thought of driving alone through the tremendous cañon before him. He was only a boy after all, despite his bulk. He had volunteered to make the trip to Condon, hoping that they would refuse. Now it loomed as a colossal, a terrific journey, and a strange country.

At sundown the following evening,

Lonesome became worried. Sam should have returned by this time. But Windy laughed at his fear.

"Give the kid a chance," he told his partner. "A couple of hours each way don't make much difference. He probably started out late from Condon."

But, an hour later, when the shadows of evening were flooding the cañon, Lonesome sprang to his feet and strode resolutely toward the corral.

"I've got a hunch something held up that young feller," he said with conviction. "I'm going to ride over toward Shuttler's Flats and meet him."

But as Lonesome was about to swing into the saddle, there came the sound of a buckboard outfit approaching up the cañon. Presently, through the gloom, he could see that it was Sam. He was drooping wearily in the seat, but he grinned with great cheerfulness as he pulled up.

"How'd you make out, son?" inquired Lonesome anxiously. "Didn't have no bad luck nor nothing?"

"Nothing to speak of," said Sam. "It's a long trip, though."

Windy, who had been examining the various items strapped in the rear of the buckboard, now emitted a loud whistle of dismay. Lonesome moved over beside him to look. Sam seated himself heavily on the step of the cabin.

"He's gone and brought home enough provisions for an army," said Windy. "Look at that fancy stuff. Canned peaches and pineapple, by gravy. Look at that jug of molasses. And what do you expect this is?"

"That's honey," came the weary voice of Sam.

"Honey!" Windy bit off the word viciously. Turning to his partner, he demanded in a hoarse undertone: "Didn't you tell that young ape what to buy in town? This mess of stuff on our bill will just about bankrupt us."

"I told him what to get," Lonesome admitted, "and then told him if he

thought of a few extra fancy stuff that he wanted, he might get that too. I never thought he would load up like this. What the Sam Hill?" He peered closely at a box beneath the pile of goods. "There's a whole box of fresh apples, Windy." He was staggered at this reckless expenditure.

"That list of stuff you gave me," said Sam, almost as if he had overheard their remarks, "I charged on your account like you said. This other stuff I bought myself. I thought it would be only right if I would donate to the expenses."

The partners looked at each other a little sheepishly. "You hadn't ought to have done that, son," said Lonesome. "We don't expect a feller that's visiting us to bring his own grub with him."

"I'm a pretty good cook," said Sam in a somewhat shaken voice. He was leaning heavily against the doorpost. "I can make swell pies. I thought maybe I'd try my hand at it to-night after I get rested a little. Gosh, I don't see why I should be so tired after sitting down all day."

Lonesome was seized suddenly with compunction. "Get him into the cabin, Windy, and make him lie down," he directed under his breath. "Forty miles in a buckboard is too far for a feller that ain't used to it. I'll unload this stuff and put up the horses. You start a fire and we'll get some supper going."

But Sam, after a few minute of relaxation, staggered to his feet and insisted on helping Windy with the supper. Presently the latter was pushed aside and Sam took charge of the entire operations. Luscious beefsteak sizzled in the griddle. Biscuits and a pie appeared under his deft fingers and slid into the oven. His motions were sure and unerring in spite of his bulk.

"Ma went off for a visit once to Michigan," the boy explained. "And I done the cooking for me and pa. We're both heavy eaters, so I got to be quite a hand at it."

The partners, sitting back in amazement, agreed that he was considerable of a hand at cooking. Presently they dragged their chairs to a table that groaned beneath the weight of juicy steaks, smoking biscuits, and a golden-crustied pie that was, both agreed, easy to look at. On the table, too, were many delicacies that had never before been on the menu of the McQuirk and De Long household.

"Sam," said Windy, as he took another helping of the honey, "I got to admit you can sure wrangle victuals."

"Tell us about your trip, son," said Lonesome. "You didn't have no trouble getting to Condon, did you?"

"I got there a little late," admitted the boy. His round, heavy cheeks flushed a little. "Those horses didn't walk very fast."

Lonesome paused in his eating operations to stare at the youth. "You don't mean to say you walked them critters all the way to Condon?"

"That's what you told me to do," the boy defended himself. "You said to walk them on all the grades, and it was kind of rolling all the way to Condon."

"You walked them critters forty miles?" Lonesome was horrified. "What time did you get in?"

Sam grinned. "It was a little after midnight. I would have gotten there earlier, except I had a little bad luck getting across the cañon. It took me better than an hour to mend the harness again after getting out of the water."

"I noticed the harness had been treated kind of rough," said Lonesome, staring fixedly at the youth. "What happened?"

"I guess I must be a pretty bum driver." The boy wriggled uneasily in his embarrassment. "But the water at the ford seemed awful deep to me. Fact is, it was clear over the seat on the buckboard. I guess the horses must have stumbled or something, 'cause the current took them down the river. All

of a sudden, we were in pretty deep water, and the horses got all tangled up in the harness." He looked at the astonished partners hopefully. "But before I had to swim myself, I slipped the bolt out of the doubletrees so the horses would be free of the buckboard."

"Wait a minute, son," interrupted Lonesome. His voice was hoarse. "Where the Sam Hill did you go across the John Day?"

"Coming out at the head of the cañon," said the ponderous youth. "I took the left fork like you said."

"The left fork?" repeated Lonesome. "Why, I made a point of it to tell you the right fork. That there left road leads to Russell's Ford."

"I must have got kind of mixed up on it," the boy said, hanging his head. "It looked like a pretty tough place to go across."

The partners stared at each other aghast. The boy had actually driven a buckboard through Russell's Ford, a passage across the John Day used only by mounted men, and then, in low water. And he had thought merely that it seemed "kind of tough."

"How did you get out of that jack pot?" Lonesome questioned.

"The current took the horses over to the bank, and they scrambled up on it. They was all tangled up. When I got them straightened out, I tied them to a jack pine and went back and pulled the buckboard out of the shallows. I guess you know how rough those cliffs are. By leading the horses single file, I finally got them back to the trail. It took me almost an hour to get the buckboard back on the trail," he admitted, grinning. "I had to work like a horse."

Sam's casual account of this colossal feat all but petrified the two old ex-gunfighters. They knew Russell's Ford minutely, the swift current of the John Day below the ford, and the all but unscalable walls that hemmed in this lower stretch. The fact that the boy had fallen

into the clutches of this current and was able to escape not only with his life, but had also brought out his horses and vehicle intact, was staggering and almost incomprehensible.

"You need a guardian, that's all there is to it," opined Windy. "Hereafter, Lonesome, you and me had best ride herd on this young feller. He can't be that lucky all the time. Well, son, tell us some more. Did you have any more grief in Condon?"

"Nothing much, except I run into a tough guy," Sam frowned at the thought, and certain bulging contours appeared in the erstwhile round lines of his smooth cheek. "I've read about such fellers, but never knew there really was any. A regular bad man." He squirmed uncomfortably. "I kind of lost my temper with him. Maybe I shouldn't have acted the way I did. He might be a friend of yours. One of the things I got to fight against," he explained somberly, "is a terrible temper I got."

"I'll bet you have," agreed Windy. "I'll bet there's fur flies when you lose your temper."

The boy stared fixedly at Windy. "Back in Decatur," he said, "I got into an argument with a feller once. Busted two of his ribs."

"G'wan with you!" Windy's mustache bristled sardonically. "You must be a regular grizzly bear."

"While we was wrestling," explained Sam, "we both slipped, and I fell on him. They had to take him to a hospital."

Lonesome chuckled outright at this, and even Windy's deep-set eyes twinkled. The boy's pugnacious examination of Windy relaxed a little.

"Go on, son," urged Lonesome. "Tell us about this bold bad man you met up with. What was his name?"

"His name was Morgan. Lem, the livery-stable man, called him 'Bull.'"

"Bull Morgan!" The genial good hu-

mor faded swiftly from the faces of the two old ex-fighters. Lonesome's eyes narrowed. "You don't mean to say that no-count polecat picked on you, Sam? If he pulled any of his bullying stuff on you, I'll go gunning for him bright and early to-morrow morning. That's just the brand of pup Bull Morgan is. Picking on inoffensive strangers like you."

"I don't think it's necessary to go after him, Mr. McQuirk. This is what happened. It was way after midnight when I got the horses put away, and I was standing there talking to Lem before going over to the hotel. Well, this man came stumbling in and he had a gun strapped on his waist. It was a real gun, too.

"'What do you want, Morgan?' said Lem, looking at him in a kind of unfriendly way.

"'Nothing, Lem,' said this man Morgan, looking at me and kind of grinning. 'Just circulating around, Lem. Circulating around.' He was kind of swaying. But his eyes never winked a bit, and looked terrible. Gosh, I was scared. 'Who's your little friend, Lem?' he said, still looking at me. 'I've seen 'em high and I've seen 'em wide,' he says, 'and I've seen 'em thick. But this is the first time I ever seen a feller that was high and wide and thick at the same time. Feller,' he says to me, 'you look kind of tired and peaked. How about imbibing a little refreshment?'

"'Don't mind if I do,' I said, because I was tired. 'I think a malted milk or something would make me feel better.'

"Well, this Mr. Morgan threw back his head and howled just like a wolf when I said that. 'Beat it, Morgan,' Lem said to him. 'Leave the kid alone.'

"But Morgan didn't pay any attention. He pulled a bottle out of his hip pocket. It had some clear stuff in it that looked like coal oil.

"'A rattler must of bit you, you're that swelled up,' he told me. 'Now this

here is snake-bite remedy. You and me is going to have a little dose. You've already been bit, and you need it. I might get bit any time, so I better be prepared.' He pulled the cork out of the bottle and gave it to me. 'Oil up, feller,' he said.

"'I wouldn't drink that stuff,' I said. 'It looks like poison to me.'

"Well, when I said that, Mr. Morgan dropped the bottle and kind of squatted a little and put his hand on his hip. 'You heard him, Lem?' he said. 'You're a witness, Lem.'"

During this recital, Lonesome had pushed back his chair and risen slowly to his feet. Now his pale-blue eyes flicked momentarily to his guns hanging on the wall and turned back to the boy. "Son," he said harshly, "did that polecat pull his gun on you?"

"He took his gun in his hand and shot at me," continued the boy with great calmness. "But I had picked up a bale of hay off the pile beside me and held it in front of me, and he fired into that, and it didn't hurt me any. Then I threw the bale of hay at him and it knocked him down. Lem jumped on him and took his gun away, but he didn't get up. He just laid there and groaned and held his stummick. He said to Lem: 'Lem, I always told you your darned old barn was going to fall down on me,' he says, 'and now it went and done it.'

"So I left after that," concluded Sam, "and went over to the hotel and went to bed."

The partners relaxed in unison and turned to stare blankly at each other. "Slugged him," breathed Windy. "Slugged Bull Morgan, with a bale of hay!"

"You didn't see him again after that?" questioned Lonesome.

"No," said Sam. "But somebody must have told it on me because there was a couple of young cowboys that rode beside me a piece when I left town.

'You're the feller that knocked Bull Morgan for a row of junipers last night, ain't you?' said one. 'You're a stranger in these parts, ain't you, pardner?'

"I told them who I was staying with, and they asked me a lot of funny questions. They said they was from the Double O outfit."

Lonesome frowned. "Them Double O boys is always up to something. They kind of cater to this said Bull Morgan, figgering he's a kind of hero instead of the blustering polecat that he really is. What were some of them questions they asked you?"

"Their questions didn't amount to so much," said Sam. "But I thought their manner was kind of funny. They were so polite and all. 'How do you like it out here in the Condon country?' one of them asked.

"'It's an awful big country,' I said. 'I've noticed several funny things. For instance, it seems strange to me, there's so much live stock running loose. On the way to Condon as I came through the cañon, I saw a big flock of bulls.'

"'A flock of bulls?' repeated this cowboy, and he looked across at his partner. 'Slim,' he said, 'he seen a flock of bulls on the way to Condon.'

"'Did you so?' says this other fellow, looking kind of surprised. 'You didn't by no chance see a herd of sheep?'

"'Not a big one,' I said. 'But I saw a little herd of sheep down in the flats. Saw the shepherd, too. He was sitting up on a rock whittling a stick.'

"Well, they both pretended to be more surprised, and the fellow called Slim said:

"'You seen a shepherd sitting on a rock, did you? The lazy sun of a gun. I'll bet the low-down critter was letting the dogs take care of that there herd of sheep.'

"Well, we talked back and forth like that quite a while, and then the one on my right says: 'We're pleased to have

met up with you, partner. There's a dance over at Willow Creek to-morrow night. You'd best ride around and meet up with some of the rest of the boys. They'll be pleased to talk to you.'"

"A dance at Willow Creek," repeated Lonesome, frowning again. "That's a pretty tough place, Sam. You didn't tell them you would go?"

"I did," said Sam, his keen eyes inspecting the other's face. "I'm a pretty fair dancer if I do say it myself. I thought it would be a good chance to get acquainted."

"You'd get acquainted all right." Lonesome glanced at Windy, his mild blue eyes troubled. The latter's mustache was bristling at the thought of the new experience the boy would unquestionably encounter at Willow Creek. Ordinarily the boys from the Double O outfit and the gentlemen who rode the hills of the Willow Creek country were continuously engaged in the plottings and carrying out of devious and bizarre practical jokes among themselves. It was only on rare and eventful occasions that a stranger of Sam's size, characteristics, and trusting disposition appeared in their midst.

"But don't you see, Sam," explained Lonesome, "those Double O boys is trying to get you over there so they can pull some of their alleged humor on you?"

"They're the lads that can do it, too," opined Windy. "I said it before, and I say it again. Give them lads half a chance and they'd make a graduated buckaroo out of you in less time than it takes to tell it."

"I don't know about that," protested Sam. "Those two boys I talked to were as polite and agreeable as a man could expect. They were real friendly."

The partners shook their heads and protested further. But Sam stubbornly insisted. He pointed out that he had promised to go, and the boys had seemed real pleased at the prospect of meeting

him there, and it would not be the proper thing to disappoint them.

"Let him go," said Windy, heaving a deep sigh. "He ain't young but once. He ought to have an interesting time at that."

On the following day the partners discussed the matter at length. Windy was all for letting Sam go alone to the Willow Creek dance. There were certain things he ought to find out for himself, he pointed out. He would undoubtedly remember it longer. But Lonesome's responsibility in the boy's welfare would not permit it.

That evening after an early supper when Sam was making preparations for his departure, Lonesome broached the subject.

"Me and Windy has decided to ride over to Willow Creek with you. We ain't so old and broken down but what we can shake a mean hoof ourselves."

"You ain't going over on my account, are you?" demanded Sam. "That ain't necessary at all."

"Don't think it for a minute," Lonesome assured him. "But we got to thinking it over that a little bit of activity wouldn't hurt us a bit. Them Willow Creek dances is always interesting."

The community hall, located in the flats bordering Willow Creek, was crowded. From the number of horses tethered outside, it was evident that all who were able to travel had come from miles around. As the trio approached, the lilting notes of a rollicking two-step were borne to their ears, followed by a tremendous burst of applause when the music ceased.

"You kind of circulate among the Double O boys," Lonesome whispered to Windy. "I'll kind of keep my eyes on the Willow Creek bunch. If anything seems framed up on Sam, maybe we can get the low-down on them."

"He seems to think this is a Sunday-school picnic," murmured Windy. "He's just as happy as if he had better sense.

If you'll kind of keep him in the background, maybe they won't pay no attention to him."

But they soon discovered that Sam was not, like a desert flower, born to blush unseen. His was not the type of personality that flourished in obscurity.

His great bulk loomed among male wallflowers standing in dignified groups in the corners and along the walls. A resplendent youth, bedecked like a range king, hailed Sam immediately, his voice rising above the laughter and din of the room. Sam's great voice boomed in reply. Many faces turned to look. Sam was soon surrounded by a group of chuckling cow hands.

"He ain't the kind of a feller that hides his light under a bushel," said Windy in an aside to Lonesome. "We might just as well have fetched him down with a brass band."

"The worst of it is," complained the other, "he's so danged innocent he takes everything at face value. He don't know that these hombres has designs on his scalp right this minute."

It immediately developed that Sam's popularity was not confined alone to members of his own sex. The partners were amazed at his rapid progress. They were still further surprised to discover that Sam, despite his bulk, was a dancer of no mean ability. Many eyes marked his progress. At the intermission between dances, the cow hands were gradually pushed back to make room for the bevy of laughing girls. Sam was in his element now. His broad, good-humored face had a perpetual grin. His shaggy hair hung in a great tawny lock over his twinkling eyes. His voice boomed as he towered above the giggling bevy about him.

It immediately became evident that Sam's popularity was meeting with scant approval on the part of the Romeos of the Willow Creek country.

"How does he get that way?" de-

manded one of the group at Windy's left. "There ain't no room for any ordinary cow hands with this he-vamp around."

"Nobody loves a fat man," sneered another. "The hombre that made that crack was sure a dumb-bell. He attracts gals like a mule attracts horseflies."

"It's his fatal beauty that does it," opined a third. "It ain't right, is it, boys? Something ought to be done about it. If we ain't careful, that heavy-weight will have us backed clear off our own range."

If, up to this time, there had been any doubt that Sam had attracted considerable attention, there was no further room for argument following the next dance, when one of those in charge of events mounted on a chair and called loudly for silence.

"We have with us to-night," proclaimed the speaker, "a gent whom we have presumed to call upon to give us an impromptu number not included in our original program. He is a wizard on the harmonica, and we are indeed fortunate to have him here. But more than that," said the speaker, "he is a toe dancer who knows his stuff. He has agreed to give us a toe dance, playing his own accompaniment on the said harmonica. Ladies and gents, I refer to Mr. Sam Smith, of Decatur, Illinois."

The partners listened with astonishment to this announcement. They were deafened by the roar of applause that greeted it. They were pushed back as the huge circle was formed to make room for the event. In the center stood Sam, bowing his acknowledgment, his great bulk looming more colossal still as he stood alone. The partners had inwardly writhed at the spectacle that Sam must undoubtedly make of himself. They had blushed for him. They knew that their protégé's talents with the harmonica had not been overestimated. But could that lumbering youth be anything but ludicrous as a solo dancer?

But their fears soon gave way to an amazed wonder. The furtive and hunted look soon disappeared from their eyes and presently they stood erect, throwing out their chests proudly, and beamed upon the enthusiastic spectators.

For Sam, even as the announcer had said, knew his stuff. This was evident from the moment that he plucked forth his harmonica from his pocket. His great bulk seemed unbelievably light—like a vast segment of thistle-down—as he whirled and bounced in a rollicking hornpipe. There was an elastic quality in his bounding energy that seemed unbelievably at odds with his avoirdupois. Whatever clumsiness that was his in repose was gone now. His great shoulders shook. His feet beat a lively tattoo on the floor. In the gyrations of the hornpipe, it seemed that he rose and fell with the notes that poured forth in staccato rhythm from the harmonica. The act was, as even the pessimistic partners were forced to admit, a knockout.

Deafening applause greeted the performance. The great circle closed in on the blushing and beaming Sam. The partners withdrew to the outskirts of the crowd, furtively avoiding each other's eyes, half ashamed of their delight in the accomplishments of their protégé.

In the enthusiasm of the moment, they failed to note that the boys from the Double O, augmented by a select half dozen of the riders of the Willow Creek country, did not join in the almost deafening acclaim. These had drawn apart in a group and were whispering among themselves.

Later, the partners blamed themselves for relaxing their vigilance. Sam's success had blunted their caution. Undoubtedly the boy was born to popular approval, they believed. It was three or four dances later that they discovered suddenly that Sam was no longer in

the dance hall. Instantly, by a swift appraisal of the crowd, they found that eight or ten of the cow hands had also disappeared.

From a late arrival outside, they gleaned the information that a group of cow hands were escorting a hefty stranger in the direction of the creek. Lonesome and Windy delayed no further, but leaped to the saddle and started in pursuit.

Part of the details of what actually happened that evening were subsequently gleaned from Sam himself. Long afterward, members of the party conceded other fragments or verified certain rumors. Lonesome and Windy themselves witnessed the climax. Pieced out in its entirety, the incident has since become one of revered memory in the Condon country.

A lanky youth had approached Sam shortly after his harmonica and dancing exhibition. Without attracting attention, he had engaged him in conversation and drawn him into a group of casual youths clustered near the door.

"You ought to be on the stage," said one, regarding him with frank admiration. "You sure shake a mean hoof."

"Got any more tricks as good as that?" inquired another. "Us fellers out here in the sagebrush is out of luck. Our education has been neglected."

"I've got two or three more tricks I can do in a pinch," Sam admitted, much gratified. "Back in high school in Decatur," he explained, "we had a musical club that we called the Order of Orpheus. Each of us had to learn an act like that. I picked up a couple more, too."

"You don't say so!" The group had gathered around, edging him toward the door. Admiration shone in their frank faces. "Come on outside a little bit, Sam," the spokesman suggested. "We ain't so good on parlor tricks, but some of the boys could show you a stunt or two that would be interesting."

"Don't mind if I do," agreed Sam. "It's a little cooler outside. I got kind of heated up."

It was a calm and mellow evening. The moon rode high above the pinnacles, and a cool breeze was whispering in the sage-clad slopes.

"Now take roping for instance," said one of the attentive cow hands. "Have you ever seen any fancy stuff along that line?"

"I saw a wild-West show once," admitted the youth. "A feller made a loop out of his rope and jumped through it and made it keep on rolling just the same."

"Not so bad," conceded the other. "But we'll show a new one. Let's all get on our horses. A feller can't do much of the real stuff on the ground."

Sam complied, and the group of mounted men moved off a little way from the hall.

"Now then," said the spokesman gravely as he loosened his rope. "You move your horse over there about ten steps and stand right still. That's right. Now hold your arms down next to your sides." Others of the group had edged their horses a little back. Sam, mounted, sat motionless some twenty feet from the speaker. "One of the hardest things in roping," explained the spokesman, whirling the loop slowly above his head, "is to make your throw absolutely right. Notice, now, Sam. It's quite a trick." The rope uncoiled like a slender snake. The loop slid gently over Sam's shoulders and settled about his waist, pinning his arms to his sides.

"Hurray!" cried the spectators in muffled but polite applause. "You wouldn't think," continued the instructor, "that a feller could throw half hitches from this distance, now, would you? But watch this, Sam."

Demonstrating with a deft snap of the wrist, a new loop rolled along the rope and settled over Sam's shoulders.

Another followed, and another, with smooth, easy precision. The speaker advanced as the rope shortened. Finally Sam was bound securely from wrist to shoulder, and the speaker held the end of the rope in his hand. The rest of the group had gathered in.

"That's fine," Sam agreed. He attempted to shift his arm. It was as though he were encased in sheet iron. "That's a good trick. Now show me another."

"Hank, over yonder," and the speaker indicated a gloomy cow-puncher at his side, "will show you how a feller is hobbled. He does it in about five motions."

Whereupon Hank, stooping from the saddle, deftly tied their captive's feet together and completed the trick with a double hitch on the pommel.

"Now," said the spokesman, gathering up his lines, "we're ready for a little trip down into the cañon."

"Wait a second," said Sam. He was still grinning good-naturedly. His eyes flicked from one to another of the group around him. "What's the idea of going down into the cañon?"

"You tell him, Hank," said the spokesman, and he turned aside and straightway fell into a violent fit of coughing.

The gloomy cow-puncher pushed forward and faced their captive. "Mr. Sam Smith," he began in a sonorous voice, "you are face to face with a mighty solemn occasion. You came to these parts a stranger, and we have done took you in. We have had you under observation and have found you worthy of the honor we are about to confer upon you. There is an organization in these parts composed chiefly and solely of tough men. At this said dance yonder," he said, indicating the distant schoolhouse with a wave of his hand, "we watched you do your stuff. It has been unanimously agreed and decided that you are a fit candidate for the 'an-

cient and mysterious Order of Snake Charmers.'"

A muffled "Hurray!" came from the spectators. "Attaboy, Hank. If he ain't got the earmarks of a snake charmer, I'm a Wampus cat."

A gratified grin overspread Sam's broad face. What an enviable position he could claim and maintain among the boys back in Decatur, when it became known that he was a member of no less an organization than the ancient and mysterious Order of Snake Charmers.

"Much obliged, gents," he said, bobbing his head. "I appreciate it. I suppose this is part of the initiation, huh?"

"It is," agreed Hank promptly. "And now, boys, er—brother Snake Charmers," he addressed his cohorts, "gather round and we will escort this said candidate down to the cañon to be—er—initiated."

Hank was evidently self-appointed master of ceremonies. That he was doing justice to the position was evidenced by the respectful admiration with which he was regarded by the others. In a group, they moved down toward the creek with their bound captive in the center. Sam assured himself that he was happy to have been chosen as a member of this important group. The others were happy, too, judging by their unmelodious howls and raucous chuckling as they rode gleefully down the long slope in the moonlight.

They halted at the edge of a deep water hole whose dark level was maintained by the meager flow of Willow Creek. The water hole was surrounded by steep walls, except on the side where they had entered. Here the boulder-strewn bank dipped down at a lesser angle. Where bank and water met, a huge, half-submerged boulder upreared above the surface.

All dismounted, and Sam was untied and permitted to climb stiffly to the ground. His horse was tethered a little apart. Hank remained in the sad-

die, directing operations. At his orders, given in a voice that was hoarse and dignified, Sam was unbound, and a cow hand stationed on each side seized him firmly by the arms. One of these had furtively armed himself with a piece of board some four feet in length by six inches in width, left at the water hole by a passing wagon outfit.

Save for the mounted spokesman and the pair standing guard over Sam, the group had gathered to one side of the water's edge to witness every detail of the forthcoming show.

"Let him stand on the rock," directed Hank. "Let him bow low."

The ponderous Sam was led to the boulder and balanced thereon, facing the water. "Bow low, Sam," admonished Hank. The cow hand at the candidate's left assisted him to bend forward in the proper position.

Thereupon the youth with the board spat upon his hands and set himself firmly on his feet in the position of a swat king about to knock a home run. The board whistled through the air. There was a sharp crack like the report of a giant pistol as it descended upon the broad and unsuspecting person of the stooping Sam.

It was this tableau that unfolded before the startled eyes of Lonesome and Windy as they charged down the slope. Windy swore between his teeth.

"This business is going too far," he muttered. "They're getting set to knock him into the water hole. You and me'll have to massacre them young hyenas, Lonesome."

"Pull up, Windy," said Lonesome. Wonder and awe was in his voice. "Look!" New history in the Condon country was being made before their eyes.

They saw the terrific blow descend. They heard the sound of its shattering impact. Under the weight of such a blow, lesser men would have hurtled forthwith into the pool. But not so

with Sam's great bulk. They heard the loud, delighted howl with which the spectators greeted the performance. Hard on the heels of this gleeful chorus, rising above it, drowning it out, came a bellowing roar that seemed fairly to fill the cañon.

Sam, lately supine and placid, was now a huge bundle of explosive energy. The youth of ponderous good nature was gone. A raging behemoth was loose in the cañon of Willow Creek.

Openmouthed, the partners sat motionless in their saddles and watched. Following the blow, it seemed that Sam straightened and whirled in the same instant. A great arm encircled each of the two tormentors beside him. He roared again as he swung them from their feet and hurled them forth into the pool.

The remainder of the would-be practical jokers were momentarily electrified at the transformation of their erstwhile spineless prisoner. Then they surged as one man upon him. Sam, bellowing, leaped from the boulder to meet them.

They met on the shelving, boulder-strewn bank. The shock of their impact was terrific. Sam was overwhelmed, beaten down by the weight of superior numbers. Wild yells and the sound of the desperate struggle filled the cañon. Hank, late master of ceremonies, was still mounted. He circled outside the milling group, his rope swinging from his upraised hand, as he called loudly upon his cohorts to fall back and give him room to rope their man. But his voice could not be heard above the din.

"Let's go," said Lonesome. "There's too many of them for Sam. They've got him down."

"Wait," said Windy. "He's up again."

The raging Sam had reared again to his feet, notwithstanding that men were clinging to his arms, his legs, even his hair, desperately striving to hold him

down. Then the mass of struggling men surged toward the water. There followed a great splash, and the pool was alive with men, striving, porpoise-like, to regain the bank. Out of the gasping and flailing mêlée Sam emerged, rising from the water as he backed up the slope.

"Come on, you bums!" he bellowed defiantly, shaking a great, hamlike fist at his late tormentors. "This initiation has only started."

But the enthusiasm of the jokesters had been considerably dampened by their sudden and unexpected immersion in the pool. They splashed their way toward the bank at angles calculated to avoid their belligerent adversary. As they dragged themselves up to solid footing, Sam took a step toward them.

At that instant, when victory seemed within his grasp, Hank's rope settled over his head and shoulders. He whirled instantly, striving to throw off the loop, but it tightened tenaciously across his chest and back. The triumphant Hank whirled his horse, and the animal scrambled higher up the bank.

Under other conditions, Sam's feat at this juncture would have been rated as nothing less than superhuman. Later there was considerable argument on the part of those who witnessed it as to exactly how it was done. The footing was undoubtedly bad for the scrambling horse. Hank's horsemanship was perhaps at fault. Be that as it may, Sam laid hold on the rope and planted his feet firmly on the boulders. The rope hummed to a straight line. The horse's scrambling progress up the bank was halted abruptly. Sam had not moved.

Open-mouthed, the spectators watched. It was unbelievable, but it was, nevertheless, happening before their eyes. For a moment the rope sang as the animal floundered in the loose boulders. Then Hank reined up and swerved the animal back to the water's edge, keeping the line taut. Here, on

an even footing, he prepared to drag forth his quarry. As he urged the horse forward, the spirited animal reared up. In that brief instant Sam lunged backward with all his ponderous weight. Horse and rider were overbalanced and toppled backward into the pool.

This was too much for the dazed and disheveled cow hands. While Sam was disengaging himself from the rope, they scurried by. With Hank clinging to the stirrup, the floundering horse regained the bank. The late master of ceremonies vaulted to the saddle as the snorting animal leaped up the slope.

"What's all the commotion?" demanded Lonesome with a show of great surprise as the first of the drenched horsemen thundered by. He shouted joyously at the second and the third, but received no reply. The cow hands merely stared at them fixedly in passing, with the mute and chastened expression of men to whom new and abiding experiences have come. It was Hank alone, last of the fleeing band, who found words to express his horror.

"Beat it, men!" he urged. "Burn up the dust. They's a wild man loose in the cañon. He ain't human, I tell you. He's *wild!*"

Far down the long slope, Sam's head and shoulders appeared above the edge of the bank. Thereupon Hank waited no longer, but turned and fled. When Sam, who was mounted on his own horse, and riding slowly, reached the partners, the last of the mysterious brotherhood of Snake Charmers was represented merely by the faint echo of rumbling hoofbeats on the remote horizon.

The ponderous one sat loosely in his saddle. Even in the moonlight, it was evident that depression and gloom weighed heavily upon him.

"Sam," said Lonesome softly, "you played pretty rough with them boys, didn't you?"

"I lost my temper," admitted the vast

youth, hanging his head. "It was terrible the way I acted. But they should have remembered that I ain't grown up yet."

Windy's lean face wrinkled with one of his rare and engaging smiles. "Son," he said earnestly, "I'm an old man, but I hope to live to see you in action when you've got your growth."

"How come you lost your temper, Sam?" inquired Lonesome gravely. "Did they hit you too hard?"

"Naw," said Sam disgustedly. "I've been initiated to things before. My harmonica," he explained, "was in my hip pocket. They busted it."

"I see." It was proof of the stern stuff of which they were made that the partners did not laugh as they eyed each other.

Later, as the trio rode homeward toward the Wasco Hills, Lonesome inquired: "What did the boys call you back in Decatur, son? Surely they had some fancy handle to hang on a lad of your gentle disposition."

"Yeah, they did," admitted Sam. He squirmed in the saddle, embarrassed. "They called me 'Dynamite.'"

At midforenoon the following day, Lonesome dashed suddenly into the cabin.

"Windy," he announced, dismayed, "the schoolma'am's riding up the cañon. I'll gamble dollars to doughnuts that she's riding around to call me down for that Willow Creek business."

"Now, Windy, it's up to you. Me and Sam is going to light out the back way and crawl into the sagebrush. You stay here and use some of your eloquence on her."

"Wait a minute——" began the outraged Windy.

"That's a-plenty," Lonesome cut in. "We're on our way, Sam and me. Do your stuff." And, suiting his action to his words, he and the ponderous youth plunged from view out the back door.

But Lonesome had no intention of re-

turning into the sagebrush. The pair leaned against the wall and listened. At first they heard only Windy's sulphurous profanity. This presently died away into a feeble mutter as the schoolma'am approached. Later, they heard him blandly explaining to that lady that Lonesome and Sam had been out on the range all morning, and would not be back until noon. It developed from their conversation that the schoolma'am had not heard of the Willow Creek episode.

"I rode around, Mr. De Long," the lady explained at length, "to tell you I was thinking of taking Sam back with me to Norton's. After thinking it over, I have decided that it wasn't right to put you and Mr. McQuirk to the inconvenience of having him around."

"Ma'am," said Windy, and Lonesome knew that wild horses could not have dragged these sentiments from Windy had he known they were listening. "Miss Emmeline—you leave that there Sam with us. Me and McQuirk cotton to him. The old shack ain't what it used to be before he come around. It's danged near a human habitation instead of a boar's nest. If you was to take him away, ma'am, we'd miss him. We'd miss him playing his harmonica in the evenings. I ain't what you'd call an optimist, ma'am, but when he plays that there harmonica, it makes you wonder if this ain't a fair to middling kind of world we're living in after all. We'd sure miss the victuals he's been fixing up for us. And not only that, ma'am." Lonesome knew that Windy's mustache was bristling and his black eyes were twinkling. "Me and McQuirk is getting old. This is a rough country. We need that young bull snake around to protect us and kind of look out for us."

Lonesome, leaning against the shadowed wall, winked at Sam, and chuckled silently as the broad face of that colossal youth split in an enormous grin.

Lost Mines



by *Roderick
O'Hargan*

*Author of "The War
Bag," etc.*

THE MINE WITH THE IRON DOOR



HE real story of the "Iron Door Mine" is just now being related to the president, in Washington, in an appeal for the release of certain government lands, which contain within their borders the original "Iron Door Mine." The story is being told by Lee Turner and his attorneys. Lee is an Indian and a prospector, and made his discovery nearly twenty years ago, through another Indian, Chino, full brother of the famous or infamous Geronimo. Because of this association and for other reasons, the discovery has lain dormant for eighteen years.

Lee Turner was born in Texas, coming to Arizona when fifteen years of age. He makes his headquarters in Tucson, Arizona.

Geronimo, last, most cruel, and most crafty of the Apache chieftains, it will be remembered, infested the border in the 'seventies, leaving a trail of murder and robbery in Texas, Arizona, and Mexico, until finally he was rounded up and captured by General Nelson A. Miles in the southeast corner of Cochise County, Arizona, and deported to the Everglades of Florida.

Confused stories of the "Iron Door

Mine" and the "Church Door Mine" were rife on the border all through that period, but the details were fragmentary. Many prospectors decided to look up these mines, but with Geronimo and his ilk in the field, it was a hazardous business. Some undoubtedly did try, and probably never came back to tell the tale.

The Door Mine was reported to be a fully developed mine, opened and operated by the early Spaniards, as was afterward proved correct by the discovery of the Church Door Mine in Chihuahua, Mexico. It was not until long afterward that it was known that there were two Door Mines—not one. When the government confiscated the lands that Geronimo laid claim to, they blocked the way to further searching; and it is in this connection that Turner is now laying the facts before the President.

Turner's statement of the discoveries made by him on the ground, read like a page from the "Arabian Nights." For instance, he discovered the body of an old soldier, which proved to be that of William Ben Bennett, who, in company with two government surveyors, had in 1879, while laying out a mail route, picked up some gold ore, which, when

brought to Tucson, netted them two hundred dollars and a gallon of whisky. Bennett heard, years later, that the little sack of ore had brought the saloon keeper fifteen hundred dollars, so, acting on this information, he left an old soldiers' home in California, sneaked back to the place of his lucky strike, and died there from natural causes.

Turner also found an old grade piled high with rock, which, when cleared, revealed an excellent road, twenty-five feet wide, winding through the mountains. He also brought to light dozens of tunnels, sealed with a rocky, hematite formation—"iron door"—and cement, then camouflaged with mountaintops being blown down on the sealed tunnels to effect a perfect blot-out.

Turner had previously noted crude symbols, usually an arrow-pierced heart, scratched on stones in the district. He attached no significance to these, believing them to be Indian signs, but in the tunnels and cuts he opened, he found these or other signs at four-yard distances. Then he came upon a great stone slab, bearing the heart-and-arrow imprint. This cap, when pried off in the presence of Dean Cummings, archaeologist at the University of Arizona, last spring, revealed a complete cipher or alphabet of hewed hearts, diamonds, arrowheads, and crescents. Dean Cummings took this to be a deposit map, but Turner is convinced that it is the key to the underground and surface workings for the whole district. This engraved cipher is seventeen inches square and the signs on it are

minute replicas of monuments he has found surrounding it within an area of fifty yards square. It also contains directions of an old Spanish map, since found, which indicates many of the monuments to the treasure which Turner has already uncovered. The map shows that the area contains several mines, developed separately, but connected. That one already broken into has for a name "Our Lady of Guadalupe." It has a copper door which corresponds to the generally accepted legend of "The Mine with the Iron Door," believed to be fabulously rich in deposits of silver and gold.

The discoveries to date are not limited to old workings and mineral deposits. Seven graveyards have been uncovered within an area of thirteen miles and in these graveyards there are between three and four thousand graves, each grave marked off with a large hewed heart and a hewed diamond.

Turner believes that upon abandoning these mines, the Spaniards sealed them and then along the open cut, dropped in huge hematite wedges. Clay was then poured among the wedges, sand spread over the top, and the whole job carefully covered with a black hematite formation.

Have the days of romance passed? Not yet! Records of the West, and particularly the Southwest, teem with hints of mines that were, are, or were to be. The great empty, brooding, sun-drenched stretches of mountain and desert invite the adventurer to add to romance, if not to history.



CLAIM-HOGGING BANNED IN NEVADA

GOVERNOR J. G. SCRUGHAM of Nevada, recently signed a bill limiting mining locations which an individual may take up in any one district to six. The act is designed to prevent "claim-hogging" by persons who locate claims with the purpose of holding the ground for possible sale to newcomers. The law holds that six claims are sufficient for one person to own and work.



The Round-Up

COMES first an author—the Robert Ormond Case. Said writing gent hales from Portland, Oregon. Robert went and got called, here recently, by one of the boys, so he has loped over the hull distance from Portland, Oregon, to this here Round-up to give his answer. Now, Robert, take the witness chair, same being that saddle of "Shorty's" that that careless gent threw down over there. It's a trifle too near the fire for a night like this, so pull it back a piece. All right, now you are comfortable, Robert, let 'er go:

"Boss and Folks: This is in reply to Aubrey Vaughn's query in the June 13th issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE: Can a horse lope sixty miles continuously, as I had 'Lonesome' McQuirk do in the novelette, 'Sing Low, Buckaroo?'"

"Pardner, you've asked a question that ought to make some of the old-timers sit up and take notice. Maybe it will open up a fine, large discussion.

"Personally, I'll have to admit I've never loped a horse sixty miles without a let-up. That's a long lope. But in 'Sing Low, Buckaroo,' you'll remember, Lonesome *had* to do it. And I believe

it can be done—and without permanently injuring the horse. There is only one string to this: it can be done only in a high, dry altitude, and by range horses accustomed to covering long distances.

"I base my belief partly on these facts: In the pony-express race, Bend, Oregon, to The Dalles, Oregon, in 1923, the winning string of horses covered the one hundred and sixty miles in ten hours, thirty-four minutes, or an average speed of fifteen and eight tenths miles per hour. Now, none of these horses covered sixty miles, but at least one covered more than thirty miles at practically a dead run. It seems to me that a horse that can cover thirty miles at that speed could, with the same effort, travel sixty miles at an easy lope.

"A friend of mine, an old-timer, traveled with a team and buckboard from Dubois, Idaho, to Nicholia, via Birch Creek, a distance of seventy-five miles, between sunup and two hours after sunset on July 4th several years ago. I believe either of those horses, had they been saddle horses, could have loped sixty miles of that distance.

"Another old-timer tells me the stage used to make a non-stop trip regularly

each week from Lovelock, Nevada, to Boyer, on the eastern side of the Humboldt Salt Marsh. That distance is sixty miles.

"But the best dope of all is this: I have just talked with the manager of the Basque Ranch, Ltd., of Ashcroft, British Columbia, Canada. This organization has a ranch of ten thousand acres, surrounded by several thousand square miles of range country corresponding to the route over which Lonesome made his ride. He says there are several Siwash Indians in the vicinity of Ashcroft who can, do, and will if called upon, make the following run: From the Basque Ranch via Spence's bridge to Ashcroft and return—a distance of sixty-one miles—and lope all the way. This gentleman invites correspondence on the proposition. He has sporting instincts, and avers that he, together with his hands, aided and abetted by the Indians in that vicinity, will cover all bets, any amount, that any gentleman or group of gentlemen care to offer who will come to Ashcroft. The Indians will ride cayuse ponies, and the race could be watched with powerful glasses all the way around the sixty-mile course from the ranch house. The bet would be that it couldn't be done—that the cayuses can't lope that far. He says the Indians would do it, and race among themselves for first money! That's fair enough, isn't it? Write Basque Ranch, Ltd., Ashcroft, British Columbia, Canada.

"However, notwithstanding that I've ridden a little myself, I don't want to pose as an authority on this point. A little discussion pro and con might help things along. Maybe some of the boys who are riding now, who bring in a little beef and pick up a WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE on the way back to the ranch, may have some ideas on the subject."

Men and women, boys and girls, what do you know about this? Here comes

Miss Mexico. She has brought up all that discussion about bits and whether to treat 'em rough or not. Wonder what she is going to give us this time. Wonder if we have switched her over, or if she is still persistent in her rough handling methods. Howdy, Miss Mexico! Gee, but she did pull that pony up so hard he liked to 'a' sat right down. Miss Mexico, kindly take that saddle that R. O. Case has just vacated and tell us whether you have had a change o' heart.

"BOSS AND FRIENDS AND FOLKS: Since writing to you some time ago regarding my experience in handling a horse, I have read several letters in answer as well as the comments by yourself, and I hope that I may be permitted to say a few words in reply.

"It has been said that my horse is scared. Of course, he is scared, and I want him to be scared. He is afraid of the punishment that is sure to follow the very slightest mistake, and for this reason he does not make mistakes. It has been said that I constantly hurt the horse. This I admit, to some extent, also, as I keep him feeling the prick of the spurs which keeps his mind off the other things, mostly meanness. Remember, please, that I am riding a mean horse, ready to do anything if given the least chance.

"There are some horses that I am sure cannot be trained with sugar and apples as one reader has suggested, and some that never could be taught to hurdle by being left in a yard with a low gate without water or oats until they did jump. Some horses are like wild animals in a circus that can only be tamed by fear. Besides, some of us don't care to wait many months or a year for results which can be obtained so much quicker. These sugar-and-petting people make some of us smile.

"A girl having a mean horse which she is anxious to ride would not accom-

plish much with most of the methods I have seen suggested, and I would certainly not recommend them. To prove again the point that I have tried to make, I might say that I bought a horse from an academy several months ago for sixty dollars. The horse was mean and thought to be no good for riding. I was offered four hundred dollars for this horse last week, as he can now be ridden and make a fine showing. This change was not accomplished by sugar and apple treatment, I can assure you.

"When I got this horse I fitted my bridle with a special bit having the appearance of the usual snaffle and curb, but with a powerful spade mouth piece. I obtained some sharp rowels which I had fitted to the ordinary park spurs, and I managed to find a heavy loaded whip. Thus equipped, I mounted the horse with a Western saddle and gave him daily lessons in obeying, and he learned the results of doing anything to annoy me.

"Now, I tried riding this horse with a loose rein on the snaffle. but it didn't work at all, as he always showed his meanness. I found this horse, too, should be ridden tight against the curb with my spurs continually at work.

"At the least sign of any let-up on my part he will show temper and 'ornerness,' and even now he needs—and receives quite often—a first-class lacing with the whip and spurs and some real hard yanks on the curb to put him where he belongs and on the lookout for another.

"I never let him forget that I am ready with the whip and spurs, and will not hesitate to use them at the least provocation.

"Some people may be too sentimental to handle a horse this way, and those people had better not attempt to ride a

mean horse. My advice to your girl readers who have a mean horse to ride or a horse with mean tricks, is to get some good, sharp spurs, a powerful bit so that the horse won't run away, and a heavy whip, and give the horse a fine taste of them all. It won't do the horse any harm, and will make a better, a more confident rider of the girl. Most girls who are injured by a horse are injured because they are afraid of the horse, which the horse knows better than they do."

Anybody want to hire a lad that claims he is handy round horses? Murray Corey, 51 East Dedham Street, Boston, Massachusetts, is looking for a job. Inform 'em, Murray, what you can do and what you want to do.

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: I am a poor boy who lives with my mother who is never feeling well. I look for a job, but can't find any for my size, for I'm only sixteen, but small for my age, so I am begging you to find me a job among horses, and I will appreciate it very much, and to show my gratitude I will answer any questions of horses, for I was brought up among Arabian horses, and know all about them. I am Arabian myself, and my father stayed up many a night to show me how to pick fast and long-enduring horses, and all sicknesses of them, and how to get herbs, how to cook the herbs so as to treat the sick horses. So if you will please give me a job among horses, I will appreciate it very much. Although it is against the rules of the Arabians to ever teach any person the secrets of the Arabian horses, I will do so."

For shooting, see next page. Buckley is going to fire.

GUN DOPE

By F. R. Buckley

WELL, Boss, if you horse wranglers could please shove over the tiniest trifle in the world—I thank you. We gunmen are far from being what we are generally made out to be; we are gentle, peaceful persons, and these four-footed friends of yours with the long faces make us nervous. Here's Dana E. Fidler on my right—come all the way from South Fourth Street, in Lafayette, Indiana, and right here at this camp fire he says he's been scared by all this chat about buckin' horses and animals swimming.

He says he owns several revolvers, including cap-and-ball—in fact, he claims that his favorite for a shooting is a .36 Colt with a seven-and-a-half-inch barrel—and a sweet weapon it is, as many an old-timer will agree. And if it isn't troubling anybody too much, he would like some information about fast draws—how they're done, and all about them; what's meant by 'rolling' a gun, for instance; and what the trick is about surrendering a gun butt at first, and then quite suddenly righting and firing the same.

Comrade Fidler seems to have an idea, Boss, that I may be able to hand out the dope aforesaid; but you know me for a peaceable guy—even if I do come in and try to spin .45 automatic cartridges on your desk top—and so I pass these questions along to some old-timer, and shall hope for authoritative reply.

Just to keep things moving, however, I may remark that to the best of my knowledge and belief, the mysterious part of the quick-draw business has been, and is, very greatly exaggerated. When all's said and done, there can't be

anything particularly subtle about the process of pulling a gun out of a holster. Obviously, the holster must be hung where it's handy, and arranged so that the gun doesn't have to be pulled around corners. It may be hung low down on the right leg, so that the right hand, when dropped normally to the side, is on the butt; it may be slung on the wearer's left side, at belt level, in a right-hand holster, so that the butt points forward; or it may be worn plumb on the tummy, barrel pointing diagonally down and to the left; or it may be worn in a shoulder holster, preferably with a spring catch to hold the gun in place. I myself—and, so far as I remember, the majority of the quick drawers I've known—seem to prefer the second and third alternatives, on the ground that *one* motion suffices to draw the gun up-out, and get it pointing forward. And since the third alternative makes the gun rather conspicuous, and is slightly uncomfortable, number two appears most advisable for a steady diet. Naturally, one has to be careful not to get the right hand mixed up, in drawing, with the left-hand flap of the jacket; but that objection's easily overcome. I remember very well being told by old Bill Barrett, of Imperial Valley—who plumped for this method—that the thing to watch about a man who might start shooting was not his *right* hand, but his *left*. "If he takes a good grip of the left lapel of his coat," Barrett said, "just about the level of the top button, what he's likely aiming to do is to yank his coat open and reach for a butt-forward gun on his left side. Don't matter whether his coat's buttoned or not, either. If you pull a bit upward as you

pull to the left, the buttons'll come undone like lighting."

Of course, there's *practice* to be considered; and when the votes of the old-timers come in, I think practice will be given credit for most of the quickness of draws—hard work, that is, rather than tricks. But I think a whole lot of the men who really know will step up and say what I've heard from a good many of them before—that a whole lot of men who were reputed quick drawers because they were good killers *never drew a gun at all*, in the usual sense of the term. They did their killing by strategy—kept the big cannon they were armed with in plain sight at their belts, and did the shooting with a .41 deringer carried in the waistcoat pocket or under an elastic band encircling the left wrist.

However, step up, step up, step up, gentlemen all! Authentic information is wanted; and if some one of all this gang can't supply it firsthand, I shall regretfully be compelled to place a couple of sticks of dynamite on the open fire.

Having said which, I perceive, a-coming up out of the circumambient obscurity—which is a good word—a man with my own initials, and, apparently, my own taste in hand guns. Sure enough, it is F. R. McCoy, from Wichita.

"I've been hearing for some time," he says, "about which is the fastest and

best hand gun; quite a few old-timers still stick by the old .44, and a very good gun it is, steady and reliable. But have any of the bunch ever seen any of our United States cavalry boys handle the .45 Colt automatic? Would you think it possible to have the gun in the holster, flap snapped down, draw, cock, find target, and fire and get a hit in three seconds? That's one of the things they have to do. And as for hitting power—in B Troop, Eighth Cavalry, Camp McGrath, Batangas, P. I., in 1913, a horse was shot and his neck broken at eight hundred and twelve yards from the firing point. So for my choice, give me a .45 Colt automatic. I have my dad's old .44 frontier models yet, and they are good guns. As some of the old-timers can tell you, Billy McCoy's guns spoke very seldom, but when they did— Perhaps some of you right here remember Billy McCoy, of western Kansas, Oklahoma, and northern Texas."

Well, now, concerning the Colt automatic, there's this to be said—

But hey, F. R. McCoy—look out! You've spilled the beans, mentioning that horse's neck being broken! All these horse wranglers are starting out for our gore! You dive under the chuck wagon. Dana Fidler and I'll take to this here pine trec.

Good night, gents! See you when you've calmed down!

LONG-LOST RING FOUND IN PRAIRIE CHICKEN

A PECULIAR coincidence and one which demonstrates the digestive capabilities of the prairie chicken, is recorded by Mrs. James Crory, of Syracuse, Nebraska. Five years ago, Mrs. Crory lost a signet ring in a plum thicket near her home in Syracuse. A little while ago, her husband, Judge Crory, shot several prairie chickens near the Wyoming line, five hundred miles distant. In dressing one of these birds, Mrs. Crory found a black, corroded ring, which when cleaned and polished, proved to be the same ring that she had lost five years before, the initials being plainly visible.



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.

NOT long ago a Gangster rode into our camp and, turning his horse loose in our corral, ambled over to The Tree and asked: "What is a Deputy of the Owl?"

This question set your postmistress a-wondering whether a few words of explanation on this subject might not be welcome to other new members of the Gang.

As many of you know, sometimes there's such an extra special rush in our busy post office that the Owl and I have to call for help. Then it's a mighty good feeling to know that we can send those letters we can't care for on to any of you and you'll help us out with them. Every Gangster is a possible Deputy, so don't be surprised if you are called upon.

Suggestions wanted and extremely welcomed, campers.

HOLLOW TREE GANG: I am going in my car to California and back. My camping equipment consists of one tent, seven feet by seven feet—either attached to car or not—one portable gasoline stove with windbreak, two army cots with two army blankets and a horse blanket each, one collapsible table, two camp stools, one complete set aluminum

dishes, cooking utensils, water bag, collapsible bucket, extra gas, oil and water holder, camp light, et cetera. We expect to camp every night at camp grounds, if possible; if not, any place that looks good. If any old-timer or young-timer has any practical suggestions as to outfit, either additions or deductions, I would appreciate a letter telling me of same. In exchange, I would be glad to tell about the Eastern States—what to see, roads, et cetera.

JAMES T. ALBERT.

13613 Fifth Avenue, East Cleveland, Ohio.

A Texas girl writes:

This is my first year North and I am very lonesome and sorry I wandered away from the Lone Star State. I do not like the cold country, I prefer the sunny climate of old San Antonio. There are many interesting places to see there: the old missions, San Juan, San Jose, and others where the old Spanish padres taught years ago; the Sunken Gardens, which are run by Japanese people, and the Alpine Drive, which winds above the gardens with palm trees on either side for about a mile and a half.

If some of you sisters will write me I will send you pictures of San Antonio. I would like a flower from each State as a keepsake.

BONNIE "TEX" LUPTON.

3142 South Sixteenth Street, Omaha, Neb.

Another wanderer has paused to say:

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am an extensive traveler and have spent six months in Alaska; I sailed down the Yukon River through the

Five Finger Rapids in a small boat, also did some prospecting. I spent three years in Mexico and some time in Hawaii, toured the South Seas, lived with the natives and know their ways of living. Have been to Cuba, Panama, and other places too numerous to mention. Am just back from Buenos Aires; believe I am one of the few who has been around Cape Horn in an oil-cargo steamer in a sixty-mile gale and snowstorm. Would appreciate letters from all.

E. E. JOHNSON.

U. S. V. B. 24, Palo Alto, Calif.

Are you a shut-in? Or a kodak enthusiast?

DEAR HOLLOW TREE FRIENDS: I am making a collection of snapshots of various persons and places, so any of you camera fiends who care to send a snap of yourself or of any place or view around you, will receive one in return of Ottawa or vicinity, providing you send name and address. Also I would be pleased to write to any shut-in or lonely person who would care to get some cheerful letters.

ESTELLE M. WILLARD.

1068 Bronson Avenue, Ottawa, Canada.

W. N. Brown, 239 South Torrence Street, Dayton, Ohio, will appreciate information about rope spinning. He wants to know the kind of rope and knot used.

"Would like to hear from Gangsters from southern California," writes Wilfred Bailey, Box 284, Magnolia, New Jersey. "We are contemplating making our home there; come on, Californians, show us we would be welcome. There is my wife, kiddie, and me."

George Cowan, Keystone, Oklahoma, will send these Western poems to Gangsters who want them: "The Dying Ranger," "The Dying Cowboy," "The Cowboy's Prayer," "Utah Carol," "Cowboy's Home Sweet Home."

Mrs. Vera E. Hodges, Booneville, Arkansas, is making a collection of snapshots and asks Hollow Tree sisters to help her fill her album.

Miss San Antonio is a T. B. convalescent and will be glad of cheery letters, especially from Western girls. Write to her in care of The Tree.

Miss Tennessee is another shut-in who asks for correspondence in my care.

"I live in a deserted mining camp in Idaho; I teach school, have six pupils who come from surrounding ranches. Will some lonely girls write Hazel Lenaghen, Pearl, Idaho."

The Kentucky Kid wants pen pals between twenty-one and thirty years of age from any State. Send letters for him in care of The Tree, brothers.

"If any one would like a few lines from Bobbie Burns' country, write me," says Andrew McEvoy, Ibrax, Ayr Road, Prestwick, Ayr, Scotland.

Missouri Girl asks other seventeen-year-old girls to write her in care of The Tree.

Private Laurence E. Stalling, 1 Bn. HQ., 13 F. A., Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Hawaiian Territory, is very lonely and will welcome letters from any State. He'll be glad to tell any one who is interested about the tropics.



"I wear my badge on my Stetson, where every one can see it," Gangster Robert E. Hadley informs us.

Where is yours?

Send twenty-five cents in stamps or coin to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, and state whether you want the button style for the coat lapel, or a pin.

Miss Bobbie of New York would like to get in touch with a sister from her State or a near-by one who has the same ambition she has, to travel West, one who is fond of hiking, motoring, dancing, and all outdoor sports. She says, "I'm sure there is one girl at least who longs for the West and has been waiting for some one to go with her." Address Miss Bobbie in my care.

H. Lindsay Smith, Five Fingers, New Brunswick, Canada, is eighteen and an

engineer in his father's sawmill. He'll be glad to give information about lumbering and snapshots of life in the woods to those who write him.

"I've been shut in cities all my life but this summer I aim to hit the open spaces of the great West and would appreciate letters from Gangsters there," writes Fred Macker, 181 Gridley Street, Bristol, Connecticut.

"If there is an assistant scoutmaster who would like to hear from a Frisco scout, will he get in touch with me?" asks Allen Atkinson, 1360 Fifth Avenue, San Francisco, California.

Mrs. Vera Carpenter, 711 Millard Court, Kalamazoo, Michigan, wants letters from everywhere. This sister says she's interested in music, writing, nature, art, and outdoor sports; she's thirty-one and has one little boy.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: What I want is a pal, a cow-puncher, if possible, one anywhere from twenty to twenty-five years old. I want him to accompany me on a jaunt through the States on horseback. I ride a little and love a horse above everything else. I want a cowboy pal so I can learn from him the finer points of riding and the art of throwing a rope.

I am twenty-five years old, like to ride, swim, skate, can take a joke. I'm a lumberjack by trade, have followed the tall timber on the coast of Oregon and Washington since I was fifteen, so am well able to answer most any question pertaining to logging.

Last spring I went to eastern Oregon and spent six months on a ranch. I used to take a horse most every evening and Sundays, and go sixteen or twenty miles out in the desert for a ride. That's how I learned to love a horse.

I want a pal who will stick, and above all an optimist; I want him to be good hearted but not a prude.

K. L. CARLSON.

523 East First Street, Aberdeen, Wash.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am so happy since I

joined your Gang. I am a native of California and, like June Rose, I love even the rocks and hard pan. Friant just now is golden with poppies twice as large as those that grow in Los Angeles, but Los Angeles has the hills beat when it comes to Mariposa lilies; we have a few here, but not many. There are some ferns here, too. I was born in Los Angeles, but must say I have never heard a nightingale sing, also never knew them to come this far south. In Butte County, thirty-one miles from Chico and twenty-eight miles from Arroyo, one can hear a night bird which they say is a nightingale.

I don't like a big town; give me the dear old hills and a cabin.

Will some Hollow Tree brother write to my husband?

Mrs. Wm. A. Rowe.

Grant Rock & Gravel Company, Friant, Calif.

DEAR GANGSTERS: I am desirous of obtaining a pattern of dress as worn by such men as Jim Bridger and plainsmen of his day. I should appreciate the efforts taken by any one to send me a paper pattern explaining length of fringe worn, style of coat, trousers, et cetera. What kind of leather will be suitable for this? I also would be pleased to hear from those interested in the West. I'd like to exchange snaps, picture post cards of England for those of the West.

Any one writing me may be sure of an answer. If you want to know anything pertaining to historical England, I will be pleased to give you the information.

ROBERT H. SUMMERS.

3 Myrtle Grove, Selby Street, West, Hull, Yorkshire, England.

DEAR HOLLOW TREE: I am a French boy twenty-two years of age. Since fifteen months I am a soldier and serv: in a French engineering regiment. I live in a camp in the middle of the mountains far from any large town. It would be pleasant to have some friendly correspondents. I shall be soon free of the army and hope to go to America. I am a watchmaker; I especially repair watches and clocks. Will that be a good trade in the United States of America? I know also radio, but not so much as watchmaking.

A. M. MEUNIER.

Les Pieux, Manche, France.



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.

HOMESTEADER'S EXPERIENCES

QUITE a number of letters have come from persons who have, at some time or another, gone in for the homesteading game. It is impossible to publish them all, but here are some that give both sides of the story. My readers must draw their own conclusions and be guided by their own particular cases as to whether it would be advisable for them to take a chance or not.

A WORD FOR THE SOUTH

DEAR MR. NORTH: I have been reading your articles on homesteading out West, and how hard it is to get grapes to grow, and that you have to pay for water and level your own land; also that you must have from one thousand dollars to fifteen hundred dollars to start on. Why is it that every one boosts the West and never says a word about the South? I would like to tell you something about the great delta of the Mississippi. I live in the heart of it, in Washington County. This is the richest land in the world, black sandy loam, and you can dig down fifty feet and find the soil just as rich as it is on top. We have two lines of railroads here and two hundred

and fifty miles of hard roads, including the Mississippi Scenic Highway, running from Port Arthur, Texas, to Port Arthur, Canada. It is eighteen feet wide. We also have a drainage system throughout the delta, consisting of canals from six to one hundred and ten feet wide.

Let me tell you what we can raise here: cotton, corn, wheat, oats, rice, barley, sugar cane, alfalfa, with many other things too numerous to mention, as well as every kind of fruit and garden truck. No fertilizer has to be used, as the land is rich enough without it. I have about sixty acres in paper-shell pecan trees, which is one of the most profitable orchards that can be planted. I have fourteen hundred trees; they begin to bear when they are seven years old, and the older they are the better they bear. I have one orchard of twenty acres that is thirty-one years old, and there is one tree in it that produced in two years seven hundred dollars' worth of pecans. Can you beat that?

The beauty of it is that you don't have to keep them on ice; you just watch them grow and gather them from October to January. The demand cannot be supplied, and there is never enough raised to supply the home market. One farmer is now planting ten thousand trees.

Cut-over land can be bought from ten dollars to fifty dollars an acre, and improved land from one hundred dollars to two hundred dollars. Why go West and homestead a rock pile or a Sahara Desert when you can get such land right in the heart of the Yazoo and Mississippi delta? If this part of the world had been boosted like the West there wouldn't be standing room here to-day.

R. L. CASEY..

Hollandale, Miss.

There you are, you seekers of gardens and orchards. Grow pecans and get rich and happy! If the South had many boosters like Brother Casey, we would all be heading for the delta to plant pecans. Thanks for the information, brother. Don't be surprised if you get lots of letters about this.

FROM AN EX-HOMESTEADER

DEAR MR. NORTH: My husband and I homesteaded one hundred and sixty acres in Humboldt County, California, in 1915. As a money-making proposition it was a total loss; as an experience which left happy memories it was worth a great deal. The hard times we had could not outbalance the pleasure we took in building our little home on the hills, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Our hopes were high, and our desire for a home of our own was very keen. We "stuck" for the required three years, winning the bet from our Uncle Sam, proved up on the land, and then, as it was evident that we could never make it yield us a living, we sold it to some one who was struck with the scenic beauty of the place and wanted it for a home.

We had a team and wagon, about three hundred dollars in cash, and good health. We built a twelve-by-twenty-foot cabin of lumber, which a mill, about thirty miles away, delivered by truck to within five miles of our homestead. We hauled it with our own wagon to within one mile, and packed it the rest of the way on our two horses and a borrowed mule. We bought shingles, doors, windows, et cetera, at the nearest store, about ten miles distant, and got them in the same way. A neighbor homesteader helped us build our house, and later my husband helped him by doing some plowing and other teamwork for him. Our house when finished cost about sixty dollars in cash, and was only of rough boards, with the cracks battened with strips, but in the mild climate so near the ocean it was quite comfortable.

The first fall we fenced, plowed, and sowed

with oats about ten acres of our ground. Our water supply was from a spring in a deep gulch some two hundred or three hundred yards from our house, and it was brought to the house by man and woman power. Irrigation was out of the question, even for a garden. My husband worked out every summer, hauling bark for a tan-oak-extract plant which was then located some twenty miles away. I stayed on the homestead most of the time, raised some turkeys and chickens and sold some butter, as we had bought some cows by that time, but if my husband hadn't worked out, and we had depended on our land for a living, we would have starved. The little money we made was from the few head of beef cattle we sold. By using some small patches of government land here and there we managed to build our bunch of cattle up to twenty-three head, and that was as far as we could go. Our own land would not support more than ten head.

Our little place looked quite like a home when we sold it for eight hundred dollars. We had built an addition to the house, had a yard full of roses, a fine strawberry patch, about twenty young fruit trees, and picket fences around it all.

There have been many homesteaders in this part of California, but I do not know of any who are now living on proved-up homesteads. They either sell out or just go away, the reason being that the homestead cannot produce a living for a family. The six-hundred-and-forty-acre homestead law is a joke. True, there are lots of six hundred and forty acres of land, cañons, brush, bluffs, rocks, and slides, that would probably afford a living to a small flock of mountain goats, and that is all.

My advice to any one who is thinking of homesteading, especially in the mountainous sections of the country, is this: You can buy deeded land with improvements cheaper than you can homestead, if you count your time and work worth anything at all. There are many such places that could be bought around in these hills.

AN EX-HOMESTEADER.

Korbel, Calif.

That is something quite different again. Nothing growing here without hard work. Well, it needs lots of grit to make orchards and gardens from rocks and bluffs, and no doubt, this letter will bring encouragement to others who are trying to carry on against similar difficulties.

MISSING

This department is conducted in both WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and DETECTIVE 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 notices, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that these persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as we 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," or others, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

HOFMANN, PAUL.—We have waited anxiously to hear from you. We want to have you home with us, and, if you need money, please wire at once. Use your brother's full name, that we may know it is you. Mamma and Papa.

BERTHA M.—She formerly lived in Vancouver, Wash. She or any one knowing her present address is asked to please write at once to Victor M., care of this magazine.

HUGHES, NEWTON S.—He is twenty-four years old, and has black hair and eyes. He was saxophone player at 19th F. A., Camp Jackson, Mo., Car. He is asked to write to his old pal of Battery A., L. D. W., 451 Beebe, Ark.

HOWELL, MILTON.—His mother died when he was a child in Lincoln, Neb. He has an uncle named Fred J. Cullen. His cousin is anxiously seeking him, and will be grateful for any information concerning his whereabouts. Please write to D. B. B., care of this magazine.

GILLELAND, CHARLES J.—He is forty-seven years old, tall and heavy built, has black hair and eyes, and gold front teeth. Four years ago he was in Richmond, Va. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write to Mrs. B. M. Foteat, 1722 No. 7th St., Kennapollis, N. C.

KING, HOWARD EARL.—He is thirty-eight years old, has light hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. He was in Reynolds Co., Ia., in 1904. His mother is most anxious to hear from her only son. Information will be welcomed by Mrs. J. B. Barber, 613 Cedar St., Coffeyville, Kan.

LAYTON, WILLIAM E.—He belonged to Co. L, 12th Infantry, stationed in Washington, D. C. He was discharged Nov. 12, 1923. His present address is sought by J. H. Baidrige, Tyrone, Pa.

C. L. F.—Mother and father separated. R. F. in the navy. Please let me know your address, so I can write you particulars. Altie Dyer, Box 255, Macon, Colo.

BORDEAUX, GEORGE W.—He was in Clint, Tex., in Dec., 1923. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will kindly write to his mother, Mrs. Lizzie Bordeaux, East Durham, N. C.

HICKLIN, RICHARD.—Do you remember a friend from Missouri, whom you met while on a Chautauque circuit? I am still anxious to hear from you, and ask you to write as soon as you see this. R. D. K., care of this magazine.

BAILEY, JOHN.—He is seventy-eight years old, and has a crippled hand. He is the son of Elford J. Bailey, of Lawrenceville, Ga. They moved from Ga. in 1874 to Atlanta, Tex. Any information will be appreciated by C. H. Bailey, R. F. D. 2, Box 99, Atlanta, Ga.

McBURNIE, H., of Yankton, S. Dak.—His friend from Linn Co., Mo., has looked for a letter from him or R. H. Any news concerning his whereabouts will be gratefully received by J., care of this magazine.

WILLIAMS, PETE E.—Registrar says you passed all your exams. Mother and dad are very much worried over your absence. Won't you please write to them, or to Mutt?

ABEL, HENRY.—He was born in Marienbad, Bohemia. His friend has news from his brother, and asks him to please get in touch with F. van Ferguson, Gila Bend, Ariz.

OWIENS, BERT.—He lived in Dodge City, Kan., twenty-three years ago. His daughter, who was adopted by a family whose she was less than a year old, would like to find him, and will greatly appreciate any news. L. E. Miller, Box 61, Walsen, Colo.

DORSE, STELLA BAY.—She is five feet nine inches tall, has light-brown hair and blue eyes. Four months ago she was in Los Angeles, Calif. She is well known in Phoenix, Ariz., by name of Stella Campbell. Her mother will be extremely grateful for any information. Mrs. Cora Reynolds, 652 Taft Ave., Albuquerque, N. M.

TAYLOR, LUCINDA.—I am married again and happy. There are no hard feelings; I hope you are in the best of health and happy. Please let me hear from you. Your old pal, T. E. P., Gen. Del., Sumner, Wash.

THOMPSON, J. A.—He is married, and has two sons and one daughter. His last known address was Imperial, Saskatchewan, Can. His brother has had letters returned from that address, and will be grateful for information as to his present address. Hugh Thompson, 237 Desautels, Ville St. Marie, Montreal, Can.

ATTENTION.—I am anxious to get in touch with my buddies, who served with me in the 51st Telegraph and 50th Signal Battalion at Fort Sam Houston, Tex., in 1920 and 1921. I will appreciate letters from George Kirby, Buster John L. Stone, Alex S. Custer, and Robert Hutchings. Alex H. Sokoloff, opt. in chas. Svc., Co., 27 B. C., Ft. Ward, Wash.

MEADOWS, FRANK.—He is forty-nine years old, tall and slender, has brown eyes, and hair turning gray. He left his home in Narrows, Va., on Oct. 9, 1924, and went to Wash., D. C. His family is very anxious and worried over his absence, and will appreciate information. Please write to W. E. Meadows, 497 Fairview Ave., Johnson City, Tenn.

NORMAN.—Mother is very ill, and calls for you every day. We love you and believe you are good and true. If you are in trouble, or for any reason cannot come to us, write and tell us, so that we can help you. Please write to your sister, Ida, Box 9-A, R. F. D., Palo Alto, Calif.

ATTENTION.—I desire the name and address of two or more men, who know that I was in the U. S. army, serving under General Crook, from 1873 to 1877. It is important that I hear from these men, as it will assist me in getting a needed pension. Please write to A. W. Maxwell, Box 241, Dundee, Tex.

RASMUSSEN, OSCAR.—He was working for the Public Service Co., of northern Ill., also at Evanston, Ill. He has friends in Silverton, Ore. He lived for a while at 4653 S. Sheridan St., Chicago, Ill. His friend will appreciate information regarding him. Please write to W. M. Wynn, Box 59, Delano, Calif.

McNALLEY, MICHAEL.—He was five feet ten inches tall, and weighed one hundred and seventy pounds. He left Mendon, Mass., about twenty-five years ago, and started for the West. His mother is very anxious to find him, and will be thankful for information. F. Moore, Hopedale Home, Hopedale, Mass.

BROWN, FRANK H.—He is twenty-three years old, six feet tall, has light hair, blue eyes, and weighs one hundred and eighty pounds. He left his home in Worcester, Mass., and went to Redwood, Calif. His mother is trying to find him, and will be very thankful for information concerning his whereabouts. Please write to Mrs. Mary B. Brown, 95 Chandler St., Worcester, Mass.

OLDHAM, WILLIAM M.—He was a member of Co. H, 3d Wyo. Inf., in 1917, and served in the World War. He was killed in France on Sept. 12, 1918. His sister is trying to find his home in Wyo., where he lived before enlisting. Members of that company or any one having information will confer a great favor by notifying Mrs. Green Gill, 301 Seavey St., Burlington, Ky.

O'LEARY, JOHN M.—He has black hair, blue eyes, false upper teeth, one gold eye tooth, saber wound through his left side, and left hand missing. He was in Salt Lake City, Utah, in Nov., 1924. His wife is very anxious about him, as he was shot in the World War. He was married by her of the P. P. L. I. from Can. Information will be gratefully received by his wife, Mrs. J. M. O'Leary, 694 So. Poplar St., Sapulpa, Okla.

RUEBEN, LANG.—He lived in Livingston, Mont., in 1919. His friend would like to get in touch with him or his stepdaughter, Dorothy Kirby. Any one knowing their whereabouts please write to Sergeant Lee J. Williamson, Co. D, 33d Inf., Fort Clayton, Canal Zone.

SMITH, Mrs. JAMES.—Her name was formerly Kavanaugh, and she lived in New Ross, Co. Wexford, Ireland. She came to the U. S. and lived on Wentworth Ave., Chicago, Ill. Her sister Elizabeth is seeking her and will be thankful for information. Please write to Mrs. Wentworth H. Harvey, Box 24, Kentville, Nova Scotia, Can.

HECK, FRED and IDA.—My mother's maiden name was Ida Rourke. In 1914 we lived in Allentown, Pa., where I was put in a home. Any one knowing their present whereabouts please send information to Russell Heck, Box 57, Coronal, Canal Zone.

BURNS, THOMAS.—He left Co. Cavan, Ireland, in 1900, and came to the U. S. His nephew had a letter from him from the Grand Union Hotel, N. Y. City. Information of his present whereabouts is sought by his nephew, John Burns, 594 Cordova St., Vancouver, B. C., Can.

O. C. S.—I am sorry for what happened. The children are well. No one reads my mail, so please write and send me your address. Reno.

BEANER, C. H.—He is a Buick mechanic and a machinist by trade. He was working in Sarasota, Fla., but it is thought he went to So. America. His daughter is anxious to find him, and asks for information. Write to R. W., care of this magazine.

SCHUELLE, OSCAR O.—He was in the army, and stationed at Fort Barry, Calif., on Sept. 12, 1918. Later he was sent to Scofield Barracks, in Honolulu, Hawaii. His niece wishes to get in touch with him, and will appreciate information. Lila E. Rouse, 936 W. Standley St., Ukiah, Calif.

TERRE HAUTE, Mr. and Miss.—I would like to hear the Wabash news. Please write to Mrs. Bonnie Kimmier Hodgers, 573 29th St., San Francisco, Calif.

ATTENTION.—I would like to hear from any of the K. E. soldiers, who were in Bendorf, Germany, on the Rhine. Please write to your old friend, John P. McKeon, 721 19th St., Watervliet, N. Y.

BOSLY, BILL.—His friend asks him to please write to John P. McKeon, 721 19th St., Watervliet, N. Y.

NITCHER, CHUCK.—Your old friend, who was with you on the U. S. S. "Denver," would like to hear from you, as he has good news. Write to Rocky, care of this magazine.

WISEMAN, LOLA MAY.—She is five feet five inches tall, has blue eyes, dark hair, a fair complexion, and a scar in center of her forehead. She was in Texas, N. M., in the fall of 1920. Any information about her will be gratefully received by her sister and mother, as they are very anxious about her. Please write to Mrs. Ola Collins, R. 1, Box 119, Abilene, Tex.

COBB, EDGAR LEE, and DOTSON, OSCAR.—They are, respectively, thirty-nine and thirty-two years old. Any information regarding their present whereabouts will be gratefully received by E. T. Cobb, Kalmelle, W. Va.

DUNHAM, JOHN L.—It is very important that I get in touch with my father at once. I will be very grateful for any news of his whereabouts. Please write to S. D. Dunham, Seneca, Mo.

COLLINS, JOHN S.—He is twenty-six years old, five feet eight inches tall, has blue eyes, very prominent front teeth, brown hair, and weighs one hundred and thirty pounds. He left his home on Mar. 15, 1923, and went to Imlay, Nev. News of him will be appreciated by Mrs. L. L. May, 1813 W. St., Houston, Tex.

BUD.—Please come back, or write soon to your wife, Mabel.

BEEM, LENA or Mrs. E. R.—Please write to your brother, L. B. Hutchinson, 2324 Dewey Ave., Omaha, Neb.

JOHNSON, OTO WILLIAM.—He left his home at Durham Station, Laporte, Ind., forty years ago. He is fifty-seven years old now, and may be known by his uncle's name, Arthur Hill. His sister is very anxious to find him, and asks for information. Please write to Emma Johnson, R. R. 3, Box 3, Mishawaka St., Elkhart, Ind.

SARGENT, FRANK.—He is six feet tall, has blond hair and blue eyes. During the years 1921 and 1922 he was in the navy. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will confer a favor by notifying his old pal, "Funny," care of this magazine.

F. S.—Hope you have not forgotten our promise. I have tried to get in touch with you for over a year. Please call at Gen. Del., San Francisco, Calif., for mail. J. D. S.

LATT, EMMALENA.—She was in Kansas City, Mo., in 1923. Any one knowing her present whereabouts please send word to Private R. Le Roy Mercer, U. S. Marines, 100th Co., 8th Reg't, 1st Brigade, Port au Prince, Haiti.

PIERCE, MILDRED.—She was in Wellsville, Kan., on Jan. 15, 1923. Any one knowing her present whereabouts please write to Private R. Le Roy Morris, U. S. Marines, 100th Co., 8th Reg't, 1st Brigade, Port au Prince, Haiti.

CAHILL, JACK.—Any one knowing his present address please send information to Charles Beehler, 214 1/2 So. Main St., Findlay, Ohio.

HARNOIS, WILFRED J.—He was living in St. Maries, Idaho. Any one knowing his whereabouts will confer a favor by writing to Charles H. LaFountain, 62 Powell St., Richmond, Va.

DWINELLS, HENRY C.—He is twenty-four years old. He left his home in Methuen, Mass., when he was fifteen years old. His brother is trying to find him, and would appreciate a letter from him or any one knowing his whereabouts. Write to Fred E. Dwinells, 32 Lee Ave., Bridgeport, Conn.

JACK, BOB, or BILLY.—Please write to "the little widow," for old times' sake. I'll be with B. and C. for a while. Write to Marie Browne, 1022 Yale Ave., Portland, Ore.

MARTIN, HAROLD E.—He was in the 11th Aero Squadron during the World War. His mother is very anxious to find him, and will greatly appreciate any help. Please send news to Mrs. W. L. H., Box 295, Prosser, Wash.

HARRINGTON, HOLLIS O.—He is twenty-six years old, has light complexion, gray-blue eyes, brown hair, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. He served in the World War, and was very nervous. He may be working as book-keeper or accountant. His parents are anxious over him, and will be thankful for any information. Please write to his mother, Mrs. W. L. Harrington, Box 295, Prosser, Wash.

KEEN, LOUISE.—Please write to me or meet me at Edna Adams' home. I have lost your address. Harold.

RUTH S.—I have suffered from my wrongdoing, and ask you to forgive me. I have tried to find you and the boy. Do you still want a divorce? Please write to me at the same address in Mont. O. S.

JONES, WILLIAM and RUFUS M., formerly of Macon, Ga.—They were in Grant's Army, but later William returned to Macon, Ga., and Rufus to Tex. My father, who is their brother Sydney, and I wish to get in touch with them. We will be glad to receive information. Esther Jones, R. F. D. 1, Forest Grove, Ore.

RAND, Mr. and Mrs. HARRY.—Two years ago they left Crescent City, Cal., for Grant's Army. Any information will be thankfully received by Mrs. Billie Harper, 729 1/2 William Ave., Portland, Ore.

JONES, GRADY M.—He is thirty years old, five feet ten inches tall, and weighs one hundred and eighty pounds. He served in the navy during the World War, on the U. S. S. "Louisville." Later he worked as brakeman on the N. Y. Central R. R. in the spring of 1924 he was at the Barnes Hotel, Buffalo, N. Y. Information will be thankfully received by his brother, Stobert Jones, Lansing, Tenn.

DILLARD, BILLY F.—He formerly lived in Monroe, La. Information concerning his present whereabouts will be appreciated by Floyd B. Fritz, Box 994, Iowa Park, Tex.

SWOPE, GEORGE EDGAR.—He is twenty-four years old and has a light complexion. He was in Alma, Kan. His father is very ill, and he is asked to write immediately to Mrs. Anna Swope, 303 N. 2d St., St. Joseph, Mo.

POSEY, HENRY.—He is twenty-nine years old, six feet tall, and weighs one hundred and forty-five pounds. In Aug., 1924, he was in Luttrell, Tex. An old friend is anxious to get in touch with him. E. N., care of this magazine.

SLADE, DEWEY.—Your friend, whom you saw in Houston, Tex., and also in Galveston, Tex., wishes to get in touch with you. Please write to E. N., care of this magazine.

LANE, ROBERT or BILL.—Please write to your old pal, Joe Zumwalt, University Ave., Columbia, Mo.

PALANCE, MARY GRACE.—She was born in Oakland, Calif., Nov. 28, 1908. She has brown eyes, light bobbed hair, and weighs one hundred and fifteen pounds. She married Jimmie Johnson in July, 1924, and lived on White Ave., Fresno, Calif. Information will be greatly appreciated by M. de Barrolos, 10499 Fernman St., Oakland, Calif.

TRUESDELL, FRANK EARLE.—He is six feet two inches tall, has blue eyes, light hair, and wore a mustache. He was in Wyo. in 1901. His daughter will be thankful for any information. Please notify Mrs. J. W. Helde, San Pablo, Calif.

A. D.—Don't lose courage. Your request has been carried out, in so far as to alleviate your feelings. Please communicate with me at the old address, until June. After that write me at R. 3, Box 40, Home Town, Shuttle.

SLIGH, THOMAS.—Mother is broken-hearted over your long absence. Please write to me at once. Your brother, J. N. Sligh, R. 1, Box 93, Fullerton, Calif.

McCARROLL, CHARLIE.—He is twenty-four years old and an ex-soldier. Four years ago he was in N. Y. City. He is asked to please write to his old buddy, Jim Mac, care of this magazine.

STOCKMAN, ED and HARDY.—A buddy, who lived with you in Parkersburg, Tex., in 1919, would like to get in touch with you. Jim Mac, care of this magazine.

DEWERS, JACK; McGEE, MARTY; HARRISS, ARTHUR.—A buddy, who sailed to New Orleans, La., six years ago, and went with you to the Spanish Port, wishes to hear from you. Jim Mac, care of this magazine.

HEROD, Mrs. WILLIAM.—She lived in Elizabethtown, Ky., in 1900. She placed me in an orphan's home in Duquoin, Ill., when I was two and one half years of age. I am extremely anxious to find her and will greatly appreciate any information. Please write to Margaret Herod, Box 34, Waterloo, Iowa.

BALDWIN, CHARLES, and HERBERT, JOE.—We were shipmates on the U. S. S. "Sherman," at Valparaiso, So. America, in 1917. Write to Jim Mac, care of this magazine.

FESSENDEN, Mrs. NELDA THOMAS.—She lived in Riverside, Calif. Her present address is sought by G. M. F., care of this magazine.

RANDE, HERMAN, and DAVIES, WILLIAM A.—They served with me on the U. S. S. "Indiana" in 1913. I would be glad to hear from them. William J. Trainer, 3218 McKinley st., Waukesha, Wis., Pa.

MARCANTI, CHARLIE and CHRISTMA.—They formerly lived in Spokane, Wash. Please write to Mary, care of this magazine.

BROWN, CHARLES A. P.—He came to Pittsburgh, Pa., from Calif. in 1920, and cared for my father during his last illness. Later he sailed on the Red Star Liner, S. S. "Kronland," and worked as steward. Since that he was heard from in Wilmington, Conn. News of his present whereabouts will be appreciated by Albert N. Ohlman, 205 Central Ave., Medford, Mass.

PACK, ELMER.—He is twenty-six years old, six feet two inches tall, and has dark blond hair. Information as to his whereabouts is sought by Floy Foster, Mayer, Ariz.

SIMPSON, IVA.—Bobbie, please write to me at mother's, Billie L., Box 386, Chanler, Ariz.

TYLER or LUTHER, HATTIE.—She was born in Forestdale, R. I., in 1878. Her mother died in 1882, and she was adopted by Benjamin Luther, who lived in Slatersville, R. I. She had two brothers, Edwin and Frank. In 1899 she lived in Onondaga, N. Y. Any information will be thankfully received by John R. White, B. F. D. 34, Oakland, Me.

WARD, JOHN and JOE, formerly of Pa.—They went West and engaged in the pump business. News was received that Joe died in Lincoln, Neb., in 1899, leaving a wife and little girl. Information concerning them is sought by Mrs. E. Barger, Milwaukee, N. Y.

KIRSTEN, ALMA.—She was born in Gethain (Sachsen), Germany. She came to N. Y. in 1895, and it is thought she changed her name to Rollock. Her parents and Toni E. Rollock are dead. Her brother is very anxious to hear from her, or any one who knows her, as there is important news for her. Write to A. Kirsten, 2963 37th St., Galveston, Tex.

FRANKS, FLOYD.—He is thirty-eight years old, has brown eyes and dark hair. He was working in the mines at Jerome, Ariz., in 1916. Information will be appreciated by Neva Flak Bobb, Box 610, Winfield, Kan.

DENNIS, HARRY.—He is fifty-seven years old, five feet seven inches tall, has brown hair and blue eyes. He is the son of William Dennis, and lived near Sterling, Mich. He was in Wash. or Ore. later working as a teamster. His father is old, feeble, and ill with rheumatism. He wishes to see his son, and asks him to please come home. Please write to Charles and Clara Dennis, Gen. Del., Portola, Calif.

BAIR, CHARLEY.—He worked in the oil fields of Wyo. His mother is very much worried about him, and will be grateful for any information. Please write to Mrs. S. A. Bair, B. F. D. 2, Kittanning, Pa.

PLACE, ED.—He formerly lived in Payne, Ohio, but was in Fla. later. Any one knowing his present address please write to Opal Fawley, 744 W. Market St., Warsaw, Ind.

FRENCH, EARL LEO.—He is twenty-three years old, five feet six inches tall, has blue eyes, brown hair, a fair complexion, and weighs one hundred and forty-five pounds. He was in Del Rio, Tex., in 1921. He is asked to please write to his mother, as she is ill from worry over him. Mrs. Lewis N. French, R. 4, Quincy, Ill.

HENDERSON, JOHN D.—He worked on a ranch in Billings, Mont., prior to Mar., 1925. Later he was in Tulsa, Okla. News of his present whereabouts will be welcomed by E. Hall, Box 636, Sacramento, Calif.

CORBETT, WILLIAM HENRY.—He is forty-six years old, five feet eight inches tall, has brown hair, and blue eyes. His name and an anchor are tattooed on his arm. He was born in Dublin, Ireland, and is the son of Alexander and Sarah Corbett. He came to America, and was in Milwaukee, Ind., but later was in San Francisco, Calif. Information will be welcomed by his niece, Sadie Moore Fritz, 3355 Woodland Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

HARKINS, WILLIAM.—He served in the 33d Division of the Mich. Engineers. Information will be thankfully received by Robert Dixon, 3253 Greenview Ave., Chicago, Ill.

COPE, WACE.—He has been in Memphis, Tenn., and Dallas, Tex. He is asked to write to his old friend, Von Zandt Kid, care of this magazine.

BEATON, DAN.—He was living with Mrs. Ellis, 3513 24 Ave., Edmonton, Can., but left there to return to his family in Sydney, Nova Scotia, Can., in Aug., 1921. His friend in England is anxious to get in touch with him. Write to L. MacDonald, 19 Stourcliffe Ave., Bournemouth, England.

HAMPTON, JUDSON F.—Five years ago he was working as an electrician in Chicago, Ill. He is asked to please write to his brother, Gran Campbell, Box 32, Norwalk, Ark.

HAYWARD, GRACE.—I am in Columbus, Ohio, and am very anxious to see you and the children. Everything is forgiven. Write or wire me at once, and I will send you money. Dad, 119 1/2 So. High St., Columbus, Ohio.

ATTENTION.—My mother died on Mar. 29, 1899, at Austin, Tex. I either died in the Austin Confederate Home later. Any information as to my mother's name, and where my parents came from originally, will be gratefully received by Ben Wilkey, 729 Holtgen Ave., San Antonio, Tex.

LOGAN, NELSON, formerly of St. Marys, Ohio.—He has been away since 1917. Any one who knows of his whereabouts please write information to Private George Logan, 230 U. S. Dept., 10th F. A., Camp Lewis, Wash.

FERGUSON, MIKE.—He is twenty-five years old, six feet tall, has blue eyes, sandy hair, a fair complexion, and weighs one hundred and seventy pounds. He was in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1924. Write to Ruth, care of this magazine.

SARGENT, JIM.—He was heard from in Dallas, Tex. He has three children, John, Arthur, and Teddy. Information concerning him or his children will be greatly appreciated by J. S., care of this magazine.

KINCANNON, IMOGENE.—She was working as a nurse in Colorado Springs, Colo., in 1921. Any one knowing of her whereabouts please write to her brother, Frank M. Kincannon, Box 1733, Adams, Ga.

QUATZER.—We are all right. We hope you, your wife, and Junior are in the best of health and getting along nicely. Lin.

GOLDEN EAGLE.—Please write to me in care of this magazine. Always the same, Minnehaha.

DAVIS or HARVEY, ETHEL.—Please send me your address. Your pal, Hattie.

CARR, GEORGE S.—He was formerly representative, in Brazil, for several coffee firms, of St. John's, Newfoundland. He was manager for the Produce Warrant Co., of Bahia, Brazil, So. America, five years ago. Information will be gladly received by an old friend of his, J. M. Barbosa, Forte Velho, Cabedelo, Paratyba do Norte, Brazil, So. America.

BROWN, WILLIAM J.—Several years ago he was cooking for a logging camp near Sandpoint, Idaho. Information as to his whereabouts will be welcomed by his son, W. H. Brown, Erickson, B. C., Can.

ABRAHAMSON, HARRY or HAROLD, formerly of Minneapolis, Minn. He is forty-three years old. Twenty years ago he left there, and later he was in San Francisco and Oakland, Calif. His mother is very anxious to receive news of him. Please send information to Mrs. W. Kirk, 1406 So. Duluth Ave., Sioux Falls, So. Dak.

JOHNSON, DOROTHY CHRISTINE.—She is sixteen years old. She is asked to write to her friend Bobbie, at the old address.

SMITH, MINA R.—I would like to see you and Viola so much. Everything will be all right with Chester and me, and I will tell you one if you will write to me. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Chester Betts, Brainerd, Minn.

STEPHENS, EUGENE.—She is five feet five inches tall, has black hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. She works as a hotel. Please write to Carl Stewart, D. E. M. L. (R. S.), Port Hayes, Columbus, Ohio.

DUARE, J. M.—Will you please communicate with your wife? She is anxious to get in touch with you. M. E. T., care of this magazine.

McFADDEN, W. C.—In 1916 he was in Brownsville, Tex. News concerning him will be appreciated by E. R. Hanford, Box 16, Galveston, Tex.

SARGENT, FRANCIS EDWARD, FRANK, or MICKY.—He lived in St. Paul, Minn., but in 1923 he was in Chicago, Ill. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his former wife, Mrs. Millie Peterson, 5 Irvine Park, St. Paul, Minn.

BISH, PEARL.—On Jan. 19, 1921, she was in Cheyenne, Wyo. Any one knowing her present address please write to Cook R. S. Anderson, Ho. Co., 19th Inf., Schofield Bas., Hawaii.

MASS, J. G.—I am sorry for my foolishness in bothering you, and ask your pardon.

FAULK, ORVAL ADDISON.—I would like very much to hear from you. If you are not able to write, please ask your relatives or friends to send me word. Grace, 45 Water St., Halifax, N. S., Can.

JACK.—Your silence is almost breaking my heart. You can trust me. Please write to mother, at Jackson.

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