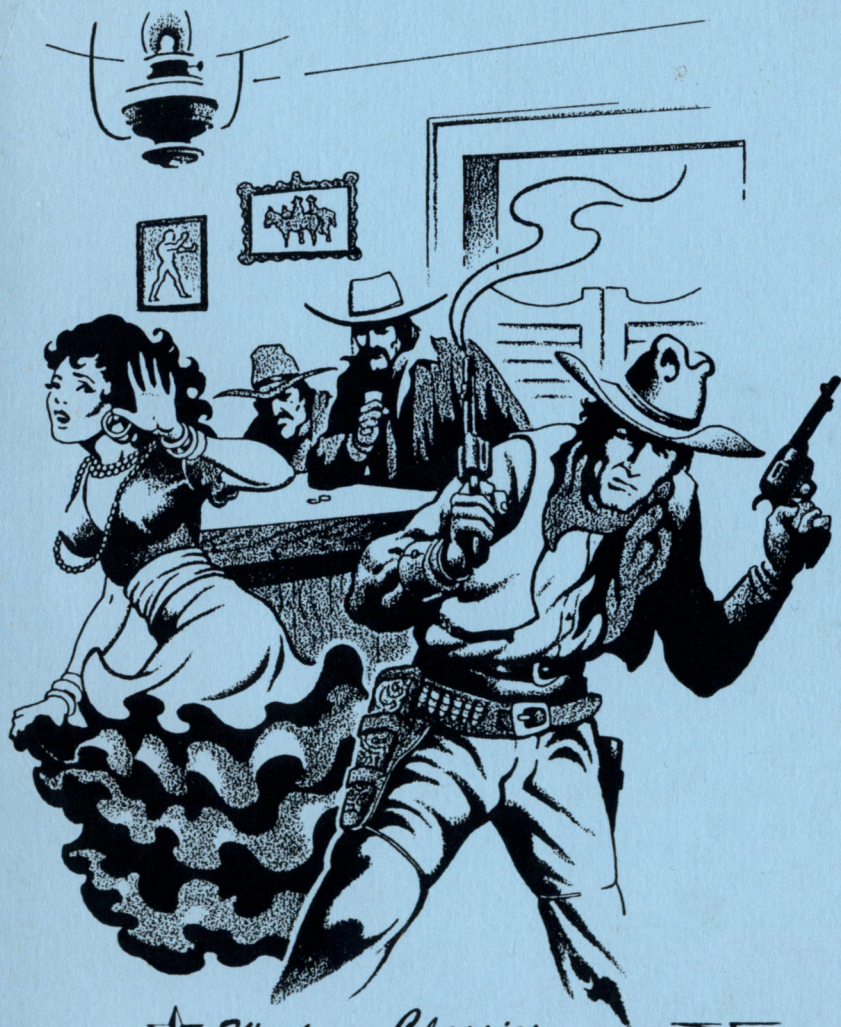


\$5.00

# THE SONORA KID



★ *Western Classics*

by **ROBERT E. HOWARD**

# THE SONORA KID

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by

**ROBERT E. HOWARD**

Illustrated by Stephen E. Fabian

## INTRODUCTION

Regional fiction, i.e., Westerns, were one of Robert E. Howard's favorite kinds of fiction to write. Ironically, his Westerns are among the least interesting of his works even to his diehard fans. Therefore you, dear readers, must be among that tiny cadre of dyed-in-the-wool fanatics who must read and collect every word that Howard wrote. The pieces collected in this modest booklet are juvenilia and fragments at that. Strictly speaking, not every one of them is a Western. Steve Allison, the Sonora Kid, seems to have been an all-purpose hero whom the young REH intended to use in all sorts of exotic settings.

None of these false-starts ever came to much, as you will see. Only two of the Sonora Kid stories ever appeared in print, "Knife, Bullet and Noose" and "The Devil's Joker" in The Last Ride (Berkley Books). Howard gave up this limited character and invented plenty more, more fully realized characters in later years, though as his Conan series demonstrates, he never lost the desire to experiment with the same character in a variety of settings.

Most of these fragments were left untitled. Howard himself christened "Red Curls and Bobbed Hair," "The Sonora Kid—Cowhand," and "The Sonora Kid's Winning Hand." Glenn Lord gave titles to some of the others. The rest are designated here with a few words from the opening lines set off by ellipses. These remain, strictly speaking, untitled.

--Robert M. Price  
Editor

## THE WEST TOWER

Helen Tranton was pleased and surprised, when, glancing across the lobby of a certain large hotel, to observe two figures whom she recognized.

"Steve Allison and Billy Buckner!" she exclaimed. "Who would have thought of seeing them in Berlin!"

"Ah, friends of yours, perhaps?" asked her companion, a blond young man with an upcurving mustache.

"Of course." She started across the lobby and her companion, raising his blond eyebrows slightly, followed.

"Steve! Billy!" The two young men turned quickly. In fact, they turned with a quickness that was surprising and their hands darted toward their coats, then fell away as they saw the girl.

"Miss Helen Tranton!" exclaimed Allison, taking the hand she offered him.

"This is indeed a pleasure," said Buckner, flushing to his hair.

"I'm certainly glad to see you," Helen said, introducing her companion, one Captain Ludvig von Schlieder. The captain placed a monocle to his eye and gazed at the two Americans almost superciliously.

"What are you doing in Germany?" asked Helen. "I thought you were going to Mexico."

"We did go to Mexico," answered Allison, "but the climate was too warm to suit us. We came to the land of the Mailed Fist as collectors."

"Collectors?" Helen asked. "Collectors of what?"

"Jewels, mostly," Allison replied. "We're working for a corporation that pays our expenses and gives us a rake-off on the jewels."

"That's nice," declared Helen. "I'd like to see more of you. You're staying in this hotel?"

Allison assented. "I suppose you're here for pleasure?"

"Yes," she laughed, that's my only reason. I suppose I'm like a butterfly, always flitting from place to place and living for pleasure alone. I'm going to a big house party soon, and I wish I could give you an invitation."

"Speaking for my friend, Erich Steindorf," spoke the captain, "I take the liberty of inviting you to the house party, mein herrein."

"Oh, that's so nice of you," exclaimed Helen.

"Any friend of Fraulein Tranton is welcome," answered the captain, bowing.

"You must come," said the girl. "We are going to have the house party in an old castle in the Black Forest. Think how thrilling and romantic."

"Certainly," answered Allison. "We'll be clean delighted."

Later on, up in their suite, Buckner looked at Allison with a disapproving eye.

"What's the game, Steve?" he asked. "You got a nerve, talkin' about collectin' jewels and acceptin' bids to house parties. Castle in the Black Forest, huh! We ain't done any scoutin' in Berlin, yet."

Steve Allison sat down and chuckled. "I didn't want to lie to Miss Helen about why we're in Germany. We are collecting jewels, aren't we?"

"Well," said Buckner, "yuh don't need to advertise it. I'm skitish enough, as it is. When Miss Helen yelled at us, I was as sure as that Moriarty had us by the collar. Why do you suppose the lager-swigger with the monocle invited us to the house party?"



"Well," answered Steve, "ginks that collect jewels, in the regular way, I mean, are very likely to carry a good deal of coin. When a duke or something sells his sparklers, he usually wants the cash right there. Did you notice Captain Skudlefuze's fingers? Long and slim and handy. Never did any work with them, you bet. A gambler, if I ever saw one."

Buckner nodded. Steve Allison, too, had hands of such a type.

"Captain Schoobleboozie's idea is to get us into a friendly game and lift all our coin. All right, let him. But I had another idea in accepting. Miss Helen is a nice American girl and I know these lager-swiggers. Anyway, it's a good chance to see if there's anything worth collecting in the castle. We'll have plenty of time for Berlin."

"You was to a house party in England once, wasn't you, as a private detective?" asked Buckner.

A slight expression of distaste crossed Steve's face.

"Yes, I was," he replied. "I came as a private detective and found my sister Marion there as a guest. One of the men was murdered in his room. I killed the thing that killed him. It was a big snake. A python. It had got away from a circus and denned up in a dungeon under the castle."

Buckner rose, walked over to a large window and stood looking out upon the busy streets of Berlin. An officer was swaggering down the street, the civilians scrambling to get out of his way.

"Steve," said Buckner, "there's a representative of a bigger snake than that python, the Prussian army. Some day it'll try to throw its coils around the world."

"Probably," answered Allison. "When it does it'll get cut in a great many pieces. Let's wander down the street and admire the goose-steppers."

The house party accepted the two Americans cordially enough, but to Steve it seemed that there was a rather thinly veiled contempt in the manner of some of them.

There was rather a large party, young men and women of the wealthy and noble houses, a few Britishers and a Russian. Helen Tranton was the only other American.

It was a huge, grim old castle, set amongst great old trees that flung out long, thick branches. It was on level ground; the forest surrounded it and ran close to the high wall that circled the entire castle. Around the wall ran a moat, long unused, but which had been cleared out and was used for a swimming pool. There was a draw-bridge and great, iron-clad doors, as there had been in the Middle Ages.

The guests were delighted. The host, Erich Steindorf, was a tall, strongly built young man, with very blond hair and a very blond mustache, curving up in the Prussian officer style. He had a bluff, forceful way which passed for frank good nature. He was wealthy and popular in Berlin society, where, if there was money and forceful character to back it, arrogance and conceit were no objections.

The castle had been remodeled to suit modern tastes. The great hall where the medieval lords of the castle had feasted and caroused, had been made into smoking-rooms, card-rooms, breakfast-rooms, bed-chambers for the guests, and so on. The architectural lines of the old castle remained unchanged, for the most part. There were still the long corridors, the winding stairs, the towers at each corner of the castle, the dungeons beneath the castle.

"Select your rooms!" shouted Steindorf, flinging out his arms in a grandiloquent manner. "There are plenty of them. Go through the castle and choose your own rooms."

The guests scattered through the rooms and corridors, laughing, shouting and skylarking.

Helen Tranton, finding herself separated for a moment from the rest of the party, felt a slight touch on her arm and turned to see Billy Buckner.

"We've got the upper room of the east tower," he said in a low voice. "You take one near us." Then he was gone, leaving Helen somewhat puzzled.

Presently the guests, having selected their rooms, assembled again in the great hall. A luncheon was served, consisting largely of liquid refreshments. Then a game of hide-and-seek was proposed, the great castle with so many nooks and alcoves naturally suggesting it.

The rooms and corridors were filled with merry shouts and laughter, the girls and young men scampering in all directions, hunting and searching and springing out suddenly from some recess to startle each other.

"For the love of mud!" commented Buckner. "Would yuh have thought grownups would cut up so?"

"Get into the game, yuh sap," Allison urged. "Listen," he whispered. Steve was a man who saw opportunities. Buckner joined the merry-makers.

Helen, seeking some good hiding-place, opened a door and found herself in a large room that evidently had been left untouched when the workmen had remodeled the castle. Dust lay thick on the floors and except for a few broken chairs, there was no furniture. There was another door in the opposite wall. She opened it and saw a flight of winding stairs leading up. To one of the towers, she supposed. The dust lay thick upon the stairs as upon the floor of the room. It was dark upon the stairs and she decided that she did not care for it as a hiding-place. She shut the door and, turning, crossed the room to the door that opened into the corridor. As she did, she felt an uncanny feeling that someone or something was watching her through the door of the stairway. Some of the guests hiding there, she thought. She returned to the door and called through it. There was no answer. She was about to open the door when a sudden and unaccountable panic assailed her. She turned and fled across the room, and did not stop until she was in the corridor. Then she laughed shamefacedly.

"I'm silly," she thought. "The silence and antiquity of this old castle must be getting on my nerves. I'm glad no one saw me act like a goose."

The guests tired of hide-and-seek and trooped down into the great hall, laughing and telling of their adventures.

Erich was called upon to tell the history of the castle, which he did.

"It was originally the home of the Steindorfs," said he. "A long line of barons held it, who were virtually kings of the Black Forest. Their power was absolute and no one questioned them nor opposed them, unless they were very powerful. Some sixty years ago, however, the Steindorfs took up another castle on the Rhine. We retained this old castle, but no one occupied it and it was allowed to fall into disuse. Lately, however, I conceived the idea of making it into a pleasure castle."

He related tale after tale of the old barons who had ruled their domains with a hand of iron. Some of the tales were hardly the thing for ladies' ears, but Steindorf related them with a brutal directness that made nothing of modesty.

"Surely there must be ghosts!" exclaimed one of the guests, a

vivacious young Englishwoman, Miss Elinor Winniston. "Such a grim old castle with such a bloody history certainly ought to be haunted."

"I certainly thought it was haunted," said Helen, and she related her adventure in the room of the winding stair.

"That is the stair that leads to the west tower," said Erich. "That tower is deserted and is reputed to be haunted."

"How delightful!" cried some of the guests. "Tell us about it."

"In the early part of the Fifteenth Century," said Erich, "the castle was held by a baron, Sir Otho Steindorf, a man noted for his great strength and dominance. One of his peculiarities was the hair which grew all over his body and limbs; in fact he must have somewhat resembled an ape in that respect. He was a man who would own no power higher than his own. His soldiers and the other barons feared him, and as for his tenants, they scarcely dared to speak without his permission. There was among his tenants a handsome young maid whom he had his eye upon. He sent his soldiers to bring her before him, but she had fled with a young henchman of his. The couple were captured before they had gone far, and brought before him. What followed took place in the west tower. Otho killed the young man with his own hand and offered the girl her freedom, in return for a certain thing. The girl refused and Otho took by force what she would not give willingly. Then, infuriated by her opposition, he hurled her from the tower. The next morning the henchmen found the baron Otho sprawled on the floor of the upper room of the west tower, a score of dagger wounds in his hairy breast, his bearded head severed from his shoulders. Who murdered him and how the murderer escaped from the castle, they did not know. Nor did they ever know, but at night it seemed to them that there was a rustling and a sound in the west tower as of a fiendish struggle. A knight who tried to spend a night in the room, leaped screaming from the window, and finally the west tower was closed and a great lock put upon the door. To this day the old legends persist, and one of my servants resigned and left the castle, swearing that a long hairy arm clutched at him from a dark recess close to the west tower. I tried to get into the tower, but it would have required a charge of dynamite to shatter the great lock, and the hinges of the door are doubtless so rusted that the whole door would have to be demolished. As it is of the hardest material and nearly a foot thick, braced with iron, it would be no easy task. The west tower differs from the others in that it has but one door, that opening into the upper room. The lower room is evidently connected with the upper by a trapdoor and a flight of stairs. Some grim crimes must have been committed there."

"There must have been more murders?" asked one of the girls, eager for horrifying details.

"There were the usual numbers of medieval murders and assassinations," answered Erich, "but most of the crimes were of another sort. The old castle has heard more shrieks of girls than screams of murdered men. My ancestors," he went on, with a meaning smile, "were ladies-men of a forceful sort. Their methods of courtship were effective, though sometimes rather violent. The women often objected, but it was seldom that they successfully opposed their passionate wooers. When one of the barons looked with favor upon a maiden, her willingness made little difference."

"Caveman stuff," laughed one of the young women.

"Rather rough on the girls, eh?" one of the Englishmen remarked.

"Oh, perhaps," Erich answered. "However, they belonged to their overlord, soul and body, hand and limb. What he chose to do with them was his affair."

"Strong, virile dominant males," said Helen Tranton. "I can't say that I admire the type."

"Yes, you would," laughed Erich. "All young women secretly wish for some man who would carry them off by force and rule them with a hand of iron. That is a girl's nature. They adore a strong, masterful man."

"I've met several of that type," remarked Steve Allison. "There was one, a big, domineering giant of a man, a Boer I met in Rhodesia. After playing the caveman with every black woman he met, he tried the same thing with a young British girl. We disagreed and I left Rhodesia."

"And the Boer?" asked one of the Britishers.

"He's there yet," Steve answered. "If the jackals left anything of him."

One of the British girls said, "Oh!" in a rather shocked voice.

"I take it that is your opinion of that type of men?" Erich asked, rather disagreeably.

Allison shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps some of us would find a game of cards agreeable?" broke in Captain von Schlieder. The suggestion was met with approval. Several of the guests went to the card-room and several games were started.

"Perhaps Herr Allison would prefer American poker?" suggested the captain. "There are some of us who play it."

"Well, I'm partial to poker," Steve admitted. Six of them made up a game: Allison; the captain; the Russian, Zuranoff; two of the Englishmen and a burly German, von Seigal.

The stakes were not large, and Allison was careful not to play anything but an ordinarily good game.

When he went up to his room in the east tower, Buckner was seated, gazing out over the forest.

Steve sat down and poured himself a glass of champagne.

"I managed to glance through all the rooms," said he, "and I looked into some of the alcoves and such. If Steindorf keeps any jewels or any large amount of money here, it's well hidden. Do you see any place where such stuff might be concealed?"

Buckner shook his head. "I didn't look very closely," he answered. "I went up a winding stair into an upper corridor. Hand me a glass of champagne."

Steve did so, also pouring out another glass of wine for himself.

"I went up into the upper corridor," Buckner continued, "where a lot of the guest rooms are. There were quite a few guests there, skylarking. I came onto another winding stair and went up it and came out into a big room. The room looked like it hadn't been used for a good many years, all dusty. There wasn't anything in it but a few suits of armor, like the knights wore in the medieval ages. The room looked out over the castle yard and there were several windows, pretty good sized, that had iron bars in them. I heard somebody coming up the corridor and I slipped into one of the nooks in the wall. There's lots of them in the castle, small spaces set back in the walls, for the baron to spy on his subjects, I reckon.

"I stepped into the nook and Erich Steindorf and that British girl, Dalia Sinclair, came in.

"Erich was talkin' to her right ardent. He picked up some armor and said, 'When men wore these, they were men indeed. They took what they wanted and did not wait on a girl's whim.'

"Dalia laughed and said something I didn't hear.

"Erich said, 'Why should you resist me? I am a man and I am

wealthy. What more do you want? Is it some other man? Am I not more of a superman than those simpering fools who are your countrymen? Or those American fools? Faugh! Some day Germany will arise in her might and crush the world. Then no one will oppose a German. The old barons, my ancestors, brooked no opposition and neither will I.'

"Don't be silly," said Dalia. They turned and walked toward the door. When they reached it, he stopped and wouldn't let her pass.

"An old German custom, my dear," said he. 'A kiss and I will let you through.'

"Oh, a toll-gate, eh?" she laughed. 'Very well, I suppose you are intent upon it.' She held up her pretty, rosy lips and he kissed her, several times.

"A German custom modified to suit the modesty of the modern girl," Erich said as they went out the door. 'I will tell you what the custom was in the early ages.'

"I heard her laugh as they went down the corridor."

Buckner paused and poured another glass of champagne.

"What then?" asked Allison.

"I wandered around amongst the upper corridors for awhile, but there isn't much there. It's mostly big rooms, bare and dusty. Erich evidently didn't do much remodeling on them. There's a card room or two, and two or three rooms that might do for a ladies' boudoir. I suspect that Erich has entertained feminine visitors before now."

"Sure. That was why he remodeled the castle," answered Allison.

"In Berlin it's quite the fad to take old castles and make them into pleasure resorts. A lot of wealthy young Germans are doing it. And you know how Germans are about women."

"Well," Buckner said, "I went down a stair and came into a lower corner. There don't seem to be any well defined stories to the castle. Some of the rooms and the corridors seem to be higher than others on the same floor. I went into a room where there were a lot of paintings on the wall. They showed men in armor and old style clothing and were well painted, I suppose, but of all the mean looking galoots I ever saw. Arrogant, domineering, cruel, some with kaiserish mustaches and some with long beards. I'd hate to have such fellows for my ancestors, but Erich seems proud of it. Because he's like them, I reckon. Sir Otho's picture wasn't there. I suppose the artists were afraid to come near him. There were several girls and men looking at the paintings, so I eased out of there. And, say, I saw that west tower he was talking about. It's like the other towers, rises from the ground up above the roof of the castle. I suppose there were two rooms, like there is in this tower, lower and upper, with doors opening into the corridors and an outer door in the lower room. But, like Erich said, there wasn't. I looked it over from foundation to roof and there was only that one door, to the upper room, and it fastened with a monster of a lock. There was a winding stair that led up from a corridor to a kind of a landing in front of the door and another stair ran down in another direction. It was rather dark on the other stair and I guessed it led to another part of the castle. Steve, it sure sounded to me like I heard something in that room. It could have been bats, but it sounded more like something big and heavy crossing the floor, walking with hardly any noise."

"Bosh!" snorted Steve. "Buck, those ghost stories the guests have been telling are getting on your nerves."

"No, sir," Buckner insisted. "Ghost yarns don't bother me and anyway that was before Erich and the others got to telling them. Maybe it was bats, but I bet it was something. Say, do you reckon that



Steindorf has got maybe a girl shut up in that tower? Or somebody else that he's holding prisoner?"

"It might be," Allison answered, musing. "Or, say, the German government might have some inventor at work on some war machine. They'd want to keep it a secret, if they invented some new weapon."

"Or the inventor might be a prisoner," suggested Buckner.

Allison mused a while. "Well," said he, "we'll see what we can find out. What did you do after you thought you heard the noise?"

"I didn't hear anything else," Buckner answered. "I went down the other flight of stairs. It was rather dark and the stair was twisting and winding. I wouldn't like to try to charge up those stairs. I was nearly at the foot of them when somebody opened a door. I crouched back on the stairs and watched. It was Helen. She looked about but didn't see me, and closed the door. I came on down the stairs. There was a small opening in the door that can hardly be seen from the other side. I looked through it and saw the door opened into a big, bare, dusty room. Helen was just walking to the door. She stopped, came back, and started to open the door; then she got frightened or something and ran out of the room. I didn't like to scare her, but I didn't care to explain why I was prowling around in that part of the castle. I had an idea that Erich didn't want anyone exploring around the west tower. I went on down to the big hall where the other guests soon came."

"We'll scout about," Allison said in an absent way. He was musing about the mystery of the west tower.

He rose. "Let's go down to the hall. Most of the guests are there."

"Helen was in her rooms just across the corridor," remarked Buckner.

Steve nodded. "Buck," said he, "you leave the hall early and pretend to go to the tower. Then you scout around. I'll tell some long tale to keep the attention of the guests. Don't let anybody see you."

Buckner did not reply. He was not particularly pleased with the thought of wandering up and down among those dark corridors.

"I can do the scouting," Allison went on.

"I'll do it," said Buckner, "but if anything jumps me, or anybody, I'm going to shoot first."

"All right," Allison said, "but don't harm any of the guests. Any that wouldn't be mixed up in any plot, I mean."

Buckner nodded.

A few card games were going on in the big hall and several couples were dancing.

Erich was playing the part of host royal, stepping from one group to another, at his bluff gayest.

Presently some of the young women, their minds still on the ghost stories that had been told by members of the party, captured him and drew him away from the others. Others joined them and presently the party was matching tales of haunted castles and ancient crimes.

Allison, who had danced with Helen Tranton, presently strolled toward the story-telling group, glancing casually at Buckner, who was playing pinochle with the Russian, Captain von Schlieder, and one of the Englishmen.

Allison listened to a tale related by one of the German girls, which dwelt upon the naughtiness of a certain countess of mediæval times. Then he said, "I am an American and America has been the homeland for my race for over three hundred years. But the Allison's came from Scotland and some of the old legends have come down to this day.

"There is a tale of the time of the Border wars and Highland forays, during the rule of the first Scotch kings, when the Picts were still raiding, burning, slaughtering, from the wilds of Galloway.

"Fergus the Black, of the ancient Allison line, was a red-handed outlaw with a price on his head. He was wanted by the English and by the Scotch king and had a dozen feuds on his hands with Border chieftains and Highland clans."

As Allison talked, couples stopped dancing and card games ceased, the players and dancers gathering about the group of which Allison was the center. Allison could tell a tale when he would and the members of the house party listened and it seemed to them that they gazed upon the scenes he pictured. It was a tale of feud and raid and battle, he told. There was no romance of the wooing of maidens, but the sheer, fierce struggle of men against men. The clashing of sword on sword ran through his narrative, oppression and rebellion, cruel injustice and savage vengeance and the ambition of a strong man. Bleak, wild mountains, barren heath and men, wild and grim as the land in which they lived. And from some of the scenes of the narrative leaped stark, wild savagery, the savagery of man of the early ages, from which some of the gay pleasure-seekers shrank aghast. Allison noted that most of the members of the house party were listening to him, and he made the narrative as lengthy as possible. He wished Buckner to have plenty of time to prowl through the castle and explore about the west tower.

When Allison ceased speaking, he rose.

"I ask your pardon for boring you with that long, tedious tale," said he. "And I will retire with your permission. I really am not used to late hours."

As he swung across the great hall with his easy, cat-like stride, the others watched him.

"A strange chap," declared one of the Englishmen.

The Russian smiled in his beard, watching Allison with eyes that were slightly narrowed.

"I believe that he could be such a man as he pictured his ancient ancestor Fergus to be," remarked Dalia Sinclair. "Helen, are all your countrymen killers?"

"Certainly not," Helen laughed.

"Who knows any more good murder tales?" put in one of the young men.

"Not any tales of murderers," shuddered one of the young German women. "Herr Allison's story has me almost afraid to look behind me."

"Tales not dealing with murder then," said Erich. "About some jolly old baron such as bluff old Sir Ludwick Steindorf, whose favorite jest was in having the young women of the village stripped, forcing them to put masks on their faces, and then having the young men of the village to pick out their wives and lovers."

"The bally boulder," commented one of the Englishmen.

Erich laughed uproariously. "Not at all," said he. "The girls were not harmed, though they were probably very much ashamed. You British have false ideas of women's modesty."

Steindorf had been drinking. Zuranoff glanced at him and suggested that the dancing be renewed.

In the east tower Steve Allison rose from his chair with cat-like quickness, a gun flashing into his hand, then slipping back into its concealed scabbard as he saw it was Buckner who had flung open the door.

Buckner turned and locked the door before he spoke. He was somewhat pale and his clothing was dusty and disarranged.

He poured himself a glass of wine and seated himself.

"Who saw you?" asked Allison.

"Nobody," answered Buckner, then after a pause, "and what was strange, I didn't see anybody."

Allison said nothing, waiting for him to speak.

"I started toward the east tower," said Buckner, "then I sneaked around and made straight for the west tower. I went in the room where the winding stair is. I went up the stairs and before I got to the landing, something came plunging down the stairs and slammed into me. I didn't use my gun, because I thought it might be one of the guests or a castle servant. We bumped down the stairs in a clinch. The thing, whatever it was, didn't try to use its fists, just seemed to be trying to tear off my arms and legs. We hit the foot of the stairs with a bump and broke the clinch. I couldn't see where the thing was, but I swung at a guess with all my strength. I must have hit the thing in the face, if it had a face, but it didn't even jolt it. It was coming for me, head-on, and I jumped aside. The thing crashed into the stairs and went right on up them. Maybe it thought I had gone up the stairs. Well, I got out of that room as fast as I could leg it."

"What was it?" asked Steve.

"I don't know," Buckner hesitated, and looked at Allison. "Steve, you know Steindorf said that old Baron Otho was hairy all over. Well, the thing I fought, whether man or beast, was as hairy as a gorilla!"

Steve shrugged his shoulders. "You trying to make me believe it was Otho?"

"I don't know," Buckner answered, "but if it was a man, why didn't it use its fists or a weapon? And if it was an animal, why didn't it use its fangs and talons? It wasn't an animal. It had hands. Four or five, it felt like. And if there ever was a man any stronger, I never saw him."

\* \* \* \* \*

## BROTHERLY ADVICE

Piretto's Place was in full swing. A Greenwich combination cabaret and gambling house run on the style of Piretto's Place was a new sensation and the "fast livers" flocked there.

The dancing floor was crowded with couples doing the latest and frankest steps; the orchestra blared jazz music. Wine flowed freely, in contemptuous defiance of the Volstead Act.

But in the gambling room above, the excitement was greater, for a party of the "highbrows," dapper young men in dress-suits and women in furs and jewels, were gathering around the roulette wheels and faro and poker tables and were squandering money in a way that made even the expressionless gamblers gasp.

At a certain table sat four young men engaged in a game of poker. One of them was a quiet, rather pale-faced young man, a professional gambler hired by the establishment. Two of the other three were of the type so common on Broadway, well-dressed, blase young men, elegant and affected.

It was the fourth man that attracted attention. He seemed somewhat out of place there, yet he was perfectly at ease. His features were clean-cut and rather lean, his eyes narrow and grey, his hair black.

There was nothing in common between him and the young men who patronized Piretto's. There was a certain something about him, undefinable, yet suggesting the gamblers of the place more than any one else.

He was the youngest at the table, little more than a boy, yet the poker chips and money were stacked high in front of him. He accorded the gambler a certain amount of respect, but there seemed to be an amused sneer beneath his courteous manner toward the other two, even as he won their money.

Steve Allison had little liking for the young highbrows although at present he was accepted as one of their set.

Occasionally he cast a glance toward a roulette table, his eyes resting on a slim, black-haired little beauty, who was throwing money away by the handful. He shrugged his shoulders and set himself to win a sum equivalent to the amount she lost which was not so difficult as it seems for Steve had been a professional gambler himself, though his friends did not know that.

The girl was certainly enjoying herself and it was also certain that she was intoxicated by excitement and pleasure—and perhaps by a little champagne likewise.

It was evident that she was a newcomer into the "fast set." Her cheeks were flushed, her laugh rang clear above the other noise of the gambling-room. She was perfectly reckless; she lost money, laughed with pure enjoyment, tossed back her unruly curls and doubled her bet, again and again.

The young women watched her with a certain amount of fascination and a certain amount of jealousy; the young men clustered about her, applauding her with most frank admiration, some of them casting glances at her that made Steve curse beneath his breath.

By listening closely he could hear what was said, and he shamelessly proceeded to eavesdrop.

"Come," one of the young men coaxed, "just one spin of the roulette wheel for a wager."

"I'm broke," she laughed. "I'll have to get some money from Steve

first."

"But I don't want you to wager money," he answered. "Don't interrupt Steve; he's winning."

"What, then?" she inquired.

"A hundred dollars against a kiss," he answered.

"All right!" she laughed. "Fair enough."

Without a word, Steve laid down his cards and rose. He was no prude; he wanted the girl to have a good time, but he had old fashioned ideas about kissing and he did not care for his sister to cheapen herself by throwing kisses away. Especially to the man who made the wager. Steve knew him and felt that his very glance soiled the woman he looked on.

The patrons of the place flocked around the roulette table. Such bets were common enough, but it was the first time Mildred Allison had made such a one and she was the "find" of the season.

"Prepare to be kissed, Milly!" laughed one of the women. "Kurt always gets what he wants."

Kurt Vanner smiled and bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment.

Just then Steve stepped up to the table and swept up the money Vanner laid down. He placed it in the astonished man's hand.

"Bet's off," he announced.

"Why, what—" Kurt stammered, then flushed. "What do you mean by this?"

Steve stepped forward and gazed into Vanner's face.

"Do you want to argue the question with me?" he asked softly.

Vanner was larger, taller and heavier, than young Allison, but he had no desire to try conclusions with him.

Steve's slim form was deceptive as Vanner knew for he had seen him fight the New York lightweight champion to a bloody draw. A panther, that was what Vanner thought of when he looked at Steve Allison.

Kurt stepped back, bowing politely, with an apology that was intended to contrast his manners with Allison and put the youth in an unfavorable light.

Steve ignored him and turned to his sister.

"Time to go home, Mildred."

Mildred didn't want to go home and she was angry at Steve; but his eyes were glinting and she knew that it wasn't well to argue with her brother when he had such an expression.

She rose and made apologies to the party; Steve escorted her to the street and hailed a taxi.

Mildred's indignation found vent in words, then. She was furious at Steve for breaking up her party. She scolded him and declared her intention of going back to the dancehall.

"You're a perfect tyrant," she declared, stamping her little foot.

"I won't go home. I won't, I tell you."

However, she was mistaken. Steve, who could manhandle three men, was not to be resisted by a young girl who stood exactly five feet high and lacked several pounds of weighing a hundred pounds.

The taxi drew up to the curb just then and Steve picked his sister up and deposited her inside.

He gave the driver a certain number and stepped in also.

"Don't act like a baby, Milly," he admonished.

The girl overcame a desire to slap him. She sat in dignified silence until they reached their destination, a rather palatial residence on Riverside Drive.

"Everybody's gone to bed, I reckon," Steve remarked as he let



them in at a side door.

"They are not," Mildred answered. "Madge is at a ball. She don't have any silly old brother to drag her away from everything," she added pointedly.

"Well, her brother ought to," Steve retorted.

Mildred's indignation at Steve had been increasing all the way home and now as they mounted the stairs to the floor where they each had a room, she became reckless in a desire to shock him.

"Anyone would think I was awfully bad, the way you haul me around," she began.

"Well, I don't want you kissing Kurt Vanner," he answered, "or anyone else."

"You're a tyrant."

"I'm not. But you don't know what kind of a man he is—and I do."

"Oh, you do?" sarcastically. "I suppose he's a villain."

"He is," was the imperturbable reply. "Also a cradle-robber. That's why he selected you."

Mildred winced. Her age was a source of great dissatisfaction to her. She was the youngest of five and this gave the others a right to "boss" her around and "make her mind," or so it seemed to her.

Steve's remark served to make her angrier and more reckless.

"He's a gentleman and you're not," she retorted.

"I never pretended to be," was his unruffled reply.

They had entered a large drawing room, elegantly furnished and brightly lighted. Steve noted his sister's flushed cheeks.

He caught her by the shoulders, drew her close to him and sniffed her breath.

"Hades!" he said disgustedly. "Half-drunk, too."

"I'm not!" she protested indignantly, struggling to free herself. "I had only two glasses of champagne."

"One's enough for a kid like you," he answered.

"You needn't be so prudish," she retorted. "I'm just naturally bad."

He laughed. "You? A wild woman? You're nothing but a baby playing make-believe."

"Oh, I am, am I?" she said deliberately, exasperated beyond caution. "What about that bet I had with Jack Doorn?"

"What was that?" he asked.

"On a horse-race. He bet two hundred dollars against my stocking." Steve was eyeing her in a way she did not like, but she plunged on recklessly. "If he won he was to take off the stocking himself."

"You little devil!" Steve's hair rose. He snatched his sister with one hand and a light riding whip with the other.

"I won!" Mildred fairly shrieked, striving desperately to wriggle off Steve's knee.

He hesitated, then deposited her on the floor, somewhat shaken and slightly pale. All desire to shock Steve had vanished. She had succeeded more than she wished. She didn't believe Steve would really have whipped her, but still—

He was still toying with the whip.

"You stop making bets like that," he ordered.

"And what if I don't?" she retorted defiantly, getting back some of her courage.

"Then I'll give you a good whipping and send you back home," he responded promptly.

(continued on page 18)

## DESERT RENDEZVOUS

The Allison family, at least the feminine part, were touring Egypt. The younger son of the family, Steve, who was the only man of the family with them, had left them at Alexandria with the avowed intention of seeing Khartoum. The family's leisurely progress was too slow for him.

Steve was to meet them in a certain time at Assuan.

Some weeks had elapsed since they had left Alexandria when Steve, leaner and tanned darkly by the African sun, rode into Assuan.

The first member of the family he met was his sister Marion.

That gentle person submitted to being kissed and immediately afterwards gave him some news that jolted him out of his habitual calm.

"You wouldn't think Helen was very romantic, would you?" was how she began the news. "But do you know what she has done?"

"What has she done?"

"Well, we met a very handsome man in Cairo; he was part Arab and part French, with some Spanish blood in him, I think, and he's some kind of a prince. He is a very gallant, handsome man and all the women just flock after him and he's very wealthy, too. And what do you know! Helen fell in love with him! What did you say?"

"Go on," replied Steve between his teeth.

"He spent a lot of his time with her and he's in love with her, too. So yesterday, when I saw Helen talking to two Arabs through her window, she told me that they were the prince's men and that they had come to guide her to an oasis in the desert where he is. They had it all arranged in Cairo! She said he wanted it kept secret until after the marriage, and I promised not to tell, but I know she wouldn't care for you knowing. I wanted to go with her, but she wouldn't let me. So she rode off with the Arabs secretly this morning. Isn't that romantic?"

Steve laughed harshly. "What is this gentleman's name?"

"He is a gentleman," she answered. "If it were anyone else I wouldn't like the idea of Helen riding off to meet him, but he loves her wildly and is a perfect gentleman besides. His name is Sir Ahmed Narroudi. He's a lord."

"Ahmed Narroudi!" Steve turned toward the door.

"Where are you going, Steve?" she asked, surprised.

"After that little fool of a sister," he answered.

She sprang up, startled. "Do you mean—oh, you don't mean that—that Sir Ahmed isn't a good man?"

She was standing, a sudden fear in her eyes.

He laughed, gratingly. "If I am not back in a week you may notify the consul and the government," he answered. "Otherwise say nothing about this to anyone."

\* \* \*

Helen sat in the shelter of her tent and gazed dreamily out across the desert. The two Arabs were nowhere to be seen. They had taken the camels off to a wadi somewhere. She was alone.

Ahmed had not been there to meet her, but he would soon come and with him would come a priest or a minister. Soon she would be in his arms! She thrilled at the thought. He was an ardent lover, perhaps too ardent. Sometimes she had had difficulty in preventing herself being swept away by the tide of his passions.

He was different from Western suitors. His touch thrilled her.

His avowals of love thrilled her. Yet, in spite of his Arabic name there could not be much Arab blood in him. He was too handsome. Then, too, she felt no racial aversion toward him as surely would have been the case had he been an Arab. For she was a Southern girl and keenly racial-conscious.

She wondered what her people would say to her marriage.

Then she started up. Someone was riding at full speed across the desert. Was it Ahmed? It would be like him to come in that manner.

She shaded her eyes. No, it could not be Narroudi. The rider was coming from the direction she had come, following her trail it seemed, and Ahmed would come from the direction of Siut. Then, the rider was alone and was not large enough for Ahmed.

It was—surely it couldn't be! Yes, it was her brother Steve!

Steve it was who had ridden hard and fast, covering in a day and night what had taken Helen and her escort two days and a night, travelling in easy stages.

He had found out by inquiry what direction she had taken and then had ridden for the oasis, which he knew was her destination, there being no other within two hundred miles.

Born and raised on another desert, Steve Allison, known on the Mexican Border as the "Sonora Kid," found no difficulty in travelling and in marshalling the strength of his mount, a swift footed Bishareen camel.

As he rode he studied the problem of persuading his sister to return with him. That she would not go willingly he was sure and he shrank from the thought of using force with her. His natural chivalry was coupled with a respect and a slight amount of awe for his sister, who was a year older than he. Yet this feeling was not caused by the difference in age.

As he came in sight of the tent he saw that Helen was alone. So Ahmed had not arrived. He felt a mixture of relief and disappointment because the Arab was not there for him to kill. For Allison was in a killing rage about Narroudi.

Helen smiled as Steve rode up and dismounted. She was fond of Steve, but she was not afraid of him. Quite the contrary. In the few conflicts they had had, she had always come out victor.

She was aware of his awe of her and, woman-like, always took advantage of it. He would beg her to go back with him. She would laugh and invite him to stay to the wedding. She did not even consider the possibility that he might try to compel her to return.

"Hello, Steve," she greeted, as he strode up. "How did you find Khartoum?"

She was really majestic. She was only of medium height and slender, but there was something queenly about her. She was the prettiest of the Allison girls, a real beauty, with wavy golden hair and large, dark-violet eyes.

"Helen," Steve began abruptly, "you can't intend to marry this Arab?"

"He isn't an Arab," she replied airily. "He took his mother's name. He's more French than anything."

"Will you answer my question?"

His tone annoyed her. "Yes, I will. I am going to marry him."

He laughed gratingly. "You little idiot, do you think he'll bring a priest with him? He's done this trick before."

The color rushed to her cheeks and she turned coldly away. He caught her hand.

"Wait!" he pleaded. "Helen, for heaven's sake, think what you

are doing!"

"Let go my hand, please," was all she said.

He released her instantly.

"Helen, please go back with me," he begged.

She smiled. "You must stay to the wedding, Steve."

He felt helpless as he looked at her and the feeling put him in an ugly mood.

"I haven't time to argue with you, Helen," he warned. "You had better do as I say. I don't want to use violence, but you've got to go back with me."

"Violence!" she laughed scornfully; his slim, lithe form, except for the shoulders not much stronger built in proportion than hers, deceived her as it had deceived many men. She had never seen her brother exhibit his strength.

"Violence! You can't make me go. I think I am nearly as strong as you."

She was much mistaken. Steve's grey eyes glittered suddenly.

He stepped forward and caught her in his arms. She tried to resist and he swung her up against him, crushing her to him. She cried out in pain and fright. His arms felt like iron bands around her. She had never felt such strength. Resistance was perfectly futile. The world reeled before her terrified gaze. He was crushing her.

She writhed in his grasp. "Steve!" she screamed. "You're killing me!"

He made no answer. "Have mercy!" she gasped. "Oh, please, please! I'll—obey—you! Please put me down!"

Instantly the arms relaxed and she slipped to the ground. She felt terribly weak; her limbs would not support her. She sank to the sands and lay in a pitiful heap, sobbing from fright and weakness.

Steve bent over her and she shrank away, her arm raised as if to guard off a blow. Steve winced; his face was pale and he was sweating. He had never handled a girl so roughly in his life.

"Will you go back with me?" he asked, hating himself.

"Yes, yes!" she sobbed. "I'll do anything you want me to. Please don't hurt me, Steve."

He gathered her tenderly in his arms, kissed her, smoothed back her hair and arranged her dress.

"I hate to hurt or frighten you, child," he said, repentantly, "but I'd kill you before I'd leave you to that Arab. Now run along and put on your riding-suit, while I go get the camels."

For a moment he held her in his arms, gazing into her tear-wet eyes, then he set her down inside the tent and strode away across the desert.

She watched him. Her eyes widened with fear as she saw the two Arabs coming across the desert. They were coming swiftly, carrying long jezail rifles. Steve was advancing slowly toward them. Now one of the Arabs threw his gun to his shoulder and fired. Steve continued to advance. Now they were within pistol range and Steve stopped. The Arabs were firing wildly. Steve's hand flew to his hip. Two revolver reports rang out above the crackling of the rifle-fire. One of the Arabs threw his hands high above his head and pitched forward. The other staggered, fired again, then as Steve's revolver spoke again, spun around and fell.

Helen leaned against the tent-pole, white and weak. But she had seen men slain before, on the Border, and she did not faint.

Slowly she changed her costume, gazing wistfully at the pretty dress. She had put it on, hoping to please Ahmed.

She arranged her things for travel and had hardly finished when Steve returned.

He had selected the swiftest camel, the one she had ridden, and divided the load between it and his Bishareen.

While he was working with the loading of the camels, the girl noticed that his shirt on the right shoulder was wet with blood.

"Steve!" she cried, frightened. "You're hurt."

"A mere scratch," he answered. "A jezail bullet cut the skin. Those Arabs are very poor marksmen."

However, she insisted on binding his shoulder up. It was, as he had said, a mere scratch.

When he finished loading he made the camels kneel and turned to Helen.

She gazed at him wistfully.

"Are you going to take me to Assuan," she asked.

"Yes."

Suddenly she dropped to her knees before him. "Steve, please—" she began.

"Helen!" he exclaimed in a horrified voice, lifting her to her feet. She threw both arms about his neck and clung to him, gazing beseechingly into his face.

"Steve, please let me stay," she pleaded piteously. "Please!"

She used all the arts of a woman begging a favor. She kissed him. She clung to him, begging not to be taken away.

Steve only held her in his arms, his face white and haggard. Finally he lifted the weeping girl and placed her on her camel.

He spoke no word, but did all he could to make her comfortable.

\* \* \* \* \*

## BROTHERLY ADVICE

(continued from page 14)

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Why wouldn't I?"

"You haven't any right to whip me."

"I haven't any legal right," he answered grimly, "but I've got the right of the stronger. Might's not right, but you disobey me and see what happens!"

"You have said you never could strike a woman," she accused.

"I wouldn't be striking a woman," he retorted. "I'd be spanking a naughty child."

"Oh, you—" Words failed her in her exasperation.

"I don't want to seem like a tyrant, Milly," he continued in a milder voice, "and I want you to have a good time. But I can't let you cheapen yourself and have your name bandied about over wine-cups. You don't know anything about the men you make these foolish bets with and the best men are not to be trusted with an innocent young girl. So you do as I say."

This advice was lost on Mildred who was furious at her brother for his self-imposed authority and she was humiliated in the extreme at the thought of having to submit to being spanked.

Her answer was prompt and unexpected. She slapped him soundly and fled to her room.



## RED CURLS AND BOBBED HAIR

The Allison family was at dinner. That is, all the family except the eldest son Frank, and the youngest daughter, Mildred.

Frank was in Arizona and as for Mildred—

She entered and sat down without a remark—rather unusual for her. Presently she looked about her with more timidity than was usual for her. Some of the family noted this.

"Edith Burton had her hair bobbed," she returned casually.

The family received that startling information without enthusiasm.

"I wonder—" Mildred mused, avoiding the eyes of the family.

"You wonder what?" inquired her older sister Helen.

"If—if—if I had my hair bobbed—"

The family rose and fell on her, with one exception. She was surrounded, stormed and captured, verbally. Her feeble attempts at defense were smothered under by the words.

"Don't you dare to think of such a thing—" that was Mrs. Allison.

"You leave your hair alone, you little idiot—" that was Helen.

"You have such beautiful hair, Milly—" that was gentle Marion.

"Aw, you make me tired," cried the harassed girl. "Darn it, all the other girls are having their hair bobbed. Whose hair is it anyhow? What right have you to tell me whether to bob my hair or not?"

"You try it and see," warned Helen.

The exception was Steve, her brother. Throughout the argument he had remained calm, not speaking a word but eating industriously.

The feminine part of the family now turned to him.

"Don't you think it's perfectly awful for Mildred to want her hair bobbed?"

"Why?" he asked coolly. "It's her hair. Let the kid have it bobbed if she wants to. All the other girls of her set are doing it."

Mildred sent him a grateful glance.

But Steve was in the minority. Even Mr. Allison, who nearly always let his girls have their way, forbid Mildred bobbing her hair.

After dinner Steve was taking his ease in an easy chair when a soft arm was slipped around his neck and a soft voice whispered, "Good old Steve." Mildred slipped into his lap; she nestled in his arms and kissed him. It was a perfect picture of sisterly love.

But Steve knew his sisters. He eyed Mildred suspiciously.

"What have you done now?" he demanded.

"I haven't done anything—"

"Well, what do you want then? I'm broke—"

"I don't want anything." She pouted; her lip quivered and there was a suggestion of tears in her dark violet eyes.

"I think it's horrid of you to suggest that I 'want something' when I only try to be nice." And she made as if to slip off his lap. He slipped an arm around her slim waist and held her.

"There, there, child," he soothed, caressing her gently. "Don't cry, little girl, I didn't mean to offend you."

"Well, you have," she responded indignantly.

"Don't be angry," he begged contritely.

"I'm not," she relented, nestling her face against his shoulder to hide the smile on her lips. Mildred was a wise little lady.

Presently she said, "Steve, do you think it would be a sin for me to bob my hair?"

There was a wistfulness in her voice that made Steve glance pityingly at her.

"Of course not."

"It makes me so furious," she sat up and her eyes flashed. "All the family pounces on me like a bunch of hawks on a poor little dove every time I mention bobbing my hair."

Steve gently pulled her back against his shoulder. He caressed her hair, running his fingers through the tresses. Her hair was black and glossy with curls and waves. It was very beautiful.

"Your hair is beautiful," he said. "It does seem a shame."

"And now you—" she jerked away and glared.

"But of course it's your hair and might look better bobbed," he added hastily.

"I wish all the rest of the family were as sensible as you. They're tyrants and they treat me shamefully," said Mildred. "I've been to each in turn and they all forbid me to bob my own hair. And Helen said she'd spank me if I did," she added resentfully.

"She's quite capable of it," Steve chuckled.

"You all treat me as if I were a kid," Mildred exclaimed indignantly.

Steve discreetly hid a smile. "What do you want me to do?"

"You could persuade the family to let me," she informed him.

"I could not," he denied flatly.

"How do you know?"

"Because I've already tried it."

She was silent for a few moments and her eyes glittered. Finally she slipped out of her brother's lap and stood up. "My family had better beware," she said ominously. "I am a desperate woman when driven too far." And she turned and climbed the stairs in a dignified manner. Steve watched her in mirthful silence.

"Poor kid," he mused. "It's a shame she can't 'be in style.'"

Mildred did not reappear until nearly bedtime when she came downstairs in her little nightie and went to Steve, carefully ignoring the rest of the family. She kissed him drowsily and sleepily begged to be carried upstairs to bed.

Steve objected.

"Please," she murmured, "you're the only one who is kind to me. Please."

Touched by this childish appeal, Steve lifted the slim, girlish form in his arms and carried her to her room. She was asleep when he reached it, so he tucked her into her bed as tenderly as a woman could have done. A moment he stood looking down at her as she lay with one white arm thrown back, a few curls resting on her rosy cheek. Then he kissed her gently and left the room.

If Mildred could have read his thoughts as he went downstairs she would have been shocked, for he was thinking "What is the little devil up to now?"

The family was discussing Mildred as Steve re-entered the drawing-room. "The poor child thinks we are treating her shamefully, not letting her bob her hair," Mrs. Allison was saying. "And I hate to refuse her anything, too; she is so pretty and innocent."

"Oh, yes, very," agreed Steve, strolling from the room.

Some minutes later Mildred slid down a rope made of sheets tied together, from her window—into Steve's waiting arms.

Her startled shriek was muffled by his hand, her frantic struggles were promptly overpowered and a familiar voice hissed, "For goodness sake, be still, you little idiot; this isn't an abduction."

"Set me down," she ordered. "How could I know it was you?"

"Where were you going?" he demanded, as he complied with her request.

"None of your business," she answered sulkily.

"Don't get fresh," he reproved. "I suppose you were going to the van Dorn ball?"

"Yes."

"Nice way for a girl of your age to act. Who were you going with?"

She stamped her little foot with vexation. "Will you lay off the subject of my age?" she cried angrily. "I'm going with Jack."

"You mean you were going with Jack," he corrected.

"How did you know I was going anywhere?" she asked resentfully.

"You're not in the habit of coming downstairs to kiss brother Steve goodnight," he answered. "You wanted an alibi. You wanted the family to know you went to bed. You're a quick worker, all right. I know you didn't have your clothes on under your nightie, but I reckon you had the sheet-ladder already prepared."

She was silent.

"That's a nice way to treat a fellow, isn't it?" his voice held an unaccustomed note of slight resentment. "Making me carry you upstairs and put you to bed, so you could get the laugh on me. I feel like turning you over my knee."

"Go ahead," she said listlessly. "I'm never allowed to do things like other girls."

He smiled. "I just did this to let you know you can't put anything over on brother Steve. How were you going to get back in the house? You couldn't climb that ladder."

"I don't know," she confessed.

"You can come in through my room," he offered. "I'll leave the window open. But you stay with Jack and don't you dare let any boy kiss you, and if you're not back by twelve I'll wear out the butter-paddle on you. Now run along and have a good time."

At about midnight a small, girlish form clambered through the window of Steve's bedroom.

"Take off your slippers," Steve said softly, "so you won't wake any of the family."

Steve always rose earlier than the rest of the Allison family, and next morning he mused as he dressed, "I guess I better wake Mildred up or she'll sleep late and the family may find out she was out late. I hope the little imp didn't kiss more than a dozen boys."

He went upstairs to Mildred's room. Evidently she was still asleep. He entered her room and stopped, astounded. On the pillow of the bed rested a mass of dark red hair! A quick step took him to the bed. He rubbed his eyes. What magic was this? Under that outlandish hair was his sister's face, but what was such hair doing there?

Just then Mildred opened her eyes and yawned. "Good morning, Steve," she said.

Sudden suspicion fell upon him. He caught a lock of hair and jerked. It came away! A wig! And underneath was Mildred's real hair—bobbed!

"So!" he exclaimed. "That was where you went! But why on earth didn't you get a black wig?"

Mildred was staring wildly at the wig. "Oh, goodness!" she wailed. "It's red!"

"Of course it is, what do you expect?"

"I didn't go to the ball," she said. "I went to the beauty shop and had my hair bobbed and—and I bought that wig."

"But why—"

"It looked black in the electric light," she wailed. "And Mrs. Duparse said it was black. And it was pretty and wavy like mine!"

I was going to wear it at home. And now what am I going to do?" she asked piteously.

Steve sat down and laughed. "I don't know," he replied. "You've sure let yourself in for a row."

"And Helen will spank me, too, like she said," wailed Mildred. "But don't you think my hair looks nice?"

"I suppose it does," Steve commented dubiously, "but—"

"But what?"

"But the family may not think so," he added dexterously.

"But what will I do?" she wailed. "The family will delight in this opportunity. And I'll be lectured and scolded and spanked and shaken—I'm going to leave."

"If I had time I could run over to the beauty shop and get another wig, but as it is—"

"It's all your fault," she said resentfully. "If you hadn't let me, I wouldn't have had my hair bobbed."

"Well, talk about gratitude," he gasped. He eyed the wig a moment and then grinned. "Let me have that wig," he ordered, "and you lock the door from the inside and don't let anyone in until I come back." He picked up the wig and left the room.

Somewhat later he entered, carrying a bundle. Mildred eyed it suspiciously, until he drew forth a wig. It was the same wig, but how different! Now it was a deep black, glossy and curly as before.

"How did you do it?" she wondered.

"My own invention," he answered proudly. "I've been experimenting with dyes in my laboratory and I dyed the wig and dried it, too, by a special process. Be still, now." He placed the wig over her real locks.

"Now you look natural and pretty," he complimented. She had dressed during his absence and now went to the mirror. She gazed dubiously.

"It's damp," she complained.

"Of course. I couldn't dry it completely."

"It's too black, somehow."

"Well, for goodness sake," he exclaimed somewhat impatiently, "quit finding fault with that wig and come downstairs. I hear mother calling you."

"All right."

As Steve turned toward the door, certain not-too-distant childhood memories caused her to say, "Steve!"

"Well?"

"While you are in the kitchen, hide the butter paddle, will you?"

Some moments later Mildred came downstairs, looking unusually demure. She breakfasted in silence—another unusual thing for her.

Helen remarked, "Your hair looks damp, Milly. What have you been putting on it?"

"If you won't let me bob my hair, it does look like you would let me put tonics on it without scolding me," Mildred replied reproachfully.

She looked so subdued that Helen felt pity for her and said in a gentle voice, "I'm not scolding you, child."

Mildred merely gave her a reproachful glance and continued her meal in silence. She seemed so quiet and subdued that the whole family wished that they had not scolded her the day before and wished to make amends. All of their approaches Mildred received in subdued silence, only casting reproachful glances that seemed to say, "So, you repent of your tyrannical treatment of me, do you? No matter, I am accustomed to such treatment." Which made the family wince and

decide that Mildred was indeed a very badly used girl.

Suddenly Marion gave a gasp. All eyes were centered on her. She was leaning back in her chair, her soft grey eyes staring wildly, her finger pointing—at Mildred's hair!

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Mrs. Allison wildly. "What have you been doing to your hair, Mildred?"

Mildred turned pale and raised her hands to her curls. Steve leaned back in his chair and laughed hysterically. Mildred's hair was changing in color with incredible rapidity. It changed before the family's wildly glaring eyes, from black to sandy-color and then to auburn—and it didn't stop there, but changed to red, bright red, flaming red!

"She's on fire!" shrieked Mrs. Allison, snatching wildly at her daughter's hair. She nearly fainted when it came away in her hand. Then for a lone moment utter silence reigned. All eyes were turned toward the shrinking girl who sat in the same attitude, her hands clutching her locks, her cheeks white.

"So!" said Helen deliberately. Then the storm of words rose and descended on the small shoulders of the shrinking culprit. Mildred tried bravely to defend herself but it was futile. All the scoldings she had ever received were nothing to the one she received then. When talk of physical violence began to be cast about, she literally threw up her hands and fled to Steve for protection. She threw herself in his arms and clung to him like a terrified wild thing.

"It's all your fault," she hissed in his ear. "Now you've got to protect me."

Steve laughed and held the slender form close to his. The verbal storm raged about them. Mildred hid her face against his shoulder and refused to speak, trusting to him to defend her from the family's wrath. Which he did.

"But, Steve," Mrs. Allison was almost in tears, "to cut off her beautiful hair that way—"

"And after we had all expressly forbid her, too," Helen was toying with a switch. "Really, Steve, you ought to let us whip her for discipline's sake."

Mildred turned her head to make an angry retort, saw the switch, winced and hid her face again.

"I'm surprised," remarked Steve. "I sure am. You talk about spanking Milly like she was a kid of ten instead of a young lady. Just because she's the youngest of the family is no reason to treat her like a baby. It would be indecent, whipping a girl of her age. And you've scolded the kid enough. So stop it."

"But—" Helen began.

"You hush," Steve ordered. Helen bit her lip and was silent.

"As I said before, it's Milly's hair and she has a right to do with it what she wants to. She won't always be young so let her have her fun. I took her to the beauty shop myself. So you let the child alone."

It seemed the family was ashamed of itself. It turned and went its way, except Mrs. Allison.

"I suppose you're right, Steve," she said rather wistfully. "But she had such beautiful hair." She gazed for a moment at the slight form in Steve's arms and then smiled and left the room.

Mildred raised her head and looked about. "Are they all gone?" she asked.

Steve laughed. "Yes."

"Thank goodness," she stood erect. "Steve, you're a good sport  
(continued on page 30)



## THE SONORA KID—COWHAND

Ogallala Brent, foreman of the Double Z-U Ranch was rather irritable. It was hot and some unspeakable person had discovered his private store of liquor and used it as it should be used.

Therefore, he was in no mood for pleasantries when a young, lithe-built youth rode up, dismounted and strode up to the ranch house porch where Ogallala sat, in the absence of the owners.

"Greetings, fair one," spoke the youth airily.

The foreman gave a noncommittal grunt, eyeing him with suspicion. The young man returned his gaze innocently.

"Do you want to hire a good man?" he asked.

"Yeah," replied the foreman. "Bring him 'round."

The young man ignored the ponderous sarcasm. "We ought to get along well, then," he remarked sprightly. "You got a job, I want a job; you need a good man, hey?"

"Well?" glared Ogallala.

"I'm him!" announced the amazing youth, taking off his sombrero and sitting down on the verandah.

"Well, of all the unmitigated nerve!" the foreman swore. "Look-a-here, young feller, what do yuh want, where you from, what's your name and what can you do?"

The young man got up and faced Ogallala, hooking his thumbs into a belt from which swung a big gun.

"My name's Steve Allison," he announced. "It's none o' your business where I'm from, but I was born in the state of Texas. I want a job; I can lick any man on this ranch, ride anything on four hoofs, drink any man I ever saw off his feet and commit wholesale robbery at poker."

The foreman grinned. "I can see yore a man of some few accomplishments. Ain't they some other virtue you forgot to mention?"

"Yeah, they is, now you remind me of it," agreed Mr. Allison. "There's two; modesty and mindin' muh own business."

The foreman looked him over. "I'm goin' to take yuh at yore word," he announced. "Hey, Gunboat!" This last in a shout.

A bellow answered him and presently a small crowd of cowpunchers came around the house. In the lead was a burly, ugly-looking individual, so heavily built as to appear short. Yet he was above the average height. His jaw was prognathous and his eyes were small and pig-like.

"Wotcher want?" inquired this interesting individual in a deep, rumbling voice.

"This young feller is laboring under the illusion that he can lick any man on the ranch," explained Ogallala, indicating Allison.

"That runt!" gasped Gunboat. "Haw! Haw!"

"Haw! Haw!" echoed the cowpunchers.

"I done told him he could have a job if he could lick you and ride Cyclone, and he's done accepted," went on the foreman smoothly.

"Him?" The astonishment was rather justified. Gunboat was some ten years older, eight inches taller and seventy-five pounds heavier. In fact when Mr. Allison looked his opponent over, he wished he had not been so specific in stating his accomplishments and the job began to lose its attractions. But there was no backing out now.

"Name your weapons," Allison suggested. "Fists, knife or gun?"

"I ain't no gunfighter," Gunboat answered, "ner yet no Mex knifer. Fists is a gentleman's weepens."

Steve shrugged his shoulders. That was the answer he had expected.

"Let's adjourn to the back of the corral," suggested one of the cowboys, known as Skinny. "Yuh'd trample Miss Gladys' flower beds here and out there they's shade and th' spectators can sit on the corral."

At the back of the corral Gunboat removed his shirt with great deliberation and Allison did likewise, first taking off his gunbelt and handing it to Ogallala.

"Boy, what I'm goin' to do to you," opined Gunboat, knotting an enormous fist, "is a plumb shame."

"Gwan, yuh big boob," Steve retorted, fervently hoping no one would notice how profusely he was sweating. "I hate to demean muhself by killin' yuh with my bare hands but yuh got yoreself to blame."

"The rules of this here combat," announced the foreman from his vantage point on the corral fence, "is plumb rough-and-tumble. Yuh can hit, kick, gouge or whatever yuh want to do. Let's go!"

At the word Gunboat lunged forward and launched a blow that would have demolished Mr. Allison had it landed. Owing to Mr. Allison's earnest efforts, it did not land, although it came so close that its breeze fanned the young man's face.

Followed a battle which, for pure, innocent primitive actions and cheerful ignoring of the Marquis of Queensberry Rules, was a masterpiece.

A boxing enthusiast would have cursed soulfully and left in disgust, but ordinary mortals, like the cowboys on the fence, would have yelled as loud and felt as uplifted as they did.

Allison was about fifty times as quick on his feet as Gunboat and that was all that saved him from defeat. But it seemed he was unable to hurt Gunboat. Time and again, he got in a blow that would have laid out an ordinary man but which seemed to make no impression on Gunboat. It was like a bear and a wolf fighting; a big, surly grizzly bear at that.

Finally Gunboat's fist caught Allison on the shoulder and the very force of the blow knocked him down. Gunboat leaped into the air with the intention of coming down feet-first on Allison's face. Allison rolled out of the way and kicked Gunboat's feet out from under him. Gunboat came down on his back, rolled over and grabbed Allison before the youth could get away. He dragged Steve to him and staggered to his feet, and with arms around him attempted to crush him against his chest.

Steve kicked him on the knee and then, getting his fingers at his eyes, made an earnest attempt to gouge. Gunboat either had to release Steve or lose an eye. He hurled Steve away from him and rushed after him. Allison made another effort to knock out his opponent and only succeeded in bruising his knuckles against Gunboat's unshaven jaw.

Then to the infinite astonishment and disgust of the watching cowpunchers, Steve turned and fled fleetly!

There was a tree close-by and Steve seemed to be running for it. Gunboat pursued as fleetly as possible for one of his bulk.

"He's goin' to climb the tree!" Skinny yelled excitedly. "Th' yelow coward!"

Indeed, it seemed that Skinny was right, for as Steve neared the tree he leaped high in the air and caught a low limb with both hands. The momentum of the leap caused him to swing far out, and to elude Gunboat's grasping hands.

Then, as the cowboys gasped in amazement, Steve swung back,

with a heave of his lithe body and put terrific force to the kick he launched out.

Both heels hit Gunboat's jaw with a force that knocked the heel from one boot and knocked Gunboat to the ground as if the man had been hit with a piledriver.

Allison dropped to the ground beside Gunboat and examined him. "His jaw ain't broke," he announced to the cowpunchers. "He'll be all right if you'll pour some water on him. He's just knocked out."

"My gosh!" Ogallala marveled. "Yore a fightin' wonder, boy!"

"Gimme my shirt," requested Steve. Having donned it, he said, "Now lead me to yore wild cayuse."

"Cayuse nothin'," answered a puncher. "He's throwed every man on this ranch."

Cyclone was a weary looking steed of indifferent hue. He slumbered while being saddled. However, Steve knew that the appearance was deceiving.

Mr. Allison mounted with care. The cowpunchers fled to the corral fence.

The noble steed still slumbered.

"Let's go," Mr. Allison requested.

The horse made no move to comply. Steve tickled him with a spur.

The horse turned his head and gave Steve a long look of shocked surprise, but stood still.

"Well, of all the no-good nags!" Steve exclaimed disgustedly. "I'm goin' to get off if—"

He stopped suddenly. The horse turned his head again and gave Steve such a diabolical stare that he felt his hair rise.

And then abruptly the show started. The bronc bounded high in the air and changed ends repeatedly and with dizzy speed.

Mr. Allison lost his hat but he did not pull leather.

Then the horse tried straight bucking. Leaping high in the air and coming down stiff legged. Mr. Allison rocked with the jolts, but he stayed.

The cowpunchers on the fence yelled delightedly.

Having tried all the regular pitching stunts without avail, the horse launched into a series of his own invention. He appeared to turn himself from a horse to a whirlwind. He danced. He pranced. He tangoed. He pirouetted gracefully on one leg. With a whoop of enjoyment he tried his favorite trick and then paused to see where Mr. Allison had landed. To his surprise and disgust, Mr. Allison was still in the saddle. With a curse, the bronc hurled himself backward, but he landed only on an empty saddle for Steve leaped off just in time.

He still held the reins, however, and when Cyclone regained his feet he was enraged to find his rider back in the saddle.

Cyclone felt sulky. After a few more lunges and an attempt to scrape his rider off against the corral fence—an attempt which was foiled by Mr. Allison's swinging half out of the saddle on the opposite side—the horse walked out into the center of the corral and stood, sulking.

Steve dismounted and walked, somewhat unsteadily, to the corral fence.

"Do I get the job?" he asked the foreman.

"You do!" replied Ogallala, gazing at him with wonder.

# THE SONORA KID'S WINNING HAND

Dusk was gathering over the cattletown of \_\_\_\_\_. A horseman rode down the street, humming a cowboy song. As he neared the outskirts of the town he heard someone call his name. He turned toward a small house on one side of the street. A slim, girlish form was standing on the porch.

"Evening, Miss Marion," said the horseman, raising his hat.

"Do you know where Steve is?" the girl asked.

"He was at the Mountain Rose when I saw him," he answered, then rather thoughtlessly, "He sure was stacking up the spondoolicks, too. Just before I left he scooped in two hundred dollars on a straight flush."

"Thank you, Billy," she answered, turning back into the house.

An elderly woman was preparing supper and Marion said to her, "I wish Steve would stay away from those awful saloons and gambling houses. He's there now, gambling."

"Is he winning?" asked her aunt.

"Billy Buckner said he had just won two hundred dollars."

"Well, goodness sakes!" exclaimed her aunt. "What are you grumbling about? If he was losing it would be different."

"But I don't want him to be with those gamblers and saloon-men. They are so rough."

Her aunt laughed. "That's silly. Steve is no angel himself. Besides, you shouldn't nag him about gambling; when he wins he spends most of the money on you."

The girl did not answer. She went to the door and looked down the street. Her eyes lighted as she saw a man coming down the street, his spurs jingling as he walked on the board sidewalk.

He was little more than a boy, a slim youth of medium height with clean-cut features, dressed in the ordinary attire of the cowpuncher, a heavy gun swinging low on his hip. He stepped up on the porch and greeted the girl cheerfully.

"Chow ready, sis?"

"Yes," she answered. "Where have you been?"

"Down at the Mountain Rose, relieving the honest gamblers of their hard-earned mazuma," he chuckled. "How about a new silk dress, kid?" And he slipped a banknote into her hand.

She hesitated, then pushed it back. "I can't take it, Steve."

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Oh, I just can't. It isn't honest, it isn't right. I wish you would stop gambling, Steve."

\* \* \* \* \*

## A BLAZING SUN IN A BLAZING SKY...

A blazing sun in a blazing sky, reflected from a blazing desert. Two horsemen riding slowly over the desert; no other sign of life except a Gila monster basking in the sun. Blazing heat, furious heat, desert heat.

The horses of the two men were tough, wiry cayuses, well adapted for desert travel. The riders were young, boys in fact. They dressed alike in wide-brimmed hats, plain, serviceable clothes, boots and spurs. Except for one thing they were no different from any of the other cowboys that rode the Arizona ranges. Low on the hip of each hung a heavy black Colt in a stiff black leather holster; and one of the youths wore two. Moreover, the end of each holster was tied to the leg of the wearer. The guns were big, single-action Colts, and their stocks were polished from much use.

The riders themselves were both of a type: clean-built, wiry youths of medium height with black hair and grey eyes. They might have been mistaken for brothers, but in reality there was little real resemblance between them. The one with the two guns was slightly taller than his companion and of a somewhat slimmer build. His eyes, too, were different, being long and narrow and of a steely glint.

In the features of both could be read determination and courage, with a liberal amount of humor; one could see at a glance that here were two young men who lived clean and thought clean.

He with the two guns shifted in his saddle and gazed ahead at the mountains which flung up their jagged crest against the skyline.

"We'll be there presently," he remarked.

"Oh, yeah," replied his companion. "A few hundred more miles of this \_\_\_\_\_ desert and we'll have the privilege of climbin' those confounded mountains. This was a fool idea of yours, Steve."

"The urge of exploration, Buck," explained Steve Allison whimsically, "that everlastingly driveth the weary wayfarer onward to discover new worlds to conquer. The what-do-you-call-it of, well, you know what I mean."

"Oh, yeah!" Buckner answered sarcastically. "Quite so; very clear."

Steve grinned. "You know that yuh want to explore those old pueblos as much as I do."

Billy Buckner merely grunted. Ever since Steve had told him of the lost pueblos up in the mountains of the \_\_\_\_\_ range, Bill had looked forward eagerly to the rediscovering and exploring of them.

For a while they rode in silence, broken only by the creak of saddles or the clink of a hoof striking a stone.

"I betcha Miguel Gonzales is hidin' out in those mountains," opined Drag. "And furthermore I betcha he sees us before we see him and ambushes us."

"He can try if he wants to," Steve answered.

"He's some gun-fanner for a Mex," mused Buckner. "Those two gamblers he drilled were pretty slick with a gun themselves."

"They had no business framin' on him to roll him for his money," said Steve. "Cheap crooks, I call 'em."

"Yeah, that's right," agreed Drag.

Less than an hour's ride brought the two to the mountains. The range was wild, steep and rugged. They rode on, going higher and farther into the mountains until they were forced to dismount and go on foot, after hobbling the horses and leaving them close to a moun-

tain spring where there was water and mountain grass in abundance.

"Just right for Gonzales to grab a horse and make a slick getaway," Drag remarked.

"They wouldn't let a stranger come near them," Steve answered. Which was true, for Steve was always careful to train his horses in certain ways.

After something like an hour's climbing, they came to a ledge overlooking a wide valley. On all sides of the valley, high, steep cliffs stood. The valley seemed a barren waste; the soil was dry and appeared alkaline and was bare except for a scattering of mesquite and sagebrush.

"What's the idea of comin' here?" Buckner asked. "I don't see any place where the pueblos could be."

"The pueblos are in that valley," Steve stated.

"Huh? In that valley? Nix, Steve. There's nothing in that valley."

"Have you explored it?" Steve demanded.

"No."

"Has anybody ever explored it?"

"No, why should they? It's nothing but a desert, nothing growing, no springs, and besides there's no way of getting down into the valley. The cliff is at least a hundred and fifty feet high at this ledge and on the other sides the cliffs are higher. And they are straight up and down."

"Anyway," Steve said, "we're going into that valley."

"But say, Steve," Buckner protested, "we can see most of the valley from the ledge and if there were any pueblos we'd see them."

"They're there, all right," Steve replied imperturbably. "And I'm going into the valley myself."

Buckner shrugged his shoulders. "All right, let's get started."

Steve chuckled. He turned to a rope that lay on the rocks and picked it up.

"Good hundred feet of hair-rope here," he announced. "That lariat I had you bring along is about forty feet long. Extra long lariat. We'll have to drop about ten feet, maybe not so far."

"I bet we get our hands burned goin' down," remarked Buckner. "And how are we going to get back up the cliff?"

"We can climb up easy, with knots in the rope," Allison replied. He tied the two ropes together carefully and made one end fast to a stunted oak several feet back from the edge of the cliff.

"I'll go first," Steve said, and wrapping the rope loosely about his waist he started down the cliff. The trip was none too easily accomplished, for though Steve was as active as an acrobat or a mountain-cat and the rope was knotted at intervals, at places the cliff bulged outward and the rope, not being fastened at the lower end, had a tendency to swing back and forth. Steve stopped frequently to rest and even then he was tired when he dropped the few feet from the rope to the floor of the valley.

Buckner, who had watched Steve's progress closely, and experienced much relief when he landed, then drew up the rope again. He tied the two rifles and the canteens to the rope and lowered them to Steve, who managed to reach them by standing on a boulder.

Then Buckner started down the rope with Steve bracing himself against the lower end to steady it.

He came down successfully and picked up his rifle and canteen.

"Now show me your pueblos," he demanded.

Steve looked up the cliff swiftly.

"Quick, duck into the sage!" he exclaimed, springing back into

the scanty bushes. Buckner did likewise and as they did so the report of a high-powered rifle rang out and a bullet buzzed through the sagebrush close to Steve. Steve's own rifle spoke as he fired at a movement of the bushes at the top of the cliff.

Then the rope came sliding down the cliff.

"Adios, señors!" came a mocking voice from the cliff.

"Gonzales, \_\_\_\_\_ him!" swore Buckner, firing in the direction of the voice.

Allison swore softly. Then he rose cautiously.

"Hey!" exclaimed Buckner. "You boob! You wanta get drilled?"

"Gonzales has gone," Steve answered. He stood erect and walked to the foot of the cliff.

Buckner rose and came forward. Steve picked up the rope.

"He didn't even cut the rope," Steve remarked. "See, he untied it. I'm glad he did. It's a good hair rope."

"I'm glad he didn't cut the rope while I was coming down it," Buckner said.

"And now for the Indian pueblos," said Steve.

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### **RED CURLS AND BOBBED HAIR**

(continued from page 23)

and I'm going to kiss you." And she did. "But what on earth made that silly old wig change color?"

Steve began to laugh. He laughed and laughed and laughed.

Mildred stood, her hands on her hips, and glared at him.

"Imperfect dyes," he gasped at last. "I dried it too quick. The dyes faded as they dried and made the hair redder than before. Oh, my! The expression on Marion's face when she saw your hair changing! Ha! ha! ha! 'She's on fire!' Haw! haw! And how funny you looked when you saw your wig!"

"Laugh if you want to," she replied haughtily, "but I think your mirth is very provoking. My hand fairly tingles to slap you, Steve."

"You better not," he chuckled. "If it hadn't been for me, you might be tingling somewhere else, just now."

She blushed. "Thank you for protecting me, Steve."

"You are welcome, Mildred."



## THE HADES SALOON...

The Hades Saloon and gambling hall, Buffalotown, Arizona, was in full swing when two sun-bronzed and dust-covered riders swung down in front of the saloon and strode through the doors.

They had hardly entered when they were recognized. And from the events which followed, it would seem that they did not crave recognition. Red McGaren, gunman of note, walked toward the two, something sinister in his cat-like stride, his hands swinging lightly near the heavy guns that hung at either thigh.

He stopped directly in front of the two.

"In from a long ride?" he said in his sneering, menacing voice.

"Maybe," was the noncommittal reply.

"I figure the sheriff might be interested in you two birds," McGaren said coolly, half-crouching, his hands hovering close above his gun-butts, a sinister figure.

Silence fell over the saloon, the gamblers paused, the bartenders made ready for a swift duck behind the bar. Dancing girls and cow-boys drew back against the wall. A few hard-looking individuals edged forward.

McGaren spoke, "There's a big reward out for the Sonora Kid and Drag Buckner and I figure on collectin' it."

McGaren went down, riddled by the bullets of the Sonora Kid, his only shot striking the saloon wall. Then the Kid and Buckner proceeded to shoot up the saloon, which deed speaks for their nerve, for the Hades Saloon was well-named and was the rendezvous for the outcasts and ruffians of three states. The two outlaws escaped in the confusion, leaving behind them a raging mob.

Helen Cnannon came to the West on the invitation of a ranch-girl friend and she came with little idea of the country or the people. She had always been skeptical in regard to the stories she had heard of the West.

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE HOT ARIZONA SUN...

The hot Arizona sun had not risen high enough to heat the clear, chill air of the morning. The shadows still lingered among the cliffs and the desert had just begun to shimmer in the sunlight. Along the cliff side, a trail ran, skirted on one side by a sheer precipice and on the other by the cliff wall that grew lower and lower as the trail ascended until at last it emerged upon a kind of high-flung plateau. This was the highest point of the trail; beyond, it dipped down into the lower levels.

Along this trail two horsemen rode. One of the riders was not what you would expect in a scene like this. It was a girl. She was a slim, lithe young thing, her rosy, untanned complexion proving her to be a newcomer, yet she rode with the ease that comes only with much riding and with a grace that proved her to be a Westerner. She possessed a fresh, vivacious beauty such as is seldom met with.

Her companion was a young man of medium size and a light, wiry build. He was dressed in an ordinary cowboy outfit, Stetson hat, chaps, boots, and so on; a very commonplace figure except for two things. The first was his eyes; they drew the glance of one as a magnet draws metal. They were long, narrow eyes, of a grey that glinted like steel. Ordinarily they were perfectly inscrutable, but on occasion they blazed like flame or leaped like daggers. The other thing that drew attention was the fact that, low on each hip, swung a heavy Colt in a black leather holster.

The girl and boy (for he was little more) showed plainly some marks of kinship. There was a certain resemblance about the nose and the girl, too, had grey eyes, but there the resemblance ceased. There was no likeness between the lean, rather long jaw and thin lips of the youth and the soft, ruby lips and delicately molded dimpled chin of the girl. Even the eyes differed, for hers were large and soft and gentle. But the main difference was in the hair, for while his was black and straight, hers was a silky, wavy gold which cast back the beams of the sun most beautifully.

The pair rode up the trail until they were upon the summit of the plateau. There they stopped.

"Well, here you are," said the boy, casting his arm around in a gesture that embraced the whole landscape. "You wanted scenery so here it is, lots of it."

The girl drew in her breath and clasped her hands ecstatically. To south and west the desert stretched away until it vanished in the blue haze of the horizon. To the north and the east, crags, cliffs and peaks were piled in magnificent chaos, as if hurled together by the hands of the Titans and then torn apart again in giant play. Man seemed to have no part in that colossal stage, yet the hand of man was there; high up on the cliffs, close under jutting rocks, on high flung crags, were the dwellings of prehistoric man, the Cliff-Dwellers. There were the caves and pueblos that were deserted ruins countless ages before ever the man of Genoa dreamed his dream or the first mail-clad Conquistador turned his face to the West.

The boy had seen it all a score of times before, but it was all new and wonderful to the girl.

As she sat her horse, her soft eyes alight with wonder and joy and her silken hair, blown loose and whipping the air in the morning breeze, she made a picture that is but seldom equalled.

"Oh! I love it all!" she cried. "The mountains, the desert, ev-

everything! It's so big and grand and I've been shut in by city walls and people so long!"

The boy smiled at her enthusiasm and pointed with his quirt toward where a ribbon of silver wound its way among a scanty fringe of trees.

"The Rio Grande," he said.

"It looks near," she remarked.

"Twenty miles," he answered absently. He was gazing at the river with a faraway look in his grey eyes.

"Looks like a kriss blade," he murmured, half to himself. That was bringing up a train of thought. He forgot the girl at his side. He was hearing again the fanatical shriek, "Ai, hai, Allah il Allah! Allaho akbar!" and was seeing again the fleeing people, and the glittering blade flashing amid the press.

He shrugged his shoulders and turned to the girl. "When you're through admirin' the scenery, Helen," he remarked, "we'll start back for the ranch before it gets hot enough to ruin your complexion."

"I could look all day and still not see enough," she responded, turning her horse toward the trail.

As they rode down it, there came the clip-clip of horse hoofs. Helen looked toward the turn of the trail, and did not notice her companion lean forward in his saddle and drop a hand to a gun. A moment later he drew it away as a rider swept around the bend, a tall, broad shouldered young man riding a magnificent black stallion. As he passed the two, his bold eyes sought the girl's face and he swept off his sombrero with a courtly gesture. Scarcely realizing what she did, Helen turned in her saddle and watched him until he vanished around a shoulder of the cliff. She was still gazing after him, a pleased smile on her lips, when her brother laid his hand on her shoulder and shook her gently.

"Tut, tut," he chided whimsically. "Is this the kind of manners they taught you in that Eastern college, gazing after strange gentlemen?"

She blushed and answered demurely, "What a splendid horse he was riding."

"Yes, wasn't it?" he asked, mildly sarcastic. "I'll bring him back and introduce you, if you like."

"Who, the horse?"

"No, the man."

"Why, who would think of such a thing!" she exclaimed, half-indignantly. "I do think you're the limit, Steve Allison."

\* \* \* \* \*

## MADGE MERALDSON...

Madge Meraldson sat her travelling bag on the station platform and glanced about the buckboard that was to take her out to the Allison ranch.

A cowpuncher approached her, lifting his sombrero. He was a black-haired youth of medium height, lean and wiry of build.

"If yore Miss Meraldson," he said, flushing beneath his tan, "I'm to take yuh and the buckboard, I mean, I got the buckboard—aw." In evident confusion he picked up her travelling bag and led the way to the two-seated hack that stood close to the station, but far enough away to prevent the possible bolting of the wiry, half-wild range ponies that were hitched to it.

He tossed the bag into the back seat, helped the girl in the front, untied the horses, and got in.

"I suppose yuh had supper on the train?" he asked.

She answered that she had and stole a glance at him. He seemed extremely capable and able to take care of himself, yet he flushed and stammered each time he spoke to her.

"You haven't introduced yourself," she reminded, smiling.

"Me? I'm Billy Buckner. Drag, most folks call me."

"Drag? What does that mean?"

"Oh, nuthin' much," he squirmed. "Just foolishness."

"Where is Steve?" asked the girl.

"Roundin' up some mavericks," he answered.

\* \* \* \* \*

## STEVE ALLISON...

Steve Allison settled himself down comfortably in a great armchair in the library of the Allison's New York home. He drew towards him a massive, leatherbound volume entitled Early Assyrian Art, and settled himself for a quiet evening.

Thereafter the body of Steve Allison was sitting in the library in New York, but his mind was wandering among the temples and avenues of ancient Nineveh.

Presently he was aroused by the entrance of his young sister. She came over to where he was sitting, with the intention, apparently, of conversing with him.

With something of an effort, Steve brought himself out of his silent contemplation of the art of the ancient Assyrians, and gazed at the girl before him.

She made quite a pretty picture, he reflected, standing there, with her slim, graceful figure, her lips and cheeks rosy with a natural glow, her dark hair disarranged prettily.

Her skirt was a trifle too short, he decided, her clothing too prone to cling to her soft form; and her hair was not at its best advantage bobbed.

But if his sister wished to be a flapper, and it gave her any pleasure, Steve Allison was not one to stand in her way.

Nay, he took her part against the other members of the household and always shielded her if any of her escapades got her into any trouble.

Steve knew the girl was honest and virtuous and that whatever she did was either the passionate protest of a rebellious spirit against staid convention, or the mere expression of a joyful and jubilant child.

She sat upon the chair arm and gave a sniff of disapproval.

"Fie on you, Steve," she scolded. "Why must you seclude yourself among old, dusty books, when there's all the great outdoors?"

Steve chuckled. "Your idea of outdoors is the riding-park and suburban streets, where the scenery consists of sign-boards."

"It isn't," she defended, "but even that's outdoors and I can't stand to stay in, especially now in the summer."

"And you shouldn't," he answered promptly. "You are much like some wild bird, anyway; a mockingbird. Develop your body, child, and let your mind develop itself. A girl as pretty as you doesn't need any special intellectual powers, anyway."

"Why, Steve!" exclaimed the girl, "I think you're just horrid and I'm not going to talk to you."

But when she would have slipped from the chair arm, Steve slipped his arm about her slim waist and held on.

"Don't fly away, little mockingbird," he said, and drew her into his lap.

"Let me go," she ordered.

"Not until I wish," he answered, and the girl, seeing that he meant it, leaned her head against his shoulder and rested in his arms, quite contented.

Steve ran his fingers lightly through her soft, dark hair. He smiled as he remembered what a row there had been in the Allison family when Mildred bobbed her hair.

"Steve," Mildred said, "do you know a dark complexioned woman with black eyes and black hair, oh, much blacker than mine, blacker than yours, even?"

than yours, even?"

"I couldn't say," Steve answered. "I've met so many people in my travels. Why do you ask?"

"A woman like that was inquiring for you," Mildred said. "I was riding through the park to meet some friends, when a big limousine rolled up and stopped and a woman called to me from it. I rode back and she asked me if I was Steve Allison's sister, and I said yes, and she invited me to take a ride in the limousine, but of course I had no one to leave the horse with. She asked if you were in New York, Steve, and said she was a friend of yours."

"What sort of looking woman was she?" Steve asked.

"She was dark, as I said," replied Mildred, "with very bold, black eyes and she had a way of looking at one with her eyes slanting. She was slender, but had a full, curvy figure and was rather beautiful in a bold way. But there was something rather coarse about her face, in spite of her beauty."

Steve was silent. His face betrayed none of his thoughts.

Mildred drew his arms from about her and sat up very straight upon his knee. "Steve," she said accusingly, "have you been mixed up with that woman somewhere?"

Where other men would have made vehement denial, Steve merely shook his head. That seemed to satisfy the girl.

"Did the woman strike you as being a foreigner?" Steve asked.

"Yes, she did," was the prompt reply. "She had a slight accent, different from any I ever heard before. And she looked foreign. She must have come from the Orient."

"Aye, from the Orient," Steve agreed, absently.

For awhile he sat silent. Then with a shrug of his shoulders he seemed to dismiss the woman from his mind.

As if she were a child, he drew his sister to him and kissed her rosy cheek and lifted her off his lap.

"Run along and play now, like a good little girl," he said, and the girl left the room, casting a rather puzzled glance at her brother as she went.

Steve sat still for a moment and then rose quickly and with quick, silent strides, paced across the room and back. Then he threw himself into the great armchair and engaged in deep thought for some minutes. As usual, even when alone, Steve Allison's features gave no sign of his thoughts. His face was placid and expressionless, but once his eyes roamed to where two Arab scimitars hung on the wall, their blades crossed, and once his hand wandered to his left armpit.

Then he rose and stepping across the room, scrutinized a large map that hung there. His eyes wandered across it and rested on Asia. Then his gaze centered on a dot in Turkestan, which was marked "Yarkand."

Steve turned away from the map and paced the room for a few seconds. Then he turned swiftly toward the door and as he turned, from the large window thrown wide open for the hot summer night, a thing came singing through the air, a thing that flashed in the light and thudded into the opposite wall.

Steve crouched back against the wall, a heavy pistol appearing in his hand as if by magic.

The light button was close to his hand. With a swift motion he pressed it and stood motionless in the dark, his pistol poised, his thumb pressing down the hammer.

For some moments he stood so, then he switched the light on again, springing aside as he did so. The room was as empty

as it had been before. Outside there was no sound except the passing of vehicles and the roar of the traffic in the business part of New York.

Alert and ready, Steve walked deliberately across the room. Nothing occurred. Then with a feeling of relief he turned his attention to the missile that had come through the window.

It was a knife of odd shape, driven inches into the wood. He drew it out and examined it. Hilt, blade and guard were made of one piece of iron. The blade was long, slightly curved and furnished with double-edges of fine steel. The haft and hilt were strangely and skillfully inlaid with gold.

He turned the knife idly in his hand and then seemed to come to a swift decision. Stepping to the telephone on a nearby table, he called a certain number and presently heard a familiar voice.

"Listen, Buck," he said rapidly, "don't ask questions."

He went on, speaking in a low tone and in the Pima Indian dialect. "Buck, meet me at Delmonico's as soon as you can get there."

"Sure," the other replied in the same language.

Steve hung up the receiver and turned toward the door, slipping the knife inside his shirt.

Presently, in an expensive limousine, he was speeding toward the famous cabaret in New York.

\* \* \* \* \*



## ...THE MOUNTAINS OF THIBET

The way it came about that Steve Allison, Timoleon Lycurgus Casanova de Quin and me came to be in the mountains of Thibet, was like this.

Steve and me went up there just for the fun of it and because Steve read where some scientist said that accordin' to his calculations and researches, the missing link was somewhere in the Himalaya Mountains, in Thibet. I didn't take much stock in that; I have seen lots of guys which easy pass for the missing link, but Steve said we'd make up an expedition and invade Thibet.

As for Timmy, which is Timoleon, etc., he went along partly because he was studying botany and partly because Steve allowed the trip would make a man of him. Anyhow, Tim is wealthy and stood a lot of the expense.

So we rambled up the Himalayas, through northern India and Nepal and up into Thibet.

No use in describing the whole trip. I'll just start at the place where the guides scooted with most of the luggage and left us sitting on a mountain in central Thibet.

"This," remarked Steve, kicking over a camp-chair, he was that peeved, "is some how-de-do. Why should those unmentionable coolies light out and leave us here?"

I'd been wondering about that myself.

"Maybe a hostile tribe of cannibals or somethin' is lurkin' about," I suggested. "Maybe the coolies got wind of it and blew."

"Cannibals? In Thibet?" Steve says. "But it may be something like that." He drew his gun and looked it over careful. Then he picked up his rifle and examined it.

"Anyhow," says he, "here we are, stranded in Thibet, and we gotta find our way out of these mountains, which is all Thibet is, anyway."

He looked all around at the high, snow-covered peaks.

"Some country, Thibet."

It is, too. It isn't all mountains, of course. It's more like a high, wide plateau, with tall peaks here and there. Mostly just desert-land. A bleak, barren country, but we were there in the summer, and it wasn't so bad. Cold enough, though.

Our camp was located on the top of a big, round mountain, as bare as the desert.

Our idea of camping so high up was so we could see anybody if they tried to raid the camp or anything, though Steve says the Thibetans were friendly and peaceable as a rule. He said the same thing, once't, about some Sioux Indians that later tried to scalp him.

"Lookit here," says Steve, gettin' down on his hands and knees and drawin' a map on the ground with a stick. "Here's Thibet. We ain't far north enough to be anywhere near the Kuenlun or any of those other mountains. Moreover, we ain't nowhere near the borders of East Turkestan because there's not enough mountains and we haven't seen any Taghliks. East and south I know the country better. The way I figure it, we're in the nomad plateau of Thibet, somewhere north of Bogtsangtsangpo."

"And havin' deducted that," says I, "what are you goin' to do?"

"Well," says he, "we had to have a startin' place, didn't we?"

"Why?" I want to know. "We're here, ain't we? And what does it matter what the name of the place is, so long as we're lost in it?"

"Well, you sap," says Steve, "how'd we know which way to start if we didn't know where we was?"

There's somethin' in that, come to think about it.

Just then we noticed Timoleon Casanova was missin'. He usually was when we was busy.

We looked around and saw him fussing around on the mountain slope with his fool magnifyin' glass and botanist outfit. We yelled at him and he came up to the camp.

"Lycurgus," says Steve plumb stern, "you gotta stick closer to camp—and to us. This is a strange country and they is no tellin' what is lurkin' in the offing."

"Ah, yes," says Timoleon, blinking like a mild mannered mud-turtle. "I have been examining a specimen of the genus \_\_\_\_\_" and he went off into a lot of botany names and words and such that Steve understood, but not me.

"Well," says Steve, "try not to roam no further away from camp than you think is your bounden duty." Well knowin' Timoleon would be chasin' off the next minute, like as not. Butterflies was Timoleon's specialty. He knew more about them than Steve Allison did about guns, which is goin' some.

"Oh, yes," says Timoleon, "I nearly forgot. I found this." And he handed Steve what looked like a yellow pebble.

Steve took it and then gave a kind of a snort.

"Drag," says he, "look here!"

I looked. That "pebble" was as big as a goose-egg and it was solid gold!

"Gosh!" says I.

Steve pounced on Timoleon. "Where'd you find this?"

"Why, down the slope there, somewhere. I really do not remember exactly. I stumbled on it while pursuing the genus \_\_\_\_\_"

Me and Steve was breakin' speed records down that mountain.

"Half an' half," says Steve, "or rather thirds."

Well, we searched that slope up and down, but we didn't find any more gold.

Finally we sat down and rested.

"Funny about that nugget," I said. "You reckon somebody dropped it?"

"If they did and I can find 'em they'll drop some more," says Steve. "That gold is the real stuff. But there's gold somewhere in Thibet."

And just then we heard a noise and looked around to see ten big tribesmen covering us with rifles. Just like that.

That's the way. When a man gets after gold he can't see, feel or think of anything else. Ordinarily an Indian couldn't sneak up on Steve and me, but we were so busy gold-huntin' we hadn't noticed.

"Shall we put up a fight, Steve?" I asked, not putting my hand on my gun, but getting ready to.

"No," said he, "these Thibetans are a peaceful people."

\* \* \* \* \*

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