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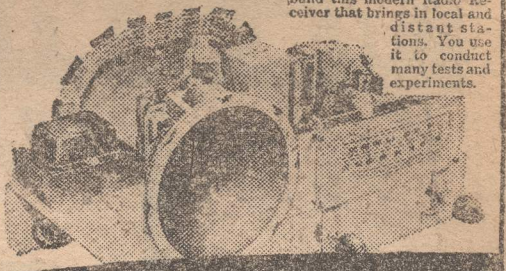

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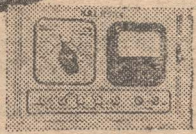

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Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, illustrating
a scene from "Heiress of Copper Butte"

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RIDIN' HERD with the Editor

WHEN ARNOLD KOHN brought in a sketch that he had dreamed up for a possible MAMMOTH WESTERN cover, we titled it "Heiress of Copper Butte", and gave him the go-ahead sign for the painting on this issue.

THEN, WE CALLED in a very capable writer—one who, regretfully, has appeared in our pages only too seldom—Guy Archette—and gave him the assignment.

THE WAY THIS story worked itself out, is a good example of how oftentimes the writer has almost no control over the development of his characters and the events that shape them. He starts his yarn, and once he delineates his people, they begin to move themselves, and work naturally into the situations that would be peculiar to their natures and temperaments were they flesh-and-blood people.

IN THIS PARTICULAR case, Guy and I got together over lunch, and in a general sort of way, worked out the basic plot. Copper Butte would be a mining town, thus giving us a chance to get in some good mining background. The attractive girl on the cover could be the heiress of Copper Butte—perhaps she owns a rich mine.

SO GUY WENT home, inserted a piece of paper in his typewriter, and got started. He followed the basic suggestions we had talked about. But by the time he got past the first quarter of the story, his characters had already assumed a very strong personality of their own, and were moving into situations which he hadn't even anticipated. He had to go back to his beginning and make a basic change. The Heiress became, instead of a rich girl, the name for the richest mine in the country.

"HEIRESS OF COPPER BUTTE" is, in this editor's firm opinion, almost the best story ever to appear in the pages of MAMMOTH WESTERN or any other western magazine. See if you don't agree...

WITH "CROWD IN THE WILDERNESS" (page 78), MW introduces Bill Kirk who has never before appeared in print. However, after you read his little short, you'll be as enthused about him as we all are here.

BILL IS A YOUNG, handsome guy, who has a good publicity job with a large national organization. However, he has always had a yen to do creative writing.

WE PICKED BILL out of the slush pile —and we're sure you'll agree with us that the guy's got talent. And his "Border Rendezvous", a novelette scheduled for the April MW, will prove that we were right—in the first place!

INCIDENTALLY, BILL INFORMS us that he has recently completed a full length historical novel which is receiving favorable consideration from a well-known publisher.

ANOTHER ONE OF your favorite MW authors is going places! And we don't mean just traveling. Paul W. Fairman came in this morning to bid us "so-long" for several weeks. He's on his way east, by invitation, to discuss with several of the pocket book publishers there the printing of some of his novels which have appeared in MAMMOTH WESTERN this past year.

WE JUST RECEIVED a whale of an exciting 40,000-word western novel from Bill Hopson, which will appear in a near-future issue. Right after he wrote this yarn, Bill and his soldier nephew visiting him from Japan, went off on a duck hunting trip.

BILL WRITES ABOUT his adventure, in a letter from the California desert: "The duck hunting is fine, except that there are no ducks. It's so hot here that we have to keep the windows open all day long. The only duck I've seen during the past week, flying across this desert, was carrying a canteen slung from its bill. The ground is so hot out here that the lizards carry a chip on their backs. They run until their feet begin to burn, then jump on the chip to let them cool off. Then they pick up the chip, put it on their back again, and take off like the well known jet-propelled bird."

THAT—we'd like to see...!

SEE YOU NEXT month—but first, how about some letters about how you liked the last few issues of MAMMOTH WESTERN? ..... LS

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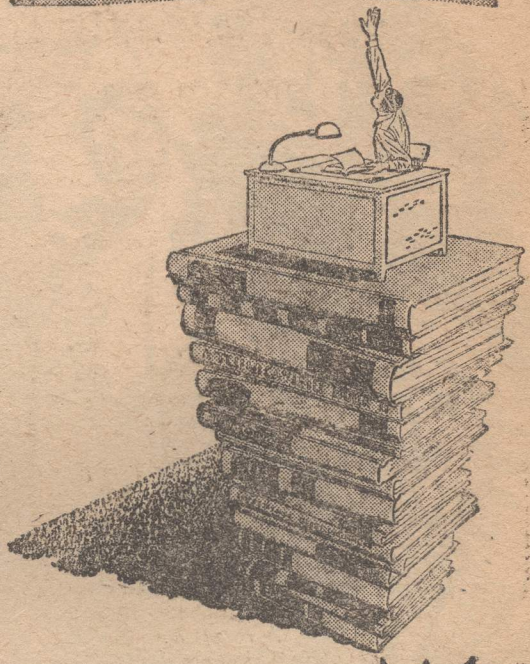

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HEIRESS OF

The hate they felt for each other was cruel, predatory, deep-rooted and final. Why?

COPPER BUTTE

By Guy Archette

She felt two great hands lifting her, and it was as though she were stripped naked and the hands were pawing her flesh. She kicked and squirmed, and her nails clawed at the bestial face in front of her

IT WAS AFTER the Civil War that they found her, a great ungainly saddle-back of a Hill in a bleak and lonely Montana valley. A cold Hill, chilled deep down into her granite by bitter winds sweeping over the Rockies.

They were hunting gold when they came to the Hill, and they swung their picks into her virgin sides, and

after awhile they found some gold.

And so a town was built in the cold valley; in this town there was peace and violence, life and death, and all the vices and virtues were practiced. But there wasn't enough gold to support all this, so they shouldered their picks and moved on, cursing the Hill for a treacherous wench.

But she laughed at them, and bandaged her ravished sides with new-grown grass. She laughed, because she knew she was the richest Hill on earth.

Later, they came again, somewhat humbled now, and willing to settle for silver instead of gold. They opened her wounds, and the silver they had previously scorned was there, and they mined it. Again the town took up its wild, hot-blooded living.

But there was not enough silver, even as there had been not enough gold; not enough for the gamblers and the merchants and the bright-eyed ladies of the line. So the town became a place of loneliness and whispering shadows once again.

And again the Hill laughed because—twice—she had been cursed for a penniless trollop—and she knew she was the richest Hill on earth.

For a span of years, she found comparative peace. Only a few fools and die-hards walked her slopes and bruised her body.

Then, a man came to Montana—into this foresaken town—a man named Abraham Gault. He was a gentleman of fortune, seeking wealth where he could find it. And he liked the look of the Hill. Other men had liked the look of her, too, so that in itself meant little.

But Abraham Gault was not like other men. Where they were ruthless and cruel, he was even more so. Where they were grasping and predatory, he combined these traits into a science. Where they were mere men, Gault was a colossus.

He spent many days tramping over the Hill, measuring her with instruments, making profound and careful tests.

Then, one morning, he looked straight at her, and announced, "You're the richest Hill on earth!"

They went to work on her and, after twenty years of clawing at her insides, they had hardly scratched the surface of her vast wealth, and it was 1898, and this was a town! Copper Butte. A town riotous and lusty, filled with tough and brutal men. They had to be that way to stay there. With muscles of less than iron, they would be lost in the competition. If their lungs were less than leather sacks, they spat them up onto the floor of a tunnel and died.

These were men! And this, by God, was Copper Butte, Montana! And just yonder lay the richest Hill on earth!

THE MAN was dying. This, in itself, was not strange, because he was an old man—deep in his seventies—and it is generally conceded that old men must die. So he lay coughing up the last of his life in a little clapboard shack on the outskirts of Copper Butte.

He had a friend—another oldster like himself—who sat by his bed watching him die, while outside the great stamp mills thumped and yammered and clattered, shaking the clapboard shack.

The bedridden ancient coughed, bringing up bloody foam. "I got a niece in Boston," he said. "Around twenty now. She's got no folks, and I been meaning to do something for her. My only kin, so I'm leaving her

the Heiress. Papers all signed. In a box under the bed. You'll see to it, Yance?"

Yance nodded, and accurately hit a slop jar with a head of tobacco juice. "Sure, Matt."

Matt lay back and listened to the wind howling like a sick banshee around the shack. The speech had tired him. He gasped like a distressed fish. "Kit Douglas. Little Kit. You'll write her to come out and take over the mine? Want to make her rich."

Yance would do nothing of the kind, but he nodded again as a new sound penetrated the room, someone pounding on the door. "Company," Yance said.

Matt Douglas neither moved nor spoke.

Yance yelled, "Come on in."

The door opened and closed. The intruder said, "I'm looking for Matt Douglas. They told me he lived here."

Yancey poked a quick finger toward the bed. "That's Matt. Me—I'm Yancey Davis."

"Is he ill?"

Yancey got up from his chair and leaned over the bed. He bent down close to his friend and then straightened up, drawing the sheet high and lowering it over Matt's face. "He's dead."

"Dead!" There was something in the tone.

Yance turned angrily. "That's right. He's seventy-three years old, and he's got no lungs. Why the hell shouldn't he be dead?"

The stranger gave no word of apology. He scowled. "I'm Drake Hughes. I came a long way to talk business with him."

Hughes was a lean, craggy young giant, probably in his early thirties. He had a wide, Lincolnesque mouth, a ruthless jutting nose. There was the hard look of eagles in his eyes.

Feature by feature, he was ugly; yet, in assembly, he had the cruel beauty of a plunging hawk. One skilled in reading outward signs might have said: Beware of this man. He is dangerous. He will get where he wants to go, and if you are in his way he will walk over you. This man is dangerous.

He softened a trifle now. "I'm sorry. Were you a close friend of Mr. Douglas?"

"Knew him as well as anyone, I guess. Close to forty years."

"I'm staying at the National House. Will you look me up when you have a little free time? We can talk of Matt Douglas, and possibly help each other."

He went out, slamming the door behind him.

Yancey Davis stood for quite a while staring at the space the man had vacated. Then, Yancey shook himself and went about his last duties to a dead friend.

"THEN THE Heiress," Drake Hughes said, "now belongs to this girl in Boston—this Catherine Douglas. It's all legal and binding?"

Yancey Davis reached again for the bottle, and poured himself four fingers. He was seated opposite Drake Hughes at a table in the National House Restaurant. He said, "Of course it's legal and binding. I'm a lawyer, and you can take my word for it. But for the life of me, I can't see why you're interested in that mine."

Hughes' smile was the tiniest quirk at one corner of his mouth. "You consider the property worthless?"

"It is worthless. Everybody in Butte knows that. Old Matt was the unluckiest man on two legs. He

staked that claim originally for silver, but it didn't even pay him for his work."

"Butte isn't a silver town. It's a copper town."

"When the copper boom hit, it didn't help Matt any. The few miserable veins and stringers he found in the Heiress made her the laughing stock of Butte. She sits right on the edge of the big ore bodies—right next door to the Bonanza and the Gagnon and the Neversweat and the Gila. Only difference is that they're worth God knows how many millions even after twenty years digging, and the Heiress isn't worth a red cent."

"I know about the Heiress. I've been down in her."

"Then you know she's worthless. What—?"

"Let's get back to this girl. You say Matt Douglas asked you to send for her?"

"That's right."

"When do you intend doing it?"

"I don't."

"Why not?"

Yancey Davis put down his glass. "It would be a mean trick. Matt wouldn't have asked it if he'd been in his right mind about that rockpile. Matt was sane enough on other things, but when it came to the Heiress, he just didn't make sense. His heart knew that the mine was worthless, but there was a short circuit somewhere and his damn stubborn brain wouldn't admit it. I'll write Catherine Douglas a letter and tell her she inherited a mine of no value and to forget it."

"It has value if I'm willing to buy it from her."

"Then why don't you go to Boston and make the girl an offer?" Yancey's tone was almost sullen. There was something about this man that scared him. He sensed himself falling under a spell, being drawn in by some mysterious magnetism toward this craggy faced schemer.

"Going east with an offer would hardly be good business. Boston is a long way from Montana, and people are inclined to disbelieve contradictory statements. Besides, I have other things to do here in Butte."

"I wish I could figure you out," Yancey said with marked bewilderment.

Hughes ignored the words. "Yes, a great deal to do." He pointed a long finger at Yancey. "You mentioned that you're a lawyer. Are you in good standing?"

"Of course I am. Don't do much practicing, though."

HUGHES' SMILE was gentle; yet, it gave his face the strange appearance of a leering devil-mask. He said, "That's because no one cares to trust their legal business to a perpetually drunken barfly, isn't it?"

Yancey's fist clenched, a vein arose in his forehead. "You rotten—lousy—"

"Sit down, my friend. I'm a man who believes all personal relationship should be based upon fact."

Hughes pushed the bottle forward. His eyes bored into those of Yancey. It was a fight, but not much of a fight. Soon, Yancey was backing away mentally. He felt stripped—naked—oddly helpless before those eyes. Finally, his hand went out like a claw and grasped the bottle. Yancey had lost.

Drake Hughes, with but a few soft words, had conquered and acquired a man. He had achieved a victory and, being utterly without vanity, he appraised it for what it was, a ridiculously simple victory.

"How would you like to be a judge of the Superior Court?" Hughes asked.

"You sure like to rub it in, don't you?"

But inside Yancey Davis—behind his weak, aristocratic face and tobacco-stained white whiskers—were other questions: Why do I sit here and take this? I never took this sort of thing before. Why am I sitting here taking it from this man? These were questions he would ask continuously in the future, and never be able to answer.

"I'm serious," Hughes assured him. "In order that some of my plans work out, I'll need a man on the Bench. There's no reason why the man shouldn't be you."

"I think you're—crazy."

The words were as the last futile kick of a trapped rabbit; the final snarl of a helpless coyote. Hughes understood them for what they were, and quirked a smile at the corner of his mouth.

"With two months 'til election, there shouldn't be much trouble. By the way, I'm going to work as a driller tomorrow—in the Gila."

Yancey took a jug of raw liquor to his room after he left Hughes. He stayed drunk for two nights and two days.

SHE HAD ridden the Utah and Northern up from Ogden, and even the bones under her firm smooth flesh were weary. For miles, she had not seen a blade of grass nor the leaf of a tree nor even the smallest of green things; only the desolation of a blighted land.

She'd asked the conductor what sort of a plague lay over this God-deserted country, and he had told her it was the copper smelters. They threw out a great pall of sulphorous smoke, and had long since killed every green thing for miles around. Upon hearing this, the girl had thought of the green Boston Common, and the nostalgia rising within her was almost a sickness.

But she was a slim dark-haired fighter, and she held her head high, giving no sign. She even faced down the new fear at the station when she found that Mr. Y. Davis, whoever he was, had not come to meet her. With only a touch of hysteria in her voice, she sought directions from the agent, picked up her grip and started resolutely off down the board walk.

A block from her destination, the front she had fought to maintain, began crumbling. She set down the grip and brushed welling tears from her eyes with a groping gesture.

Around her were people, lumbering and shoving rudely, and she was too preoccupied with their roughness—with the crude animal smell of them—with her own disgust—to notice that they were all moving in one direction; the direction from which she had come.

She allowed herself a moment of self-pity. Then, she reached for her grip. But her hand hung in space—frozen—as she stared up the street.

At its far end, the block had suddenly become filled with insane people! From out of the ground, it seemed, there had sprung unnumbered creatures who screamed and howled through filthy beards, and waved torches in the early evening dimness. They filled the street solidly and the sound of them, as they moved toward her, was like the roaring of the sea.

Paralyzed, she stared. Here was, obviously, the makings of a riot; or possibly a lynching. The girl saw the old man who was being carried along by the howling creatures. He rode

on two massive shoulders and, as the movement swept down upon her, she could see his dirty white whiskers and his look of amiable idiocy.

Why—why he's drunk, the girl told herself. They're all drunk! In Boston, every one of them would be arrested!

BUT NOW, her thoughts turned toward her own peril. She'd hesitated too long, and she was in danger of being trampled into the ground.

She screamed and turned to flee, but it was too late. They were upon her like the wall of a tidal wave. An arm came out of nowhere and swept her up. She felt two great hands lifting her, and it was as though she were stripped naked and the hands were pawing her flesh.

She was turned in space, kicking and squirming, and then there was a face she would always remember—an unspeakably bestial visage to be filed away in the mothballs of memory, and to be taken out only for the wildest of nightmares.

When the brute kissed her, something snapped inside. At that instant, she stopped being a frightened woman and became a fighting she-devil. The sharp toes of her shoes beat a tattoo against the monster's legs. Her nails clawed blood and filth from his whiskered face. Even her teeth found something to war against—a thick slab of flesh they went after with gusto—snarling and grinding through it until they met in the middle.

Now, she was hurling through space, through a void, and she could hear voices and raucous laughter: "Haw-haw-haw! There's a hellion! She chewed right through Mike's lower lip! She's hungry, Mike! Haw-haw-haw!"

And Mike's indignant yowl sounded out above everything else as she landed smack on her seat, hat askew, in the gummy mud.

She sat there raking the back of her hand across her mouth, wiping away Mike's blood and spitting the taste of it from between her teeth. From her genteel Boston throat came the high-pitched screams of a fishwife.

From the thick of the mob flew her grip to plop into the mud beside her. A gravel-voice yelled, "See you on the line, honey," and the mob moved on.

Her screams turned to sobs, and a new voice touched her ear; a gentle voice, the first of its kind she had heard in this ghastly horror of a town: "You're all upset, honey. Let me help you." Hands as gentle as the voice lifted her to her feet. "They don't mean no harm, honey. They're just having fun."

Fun! Great God!

The girl had a sweet round face under a head of curly blonde hair. She said, "You're new here, ain't you? What's your name?"

"Douglas. Catherine Douglas. I'm from Boston." She spoke the name of the town with defiant pride, as though it constituted a badge of honor.

"That's a long way, ain't it? I'm Jenny Wales. You better come to my place and get cleaned up. You don't want to meet nobody this way."

JENNY showed no squeamishness as she scraped handfuls of mud from Kit's dress, then picked up the grip and led her up the street just quitted by the screeching mob.

"Do they have this kind of...fun... often?"

Jenny had blue eyes in which a certain sadness seemed characteristic, and a round chin ready to tremble at any unkind word. "No. This is elec-

tion day, honey. That was the new judge they was carrying. Judge Davis. He was Drake Hughes' candidate, and Drake's been buying drinks for the boys. They always have a big time after election. Business'll be heavy tonight."

Kit Douglas was capable of being chilled by only one stark fact at a time. "You mean, that drunken, dirty old man they were carrying was a... judge?"

Jenny nodded. "He's a judge all right. He won big. You come on inside and we'll get you cleaned up."

Kit followed the girl through a doorway. Her mind was in a turmoil. She was almost totally unconscious of her surroundings as she tried to focus her thoughts upon a fixed point.

No! She started to ask a question, then stopped. It was utterly foolish. But the question came, nonetheless: "You said his name was Davis. Do you know his first name? It doesn't, of course, begin with a Y."

Swiftly, Jenny had gotten the smooth Boston beauty out of her dress. She said, "Oh, that's a shame. The mud went right through! That Mike Dallas ought to be taught some manners. I can clean it off, though." She raised her gentle, cow-like eyes. "What did you say?"

"The judge's name?"

"Oh, him. Yancey, they call him, so I guess that's it. He's a nice old man. Everybody likes him."

The shock was only mild. When piled one on top of another, shocks tend to lose force. Kit lay back across the bed upon which she had been sitting and dropped an arm across her burning eyes.

"That's the man I came out here to see. Clear from Boston," she moaned, "on the word of a man with a beard full of tobacco juice. Oh, Lord."

"What's the matter, honey?" Jenny, busy with Kit's petticoat, had been listening with only half an ear.

Kit didn't answer. This is the end, she thought. This has to be the end. There can't be any more. I wonder when the next train leaves for Ogden?

BUT IT WAS far from the end. There was going to be a great deal more, starting precisely at that moment. The door swung open and a scraping of feet brought Kit erect, her eyes blazing.

She and the man stared at each other, both frozen with surprise. Kit, stunned into helplessness by this un-Bostonlike entrance, stood like a statue.

The hairy giant also stood unmoving. Only his eyes were alive and appreciative. They began taking the girl in—first a quick once-over—then a retake, searching out detail.

Jenny turned a casual head. She greeted, "Hello, Sam," and went back to her work.

Kit Douglas got a scream past her teeth. She knew where she was, now. In a split second, several pieces fell into place, and the horrible picture was complete: The smirk of the depot agent when he'd directed her; Jenny's remark, "Business'll be heavy tonight"; the stories, whispered even in far-off Boston, concerning the line in Butte, Montana, and its lush ladies. Kit had crossed a continent and come unerringly into one of the houses on famed Galena Street. She covered as much of her person as possible with her arms and elbows, and continued to scream.

Sam turned a bewildered look on Jenny. "What the hell's wrong with her?"

Jenny put down Kit's petticoat and

advanced upon the puzzled man. "I guess it must be you, Sam. She's had a long trip and she's tired." She pushed Sam into the street. "You go 'way now and let her get some rest. Come back after while though. You hear?"

Ten minutes later, Kit was marching grimly up Galena Street. She was holding herself together with studied effort. She walked in a straight line and now, though she didn't notice it, the people who had previously elbowed and shoved her, somehow managed to get out of the way. The men eyed her with varying degrees of appreciation, but got no glances in return. She was still aware of their obnoxiousness. They were as uncivilized and they smelled as bad, in passing, as ever, but Kit was too vitally aware of the forest to bother with the trees.

Copper Butte! In Kit's mind, those had become fighting words. She had the taste of the place in her mouth, the stench of it in her nostrils and the filth of it under her fingernails. She had sat down in it, and had found it cold and wet on her tender Boston skin. She hated Copper Butte. Somehow, the disturbing incidents of her arrival therein seemed a deliberate conspiracy aimed at belittling Boston, Massachusetts.

Kit's mouth set itself in a grim line as she walked into the National House. She reached to the desk, glared at the room clerk, and there was a most unladylike thought in her mind: Maybe they'll find Boston just a little tougher than they bargained for.

AT APPROXIMATELY the same hour, a conference was taking place in the Butte office of the Gault Ore and Mineral Company. The offices were ornate, as befitted the dignity of the world's largest copper trust, and the conferees—three in number—had the look that all successful and expensive executives somehow acquire. They sat at a heavy mahogany table and spoke in turn:

Blair: As nearly as I can discover, no one ever heard of the man before. He just popped up out of nowhere.

King: I still don't see what all the shouting's about. Why should we care who he is? What does it matter?

Able: It may matter a great deal. Do you realize what he's done?

King: He's gotten himself pretty well liked among the miners. I'll grant that, but—

Able: You put it rather mildly. Two months ago, he was unknown in Butte. Today, through his own individual effort, he put a blackleg, bottle nursing bum on the bench of the Superior Court. We kept Kellogg in that judgeship for fifteen years. I tell you the Old Man isn't going to like this.

King: But he's only a driller in the Gila! Maybe he liked the old cuss and wanted to get him a job. I'll admit Hughes is—well, extraordinary. But I don't see why we should go into a lather about it.

Blair: It's our job to keep things under control. I'm not so much concerned over the how of this thing. I'm interested in the why. What's Hughes up to? What are his plans? Do you think we should send the Old Man a complete report?

King: Of course not! That's foolish. Why go out of our way to look for trouble?

Able: Maybe you're right. But I'm going to keep my eye on Hughes.

King: You do that. Me—I'm going to get a drink.

KIT LOOKED around the shabby office, at the shabbier desk, at

The hairy man's eyes were alive and appreciative as he gave Kit the once-over. Kit, horrified at his unexpected entrance, was too stunned to scream

the old man seated behind the desk. She felt that she had suffered a great deal at the hands of this bewhiskered sot, and she wanted him to know the contempt she felt for him.

Yancey Davis pulled at his beard and cast his eyes downward. "I'm sorry about yesterday," he mumbled. "About not meeting you at the train. But I see you got in all right, so I guess there's no harm done." He was nursing a magnificent hangover, and he wished his head would split open and get it over with.

She wanted to say: Oh, no! No harm done at all. I was manhandled and practically raped and cast aside by a drunken mob. Then, I was dragged to a house on the line and stripped. A typical Copper Butte welcome, no doubt.

But, instead, she spoke with cloying sweetness: "It was nice of you to inform me as to my inheritance. Now, I wonder if you would be so good as to recommend a lawyer—a good, competent lawyer—to look after my interests?"

Yancey Davis blinked. This pretty cat had her claws out. But why? He

couldn't recall having done her an injury. At least, not one she could possibly know about. She'd given him a good opening, however, for what he had to do, so he took it.

"Well, now, maybe I could, Miss Douglas, now that you mention it. But I can't see where you'll need any help, legal or otherwise. What did you have in mind?"

"Why, the Heiress, of course. The mine I inherited from Uncle Matt. There are, no doubt, legal matters involved." This old fool was so thick-headed, you couldn't insult him.

"None that I know of. I arranged for transfer of title. It's all finished and done with. The mine's yours, tight and simple." He took a folded, legal-looking document from the desk and handed it to her. "That's all you need. She's yours."

"Then, possibly, you'd direct me," Kit said. "I'd like to visit the mine and meet the manager or the foreman or whoever runs it. I'd like to see the workings."

"There isn't any manager, Miss. No foreman. No workings that I know of."

"I find you insulting. I'm not used to being talked to as a child!"

"Sorry. Didn't mean to insult you, Miss Douglas."

Sudden fear gripped her. "What—what are you telling me?"

He felt disgusted with himself; ashamed of the role he was playing in this cheap little drama. Nevertheless, he went on with it: "Evidently, Miss Douglas, you came out here with the belief that the Heiress is an active mine, a going proposition. That isn't true. It's nothing but a worthless hole in the ground with a few rises and drifts and stopes underneath. There isn't any copper in it, or any gold or silver. It's been inactive for years."

THIS WAS the greatest shock to date, but Kit Douglas had learned to take shocks without giving sign. Her hands gripped the arms of her chair until her knuckles whitened, but that was all. When she spoke, her voice was calm, almost pleasant: "Am I to understand that you dragged me clear across the nation into this sink of iniquity to take possession of a worthless hole in the ground?"

Yancey Davis opened the middle drawer of his desk and brought out a sheet of paper. Thereupon was a copy of the message—carefully written by Drake Hughes—which had been sent to Boston:

Mattison Douglas your uncle died last night. Condolances. He left you as sole heiress to Butte mine of the same name. Congratulations. Y. Davis.

"I am not aware of having dragged you anywhere," Yancey said coldly. "But that's beside the point. I believe I can turn the mine for you. A local operator has made several inquiries about it."

"That's very interesting. Are local operators in the habit of buying worthless mines?"

Yancey Davis yearned for a straight three fingers to clear his head. This girl was a trifle too sharp. "I don't know what the man has in mind," he said. "Shall I ask him for an offer?"

Kit Douglas realized that she had changed a great deal in the last forty-eight hours. It was as though the Boston breeding, the Boston politeness, the Boston veneer, had worn off completely with the first application of Montana sandpaper. Somehow, it was a little like crawling out of a suit of armor. She felt suddenly free—and marvelously uninhibited.

She studied Yancey thoughtfully.

"You seem a nice enough old fellow," she said. "After getting close enough to look under those dirty whiskers, I think I could even like you. But you're a complete failure at dishonesty. Now, tell me the truth about the Heiress."

Yancey choked on his cud of tobacco. This in itself was embarrassing, but he was grateful for the interlude. He didn't know how to cope with Boston females.

Kit saved him by getting up and moving toward the door. "Tell this philanthropist to come and see me," she said. "I'm staying at the National House. Good day."

She left, and Yancey dived for the bottle in his desk drawer.

DRAKE HUGHES was highly satisfied with the present state of affairs. On election eve, he had quit the Gila, his two-fold job in that fabulous mine completed. He had made a direct and highly successful contact with the miners—the men whose marks on the ballots put candidates in office—and he had also completed the rough survey works so vital to his plans. Thriftily, he collected the sixty-seven dollars due him at the paymaster's office, then spent two hours in a steaming tub getting the black sulphide dust out of his skin.

Later, after the election celebration, he made certain inquiries as to the arrival in Butte of one Catherine Douglas of Boston. He trailed her progress from the station to the National House, and was more than satisfied.

He had, of course, arranged that she be left adrift in Butte, but the victory parade incident and the affair on Galena Street had been pure good fortune. Hughes was willing to bet that the price of the Heiress had fallen to a tenth of what he was willing to pay.

Like a good tactitian, he waited the final punishing blow of Yancey Davis' revelations when Kit visited the lawyer's office. Allowing ample time, he went there himself to get the results. But he found Yancey stretched across his desk in a drunken stupor. Without trying to awaken him, Hughes headed for the National House and his kill.

I'll offer her five hundred dollars, he thought. In her present state of mind, that should seem like a bonanza. Hat in hand, he knocked gently upon her door.

Thirty seconds later, he proved one facet of his genius and also his uncanny judgment, by throwing three million dollars out the window. That was what it amounted to, at least a cold three million.

This occurred when a swift primary appraisal of Kit Douglas told him what would have been hidden from lesser men: You're on the wrong road. You've misjudged this girl completely. One false step and she won't sell the Heiress for the price of the whole Hill. She's a hellion, and her back is up. Look out.

SO, IN a split second, Drake Hughes evolved an entirely new campaign, and opened it with a gentle smile. "Good evening, Miss Douglas. My name is Hughes. I have a plan concerning your copper mine. May I discuss it with you?" He could have been a minister collecting donations for a new church.

Kit was caught somewhat off balance. She'd been expecting a visit relative to the mine, but not from a man who could have been Abraham Lincoln's younger brother, and who had a voice like an organ built into the hills.

"Come—please come in."

He sat with his hat on his knees,

looking pathetically clumsy with his long legs sprawled out from his chair. Kit sat down opposite him.

"It was nice of you to come, Mr. Hughes. But Yancey Davis, the man who notified me of my uncle's death, told me the mine is worthless, that it hasn't been worked in years."

Hughes shrugged. "That may be true. It may be of no value. But who can speak with absolute authority where a mine is concerned? I am willing to bet that there are millions in it. How would you like a partner, Miss Douglas? I wish to take nothing away from you. If I'm right, I want you to benefit. If I'm wrong, you lose nothing. I'll put up the capital and work the mine. Do you agree?"

"You're the first honest man I've met in Copper Butte, Mr. Hughes. I—" Her mind caught on a snag. After a moment, she said, "There was something I heard. It concerned Yancey Davis. He was just elected Superior Court judge, and someone mentioned that he was Drake Hughes' candidate. Are you in politics, Mr. Hughes?"

Drake sensed that the ice was indeed thin right here. If the cat jumped the wrong way in Kit Douglas' mind, the Heiress would never be his. "No. But Davis interested me. I felt an urge to help him and, possibly, I influenced some votes." He hesitated, then went on with some bewilderment: "But now I wonder—I'm not too sure. It could have been a mistake." He did not say an honest mistake, but that wasn't necessary. His inflection left no doubt on that score.

KIT DOUGLAS smiled in sympathy, and wanted to push his rough black locks off his forehead. It was a fine forehead, she thought.

"But about the mine, Miss Douglas. Wouldn't you like to be rich? It could mean millions."

"Of course I'd like to be rich, but—"

He was on his feet. Two strides carried him to a desk upon which there was paper and ink. He wrote swiftly without sitting down—two copies of a short document. One of these, he handed to Kit.

"Read this. It's short and simple. Read it while I go find a witness. Then we'll sign."

When she'd finished reading it, he was back with the hotel clerk. The signatures were affixed. He deposited a copy in his pocket and left one on the desk. Now, he straightened up to his full height. "I must go now. Suppose we meet for lunch tomorrow downstairs and talk over the new partnership."

After he was gone, Kit Douglas sat down and strove to catch up with herself. Exactly what had happened? She wasn't quite sure of anything except that she'd broken a resolution. She'd resolved that—because all Copper Butte was obviously dishonest—she would make no deal concerning the Heiress, even if she had to walk clear back to Boston. She'd meant that.

But, instead, she'd met a stranger, had gone into partnership with him ten minutes later, and was now wondering if it had really happened. She got up and went to the desk and looked at the contract.

DRAKE HUGHES took Yancey Davis by the hair and banged his head against the desk. Yancey snorted, but refused to open his eyes. Disgusted, Hughes brushed his hands together and sat down on the edge of the desk.

He eyed the drunken Yancey moodily, and considered developments to date. All in all, he was sat-

isfied. The cost had been heavy, but at least he had the Heiress and was at last ready to operate. And he'd come so close to losing her, the only mine in Butte that suited his purpose.

Being now forced to split the returns, didn't bother him greatly. Money had not been the primary objective of all the careful groundwork he'd laid. The primary objective...

Drake Hughes stared at the wall. The lamp on the desk below him threw upswept shadows across his face. Never had he looked so wolfish, so predatory, so dangerous. He folded his hand into a great fist and turned it slowly. If a man's neck had been in that fist, there would have been the sound of tortured, crumbling bones.

Hughes' glance dropped to the man sprawled on the desk; the man he'd put into a position of high public trust.

"You've been expensive, Davis," he said softly. "You're a million dollar asset." He extinguished the guttering oil lamp, moved to the door, opened it and looked back. "But you can be worth it—and you'd better be."

IT WAS on a Tuesday night that Drake Hughes affixed his signature to a contract making him half owner of the Heiress. On the following Saturday, eighty-six miners quit their jobs in the Gila.

Mike Toss, the burly Gila superintendent, came within an inch of apoplexy. His screams of anquish resounded across the barren flats below the Hill. Nevertheless, eighty-six of his best men demanded and got their pay, and Mike was called into the front office of the Gault Ore and Mineral Company.

"What's the matter, Mike?" Frank Able asked coldly. "Can't you hang onto your men?"

On the following Monday morning, the traitorous eighty-six reported for work at a shaft near, but slightly lower on the Hill than the Gila.

Thus did the Heiress become a going enterprise.

Hughes had picked his men well. He had harangued them and briefed them and, on Monday morning, they knew exactly what to do. They went at it as though all hell cracked the whip at their heels, and Drake Hughes breathed a little easier.

He had one problem he'd shared with no one—a bankroll too small to meet the pay-sheet due in exactly six days. Therefore, though his help didn't know it, their pay lay snugly underground on Monday morning. It had to be on the surface and through the stampmills and smelters by Saturday night, or there would be trouble in Copper Butte.

It was a pitifully small crew for the operation involved, but this was of Hughes' choosing. The operation was ticklish, and he needed, at this stage, loyal and closemouthed men.

The lid had to be held down for at least a week. By that time, Yancey Davis would be elevated to the bench and Drake Hughes would face the future with more certainty.

Copper Butte's reaction to Hughes' mad venture was, on the whole, sympathetic. The town liked Hughes. He was a good fellow, by golly, and everyone hoped that he was right about the Heiress. They wanted him to win because he was one of them. He bought them drinks in the saloons, and he'd worked shoulder to shoulder with them. He was human—even to the point of wanting an old stumblebum like Yancey Davis to have a chance in life. He was a man they could understand.

So, on Tuesday, when the Heiress lift began hoisting high grade ore by the carload, the town blinked and let out a mighty roar.

He'd done it! He'd proved them all wrong! He'd gone down into the despised Heiress and brought up ore as rich as any in the fabulous Copper Trust mines! He was a rip-snortin' son-of-a-gun, and you couldn't beat him.

He'd done it!

Drake Hughes spent practicallly the whole week deep down in the bowels of the Hill. He worked twice as hard as Pete Titch, his mine boss, who in turn worked three times as hard as any of the men who sweated blood to make the Heiress succeed. Drake was everywhere, urging, forcing, driving with mind and muscle.

Late Friday afternoon, he was down on the flat at the Keyes Smelter. He stood wide-legged, wolfish, triumphant, watching an ever-increasing pile of bright copper pigs. They were pigs out of the Heiress; less than one week's digging, and they were worth over one hundred thousand dollars.

On the following Monday morning, the payroll of the Heiress jumped to four hundred men.

GLOOM lay like thick syrup over the offices of the Gault Ore and Mineral Company. In the conference room, three men sat around a table. They were not happy. One of them, Frank Able, was holding a sheet of yellow paper. He held it gingerly, as though it were very hot and might burst into flame at any moment.

He said, "Message from the Old Man. Quote—Quite a few people in New York know of a tremendous strike in Copper Butte. These people include bankers, plumbers, newsboys, cripples, and deaf-mutes. The only uninformed person in town is a man who owns ninety per cent of the unmined ore in Montana and who, at great expense, maintains an office there. Namely myself. I'd better get a report damn quick, gentlemen. Abraham Gault. Unquote."

Blair: I thought they didn't allow cusswords over the wire.

King: The Old Man owns the wire.

Able: Talk sense. This is serious.

King: Well, what the hell? Are we supposed to be magicians? The Heiress was worthless. There isn't an engineer in the world who would have said differently.

Blair: All this man Hughes has proven is that he's sane and everybody else is crazy.

King: If any one of us had suggested buying the Heiress, he'd have been fired by return mail.

Blair: Nevertheless, I wish I had a carbon copy of just such a suggestion. It would save our jobs now.

King: Whatever a man does, he can't win. What's our next step?

Able: The Old Man wants a report.

King: Then I guess we'd better send him one.

"WE'LL GET off at the two-thousand foot level and follow the drift southeast," Drake Hughes said. "I'll show you the works we've opened, where all your money is coming from." His smile was shadowy under the carbide lamp in his hat.

Kit Douglas smiled back, gripping her own lamp tight in her left hand, her right pressed hard on Drake Hughes' arm. The cage descended at a sickening speed. It seemed to her that the cable must have broken. A pulse fluttered in her throat.

Drake Hughes sensed her fear. He turned her gently, his great hands on her shoulders, and drew her close to him. He held her firmly, her back against his chest.

"It's all right," he said. "Everyone is nervous on their first trip down."

Kit felt his muscles against her back, and through her flesh came the thud-thud-thud of his heart, beating as though it were her own heart.

An undefinable, intense emotion swept through her; emotion she had never before experienced. Blindly, in instinctive defense, she labeled it gratitude and surrendered to it.

He'd been so good! She'd come almost penniless to this town. She'd come trustingly, at the word of a drunken old scoundrel, and had been laughed at and treated like a woman of the streets.

But from the moment Drake Hughes tapped timidly on her door, things had been different. He was honest and straight-forward and clean, and within him was a power that made her senses reel. She had never known that pure gratitude could be so intoxicating, so delicious.

The cage stopped with a jerk that bent her knees, but he stood as solid as a cement pillar and held her erect. His breath was in her hair. It went through her body like an electric current. For an instant, she was incapable of movement.

"We'd better get off the hoist," he said. "They might want it." In his voice was an urgency she understood.

The floor of the two-thousand foot level was now under their feet. The cage shot away, its noise diminishing. With exaggerated care, Drake Hughes took her lamp from her hand, removed his miner's cap, and placed both sputtering carbides on the granite floor nearby. He turned. She was waiting.

THE INITIAL contact of these two was a thing of violence. He was not a gentle lover. His hands seized upon Kit; savage hands that had torn copper ore from the bowels of the Hill. And, strangely, she had known how it would be. Yet, she did not shrink from it, nor cry out against his bruising force; against the tyrannical insistence of his magnificent body pressing forward; against the brutality of his mouth and arms.

Her mental surrender was complete.

The rapturous thunders pitching and echoing within her had stilled somewhat when he put the lamp back into her hand and pointed it down the drift. He put on his cap and took her other hand.

"This way," he said.

Mutely, she followed, walking between the narrow-gauge tracks along which patient mules hauled carloads of ore to the shaft and the waiting cage.

Kit did not speak until she was sure her voice was again normal. "You're...pretty wonderful," she said.

"Of course."

"I mean, to do this, to find the ore. Everyone said it wasn't here. The smartest minds in the country looked and said it wasn't here. Yet, you found it."

"Maybe they didn't look in the right place."

"You're a remarkable person. Now that I think of it, you were so sure, so absolutely certain that it would be here."

"Faith in my destiny. I was born to discover the world's richest mine."

"And—"

"And the world's most beautiful woman."

"Take off your hat."

"Why?"

"I want to be kissed again, but I don't want the hair burned off my head."

He took off his hat.

Was she in her right mind, she wondered? Could a sane mind find pleasure in being hurt by this brute?

"Kiss me...again," she whispered. "Drake, kiss me again."

DRAKE HUGHES was highly elated at the trend of events. Prior to escorting Kit on her first visit to the Heiress, there had been a problem concerning her awaiting solution.

The contract had gotten Drake Hughes solidly into the Heiress, even though it had not gotten him controlling interest. He had done the best he could under the circumstances, but the time was coming when absolute control would be necessary. Getting it legally was, he felt, an impossibility. Therefore, the only alternative was to control Kit.

He had been giving thought to possible strategy when, with the speed and fury of a tornado, the thing was done. She was his.

All in all, it had been a pleasant victory; pleasant, but not nearly as exhilarating as would have been the conquering of an adversary more closely matching him in strength. But even at that, her kisses had far more fire than those of any woman he had ever known; more fiery than those of, say, Jenny Wales, the blonde he'd found on Galena Street. All that was of little importance, however. To Drake Hughes, kisses fell into the same category as copper pigs and sirloin steaks; a commodity that rose and fell in price as supply and demand seesawed.

The important thing was that he now controlled Kit. Of this, he was sure. Conceit was not one of Drake Hughes' vices. Vanity didn't cloud his clear vision when he told himself that he had Kit Douglas body, soul, and copper mine.

And of these three, the greatest by far was the mine.

The powers that guided Gault Ore and Mineral had one hope to fall back on: That Drake Hughes, the infernally lucky upstart, had by sheer good fortune stumbled onto a vein in the Heiress; a vein which would peter out into nothing after a few thousand tons of ore had been lifted.

This hope was a fear in the minds of Copper Butte's citizens. It was a probability, and they were loath to see such a gallant swashbuckler as Hughes go down under a pile of barren rock.

But the Heiress kept right on producing. Day after day she spewed up copper of a richness equalled only by the Bonanza and the Gila. Fate was indeed smiling on Drake Hughes. And why not? He had planned that it should.

BUT FATE went Hughes one better. On a Thursday morning, eighteen days after the Heiress operations had begun, Hughes was stopped on the main street of Copper Butte by a distinguished looking man who introduced himself as Frank Able of Gault Ore and Mineral.

"I'm honored," Drake Hughes said.

"Not at all. I'm just one of Abe Gault's office boys," Able said genially. "I'd like to buy the new copper king a drink, though."

Hughes was not averse to this.

With one foot planted firmly on the rail in the National House bar, Able said, "Hughes, man to man now, what do you want for the Heiress?"

For a moment, Drake Hughes was stunned. Fortunately, he had a poker face, and so Able could not sense the sledge-hammer effect of his words.

Hughes carefully set down his glass and stared at the bar surface.

His mind is working like an adding machine, Able thought.

But Able was wrong. Hughes was revelling in a moment of savage triumph. In his times of greatest optimism, he hadn't dared—hope for

this. Was such a devastating victory possible? Was the western office of Gault Ore and Minerals made up entirely of fools?

"I'd have to give it some thought," Drake said.

"Could you give me some word on it by afternoon?"

"Possibly."

"How about dropping into the office around four?"

"I'll be there."

It seemed to Hughes that Able breathed a sigh of relief. And why not? Able was in a bad hole. Why shouldn't the Copper Trust bid for the Heiress? To Abraham Gault, anything less than complete control was failure.

Drake Hughes grinned like a hungry wolf as he watched Able's broad back vanish into the street. And Able would have been puzzled, had he seen the grin.

Promptly at four o'clock that afternoon, four men were seated in the conference room of the Gault Ore and Mineral western office.

They sat around a mahogany table. Frank Able opened the business of the moment. "You realize, of course, that Gault Ore could be making a huge mistake. The vein you've struck could fritter out tomorrow."

DRAKE HUGHES quirked the corner of his big mouth. "The vein I've struck won't fritter out tomorrow or next year or the year after."

"I hope you're right. Would you care to set a price on the Heiress?"

"Ten million dollars."

James King's eyes popped. Samson Blair opened his mouth, but no words came out. Frank Able bit down delicately upon his mild Havana.

"A healthy price," he said pleasantly. "We'd of course be allowed to check the vein, to satisfy ourselves that—"

The door at the end of the room had opened. A man stood in the doorway, but no one payed him any attention. All eyes were on Drake Hughes.

"I wouldn't allow that," Hughes was saying.

"You're damned right he wouldn't!" The words came from the doorway with enough force to blow out a candle, and Mike Toss, the Gila superintendent, strode to the table. Mike's face was brick-red. His lips were back in a snarl. His fists were clenched. He glared at Drake Hughes. "You dirty, thieving bastard!"

No one moved. Able barked, "Mike!"

Toss whirled on Able. "You know what this skunk's been doing? He's been bringing Gila ore up through the Heiress shaft! He's robbed us of almost half a million dollars in two weeks!"

There was thirty seconds of silence in the room while each man seemed to be listening to the eternal slam-slam-slam of the stamp mills down on the flat.

"Can you prove that, Mike?"

"Prove it? Hell! Come down in the Gila and listen. Our south body runs three thousand feet beyond our drift end. At the two-thousand foot level, you can hear his drillers, and if they're not in our body, I'll eat this table. I tell you, he's looting our mine!"

Able turned to Drake Hughes. "Is this true, Mr. Hughes, or does Mike owe you an apology?"

Drake Hughes smiled and lit a cigar.

"I WANT this man held without bail," Frank Able said. "The action I'm bringing is criminal, not civil. Under the law, it is within

your power to grant my petition."

Superior Judge Yancey Davis raised blood-shot eyes to the grim face of Gault Ore's western ace. Yancey was not feeling well. He'd drunk too much, and he resented being routed out at ten o'clock at night. The lamp at his elbow sputtered and cast long shadows over the walls of his Court House chambers.

"A little drastic, isn't it?" Yancey asked. "What makes you think Drake —Mr. Hughes—intends to flee the jurisdiction of this court?"

"Because of the manner in which he evaded arrest. He went into a mine known as the Heiress and remained hidden for some hours. Also, because of the gravity of the charges."

"I think Mr. Hughes will stay around," Yancey said. He looked up at the tall, gangling figure before him. "How much money do you have on you, Mr. Hughes?"

Drake Hughes smiled briefly and drew forth a roll of bills. He counted it. "Three hundred and some odd dollars, Your Honor."

"You'll need a little. Can't leave a man penniless with the bank closed. Bail set at two hundred dollars."

Able sprang forward. "What sort of a farce—"

Yancey Davis put the money in his pocket. "Careful, Mr. Able," he cautioned. "You could easily find yourself in trouble."

Able swiftly backed water. "I apologise, Your Honor. I now petition the court for an order allowing my men to get down into the Heiress. We wish to obtain proof of theft."

Yancey turned to Drake Hughes. "Any objections?"

Able's face darkened, but he held his peace.

"No objection," Drake Hughes said.

"Very well, the petition will be granted."

Able, on the verge of explosion, turned and left the chambers.

A moment later, Drake Hughes followed him.

The news had spread like a prairie fire across Copper Butte, and a crowd of miners milled in front of the Court House. When Drake Hughes appeared, a wave of sound greeted him. The sound was neither hostile nor cordial; rather, it was a questioning rumble. The crowd was bewildered, but mighty interested.

Drake Hughes paid them no attention. This bewildered them even more. They had expected the bluff, hearty approach he'd always used with a crowd. They expected free drinks.

Drake pushed through them and went striding up the walk. The mob followed. Halfway down the block, Hughes opened the door of the Golden Elk, and his deep base voice was heard by all: "Mike Toss!"

TOSS WAS not there. Hughes moved on. The yell was repeated three times at the door of different establishments before it brought results and Mike Toss came out of Cherry's Lime House into the street.

The crowd backed away, and there was a circle in the center of which the two men faced each other.

Drake Hughes said, "You made some statements that can't be allowed to stand."

"They stand," Toss told him.

Hughes hit him full in the face, sending him down into the dust.

Toss came up as though fired from a gun and hurtled into Hughes with his full weight. They were about evenly matched, though Toss appeared more compact. He stood on legs like squat cement posts. His arms were short, but full of deadly power. His chest had the girth of a beer barrel.

Hughes swayed and went down be-

Toss charged again, but stepped into a perfectly timed straight that smashed his nose

fore the rush. Toss, a barroom fighter of long record, sought to follow up his advantage. His knee came up and arced down viciously into Drake Hughes' groin, but the force was lost as Hughes rolled and the knee scraped across his body at an angle. Toss jammed an elbow into Hughes' throat with more success, and as Hughes struggled to his feet he gasped for breath. He hurled Toss away from him.

Toss charged again. But he was overeager to get in close, where he could use his barroom skill, and he showed a lack of caution.

He stepped full into a perfectly timed straight right that smashed his nose and sent him over like a felled tree. For a few moments, he lay motionless with blood pumping out of his face. Then he was up again, an enraged bull, charging in.

From that moment on, he never had a chance. With a slight quirk at the corner of his big mouth, Drake Hughes stood back and smashed him down again and again. Left and right, right and left, until Hughes' hands were bloody, his knuckles stripped to the bone.

Again and again, Toss came charging in. His breath bubbled in sobs and there were tears in his eyes. He was crying unashamedly as he fought the futile fight.

He could lick this damn thief! That he knew. He could beat him bloody—tear him apart—kill him—if he could only get at him!

But he couldn't get past those terrible fists, and he finally went down for the last time and lay wheezing through the smashed bone and pulpy flesh that had been his face.

As Drake Hughes walked away, a roar went up from the crowd. By golly, you couldn't beat him! He was their boy! He could spit in the face of the Copper Trust, and then come out in the street and beat hell out of the man who'd called him names. He was their kind, and they loved him.

KIT DOUGLAS lay curled on the bed in her room. She was nursing her wounds. They were spiritual wounds, deep in her heart and in her mind, and they added up to one terrible truth: He had turned away from her.

She was his under all circumstances. He was hers to love, to comfort and to protect. Now, in his trouble, he had turned away from her.

At the first news of his trouble, she had hurried to the mine, eager to be by his side. Yes, he was there. Gordon, the red-headed skip tender told her he'd gone down. She stepped into the cage and signalled the hoisting engineer. She was ignored. Nothing happened.

She appealed to Gordon: "Tell him to take me down."

"Sorry, Miss."

"Why—what do you mean?"

"Orders."

"I'm owner of this mine. You take orders from me!"

"Sorry. His orders. No one goes down."

"That's—that's absurd. I want to see him. The order doesn't apply to me."

"Sorry. He said no one goes down. You're someone, so you don't go."

She raged and stormed. She fired Gordon and the hoisting engineer. They didn't move. The cage didn't move. Nothing moved. Kit ran down the Hill and into town, and now she was nursing her wounds. He'd turned away from her.

Somewhere, there was the roaring of a crowd and Kit raised her head. What was wrong? Were they lynching him? Killing him?

She threw on a coat and went down

into the street and hunted for the crowd. When she found it, it was breaking up—had broken up into small groups. She tugged at an arm and asked: "What was it? What—?"

The bearded miner looked her over. "Fight, lady. Big fight. It's over now."

"Who was fighting?"

"Hughes and Toss. Hell of a fight. See the blood?"

She stared down and there was sickness inside her. "Where is he? Where did Drake Hughes go?"

BUT THE miner had turned away. He was collecting some money from another miner. He was grinning. He was saying, "By golly, you can't beat him," and Kit hurried on down the street. There was a place she knew of, someone who might know Yancey Davis.

She rushed into the Golden Elk, and Yancey was there pouring a shot of whisky past his tobacco stained beard. She grasped Yancey's shoulder, and the eminent jurist turned and blew foul breath into her face.

"Where is he—Drake—what did they do to him?"

"They tried to arrest him, Miss, but—"

She shook his shoulder, gritting her white teeth: "Where-is-he-now!"

There was a voice from somewhere and drunken laughter: "It was horrible, lady. They dragged him away. Try Jenny Wales' house on Galena Street."

"This is no place for you, Miss Douglas. Go home," Yancey Davis advised.

"I'll go with you," someone yelled, and there was more laughter.

Kit left the Golden Elk. No help there. In her mind's eyes, she was seeing that pool of blood in the street; seeing how it had dried and turned the dust into something black and sinister. She had to find him, and she didn't know where to look. She headed for Galena Street.

The light was on in the one-room cottage, but the shade was drawn. Kit hurried past the window and knocked frantically.

No one came to the door. No one invited her in. No one did anything. Kit knocked again.

A lazy voice called, "Go away." It was a man's voice.

Kit turned the knob and went inside.

Drake Hughes was sprawled on the bed. His boots were off and he was in his shirtsleeves. Jenny Wales sat beside him. One of Jenny's hands lay on his chest, and the other was stroking the coarse black hair up off his forehead.

Jenny got up and straightened her dress. "Now listen, honey. After all... It's nice of you to come, but..." She stopped uncertainly.

KIT WAS paying her no attention. Her eyes were on Drake Hughes. There was nothing the matter with him. Save for a bandaged right hand, he appeared to be totally unscathed. He smiled at Kit. His smile was the smallest quirk at the corner of his wide ugly mouth. It made him look like a leering Satan.

"Why did you come here?" he asked. "Why aren't you in bed where you belong?"

Kit was in no shape to analyze her own emotions. They were of such heat and mixture as to defy any sane description. She hardly heard the words that came from her throat.

"You—you vile beast. You contemptible—" and for the second time since she'd arrived in Copper Butte, she drew the back of her hand across her mouth as though to scrub off a taste.

Jenny Wales was obviously distressed. Her eyes went from Kit Douglas to Hughes and back again. "What's the matter, honey? What upset you so? What's wrong with her, Drake?"

Drake Hughes didn't answer. He ignored Jenny. He was in a rare good mood, now. He was exultant. All the tension of the past days was gone. The lid had blown and the game was out in the open. He'd found both physical and mental release. The feel of his fists against the luckless Toss had been good.

He looked at Kit Douglas and roared with laughter. There was nothing to worry about from her direction. He knew his powers. He had the girl, and she would never get away.

THE CASE of the Gault Ore and Mineral Co. vs Drake Hughes came speedily into court. It was scheduled for ten o'clock on the morning of the second day following Mike Toss' accusations. Superior Judge Davis opened it with a verbal scouring directed against the plaintive.

"I consider your conduct to date in this affair as most remarkable. To say the least, you are treading on dangerous ground. The filing of your charges was premature in that they were brought, I understand, upon the word of your mine superintendent and without one iota of actual proof."

Yancey spat accurately into a cuspidor he'd had installed beside his bench. "It would seem to me that, unless you can come forward with this proof, the defendant has you where the hair is short."

"We will submit incontestable proof, Your Honor," Frank Able stated grimly.

"Is the defendant represented by counsel?"

Drake Hughes arose. "The defendant begs leave to represent himself."

"Granted." Then, to Able: "Call your first witness."

Able did. He called his first, second, third and fourth. The witnesses, mining engineers of repute, surveyors of ability and integrity, cited facts and figures to prove that the owners of the Heiress had directed and caused their employees to tunnel into the property of the Gault Ore and Mineral Company and to mine and remove therefrom certain copper ore, the amount of which was stated in cubic yards, the value of which, though obviously great, was of course unknown.

After the last witness had left the stand, Drake Hughes came forward to the bench. "Your Honor, I believe we can save a great deal of the Court's time. As you will remember, I made no effort to keep the plaintiff from entering my property in order to ascertain the extent of these so-called thefts. Also, I do not deny, but frankly admit, that I removed copper ore in the locations and to the amounts they specify."

The jammed courtroom reverberated from the shock of this bald statement, this open admission of theft.

"I deny, however, that I have done anything unlawful."

Able was on his feet, his face crimson. "You admit," he shouted, "that you entered the Gila at the two-thousand foot level and removed tons of ore, and yet you deny breaking the law? Are you crazy?"

HUGHES IGNORED the stormy Gault lawyer. He went to his chair and returned to the bench with

a brown covered, legal looking volume. This he opened and laid before Yancey Davis. "Not being vitally interested in mining," he said, "Your Honor may not know the law, so perhaps you would care to read it."

Yancey peered at the open pages, frowning. "What's your point?" he snapped.

Drake Hughes smiled. "The laws I refer to," he said, "were passed in 1866 and clarified in 1872. They are on the statute books and are the law of the land. They state, in simplified language, that the exact boundaries of an owner's claim do not restrict him from seeking out and bringing to the surface the ores which are rightfully his.

"By authority of these laws, a man may follow any vein that originates within the boundaries of his claim, no matter where it leads. He may do this so long as he remains within an area bounded by two planes projected along the end lines of his claim."

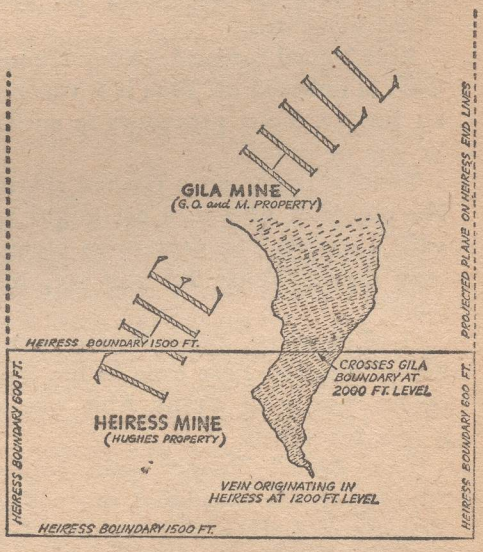
Drake took a pencil from his pocket. "Let me draw you a diagram, Your Honor, in order to make myself clear." He sketched rapidly upon a pad, and then turned the pad so that Yancey could see the result.

"The vein in question," Drake said, "originates in the Heiress, well within the vertical boundary lines. It travels downward, broadens and passes through the vertical boundary into the Gila at the two-thousand foot level. Some few feet beyond, it becomes a rich ore body."

Drake Hughes turned to face the stricken Able. "It is this ore that I have been bringing to the surface. But I have broken no law in so doing, because the vein originated on my property, as your engineers are at liberty to discover for themselves. Therefore, it is my ore and I will continue to mine it!"

Probably not ten persons in the crowded courtroom realized the resounding implication of Hughes' words. No doubt, only Able himself understood that Hughes could easily be sounding the death knell of the Copper Trust.

Able was no fool. He was a fifty-thousand a year legal brain, and he knew all about the "law of apex". He had faced it before. In years past, a couple of small operators, astute but penniless, had flung it into the face



of the Copper Trust. But in both cases, they had been frowned down and smashed by the legal steam roller of Gault Ore and Mineral. Mining was a rich man's game, and legally sound arguments meant little to the deeply entrenched and dollar-powerful Copper Trust.

BUT HERE was a situation entirely different. This man Hughes was of no small caliber. His abilities were self-apparent even at the outset. He owned a judge. He was clever and utterly ruthless.

Able knew what lay ahead, and he

was a thoroughly frightened man.

Judge Yancey Davis spat into his cuspidor and returned to his study of United States law. Drake Hughes leaned against the bench and helped His Honor over the more obtuse and difficult passages.

Frank Able said, "May it please the court—"

Yancey Davis waved him down and Able stood silent, gnawing at his nails.

With a gesture of finality, Yancey Davis slammed the book shut and rapped the bench with his gavel. "The law is clear on the point," he said. "Case dismissed."

Able leaped forward. "Your Honor! This is unheard of. This is a travesty on justice. Your procedure is entirely out of order!"

Yancey Davis' eyes flashed sparks. He regarded Able as a cat might regard a mouse. The courtroom became very quiet. "What did you say, Mr. Able?"

"I—I'm sorry, Your Honor, but—but—" For the first time in his long career, the great Frank Able was at a loss for words.

"Mr. Able," Yancey said coldly, "the court has dismissed the action. You are at liberty to bring any further action you see fit."

ABLE WAS desperate. "Your Honor. I petition the court for an injunction restraining the defendant from removing copper ore from the Heiress mine!"

"Your procedure is out of order, Mr. Able. The court will consider the injunction when presented in the proper form. This court stands adjourned."

The spectators poured out of the courtroom and into the street. Copper Butte went wild. He was their boy, this long-legged, rip-roaring son-of-a-gun! He was going to make the hated Copper Trust yell uncle! By golly, you couldn't beat him.

On the following day, Yancey Davis was stricken with an illness which confined him to his bed. This of course rendered him unable to receive Able's restraining injunction against Drake Hughes.

Frothing, Able waited until the next day and the next. Judge Davis showed no improvement. On the third day, an obscure Circuit Court judge granted Gault Ore and Mineral a restraining order against the Heiress.

An hour later, Judge Davis got well and appeared in his courtroom. At the request of Nicholas Breen, an introverted, chinless little attorney Drake Hughes had scraped up from somewhere, Judge Davis vacated the injunction.

Hughes put three shifts to work in the Heiress. Driving night and day, his barrel-chested miners drilled and blasted two more drifts straight into the vast bodies within the Gila's perpendicular boundaries. From the Heiress shaft poured an ever-increasing flood of ore.

Hughes offered Copper Butte's two remaining independent smelters a generous premium for their exclusive services. As a result, Heiress ore was rushed through processing, while that of the Gault interests waited on the sidings.

Again, Hughes had kicked the hated Copper Trust squarely in the seat of its custom-made pants; again, the workers of Copper Butte howled in appreciation.

DRAKE HUGHES scowled. He sat with his feet on the desk in the office he'd built close to the collar of the Heiress shaft.

With him was Nicholas Breen, a

hopeless little lawyer, frustrated and unsuccessful, whom Hughes had hired for just that reason. Hughes did not want a counsellor of brain and ability; he wanted an automaton who would follow orders, and Breen filled this role admirably.

"Judge Davis vacated the injunction an hour ago," Breen said. "That makes the third one they've tried to push through."

Hughes continued to scowl. "I don't like it. Able is smarter than that. He knows I own Davis, and yet he doesn't act accordingly. I don't quite understand it."

Breen shrugged. "They're trying. What more can they do?"

Hughes favored him with a pitying glance. "Do you think I'd let anyone pull ore out of my mine and get away with it?"

"N-no—I guess not."

"Well, Able and the Gault outfit are a hell of a lot stronger than I am."

"What do you expect them to do?"

"I don't know. I'm fighting my own fight, not theirs. But I expect them to do something."

A timid rapping on the door interrupted him. He called, "Come in." The door opened just wide enough to allow a scared looking young man to slide into the room. Then it closed quickly.

The young man sidled across to Hughes' desk. He spoke in a low voice as though forty people had their ears glued to the walls. "I've got news," he said. "Big news. He's coming out himself."

Hughes extended his hand for the sheet of yellow paper the young man clutched in his fist. He took the sheet and laid it, still folded, on the desk. The young man said, "It's a message to Frank Able, straight from New York."

"Thanks," Hughes said.

The young man went out as he had come, like a spy creeping through an enemy camp. After he had gone, Breen said, "I don't understand. He brought you a message addressed to Frank Able. How?"

Drake Hughes regarded his lawyer. It appeared that he was a trifle discouraged with Nicholas Breen. Hughes pulled open a drawer of his desk. Inside, was a pile of yellow sheets similar to the one he'd just received.

"He brings me a lot of messages addressed to Frank Able. I think you'd better give a little thought to growing up, Mr. Breen. Good evening."

Breen blushed and got to his feet. "Oh, yes. I see. Quite...ingenious." He seemed glad to get away.

Alone, Hughes opened the message and read it slowly. He read it again, then smoothed it out carefully and put it with the others.

He took his feet from the desk and sat staring at the wall for a long time. There was somthing else in his eyes now, something new; his old defiance, his old ruthlessness, the same granite-like solidity of expression, but with a certain sullenness added, and there was something akin to fear in his look.

He took a brown bottle from the desk drawer, uncorked it, and tipped it up. He drank long and deep. After this punishing draught, he took a glass from the same drawer and filled it from the bottle. This he drank slowly, savoring each mouthful, his eyes far away and vague.

It took him an hour to empty the bottle, and when he finally got to his feet, he was drunk.

But no one would have known this. There was no tremor in his hand, no stagger in his walk, and no lack of

clarity in his mind. If anything, the whisky sharpened him; made him more rapacious, more ruthless. He left the office and went down the hill in long even strides and, as he traveled, he looked a little like a gaunt mobile scarecrow deserting its post in some corn field.

KIT DOUGLAS had not as yet gotten her thinking straightened out. The shock she'd received in Jenny Wales' Galena Street cottage was still upon her. The elapse of time seemed to have had no effect upon it.

She was aware, vaguely, of the passing days, but the pain and humiliation was still burning like a molten lump in her breast. She was living through a new experience, and its varying stages had a quality in common—the dull weight of pain.

The first stage had been one of numbness during which she could neither think nor act. She sought the privacy of her room aflame with humiliation like a person who had been stripped and publicly scorned. After many hours, she slept, only to awaken to her gray and empty world. After that, she went through various phases of emotion, and each phase was as intense as her own passionate nature.

When she thought to hurt him, her dreamed-up methods included flaying him alive, slashing him to pieces in a frenzy of hate.

When she concentrated upon hating him, her hatred was a physical thing that she could feel gnawing her stomach.

She passed through all the degrading emotions. They had burned her out, and she arrived back to where she had started. She loved Drake Hughes. Her arms and her lips and her body wanted him; her heart wanted him. These dominant parts of her were not in sympathy with her pride. They kicked her pride around and stamped on it until it was a mangled thing at her feet, scarcely recognizable and unable to carry on the fight.

Still, her pride maintained and defended one small and pitiful point: She would not go to him. She would forgive him; she would even crawl, and blame herself for lacking the charms of a Galena Street trollop. But she would not go to him. Why, then—why oh why, didn't he come to her?

This was the exact state of her mind when Drake Hughes knocked on her door, entered her room, and closed the door behind him.

HE STOOD with his back against the door, long legs spread wide, thumbs hooked in his belt. There was the ghost of a smile on his face. "Hello...partner."

She crossed over and stood before him looking up into his craggy face. She saw no pity there, no mercy, no compassion. His eyes were cold, and he could have been as far away as the stars. She looked at him and her pride, beaten and hammered though it was, still demanded something.

She reached up and slapped him twice across the face, hard.

Only his eyebrows moved. He raised them a fraction of an inch, and his smile deepened.

"You're...evil," her voice was shrill. "You're a devil. You even look like a devil." She slapped him again, and felt futilely like she was hitting a granite cliff.

"Are you through?" he asked.

Her hand dropped to her side. Her eyes closed as from weariness. "Yes ...yes. I'm through."

He reached out and took her in hard against his chest; her head fell back and he kissed her. But there

was no gentleness. His embrace was a brutal thing, and his kiss was a blow.

So many things were going through her mind: How could I have gone so many years without knowing myself? How can all the things I've known and believed now suddenly mean so little? How can my mind and spirit and body want this brutality? From whence comes this heat and urge to take brutality and be brutal in return? How—?

Then, all the questions were washed away. She laughed and hurled herself against the crest of his breathing; against the solid surface of his chest. He kissed her again and, standing there as in a roaring furnace, there was no way she could measure time nor space nor the depths of her passion.

HE WAS sprawled on the lounge, and she sat close to him pushing the rough black locks up off his forehead. His eyes were closed, and he had been silent for a long time.

"There's something on your mind," she said. "What is it?"

He didn't question her penetration. "He's coming. He's coming out to show the little men how to squash a bug."

"Who?"

"Abraham Lewis Gault."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"I don't know. I think I am."

"Why?"

"He's stronger than I am. He eats men my size for breakfast."

She continued to comb his rough hair. "Drake...darling."

"Yes?"

"What's behind all this? What's driving you on?"

"Driving me? Money. I want to make you the richest woman in the world."

"It's more than money. Maybe others can't see that, but I can. All they see is a—a madman—tearing Copper Butte to pieces. But I can see more. What's driving you on?"

"Nothing."

"Is it something someone did to you once? Were you hurt? Are you getting even with somebody?"

He opened his eyes and grinned. "How does it feel to be worth a half-million dollars, Miss Douglas—Miss Half-a-Millionairess? How does it feel?"

"Drake, don't hedge—please!"

"We've only begun. We'll own this town before they smoke us out."

"You mean, they'll eventually stop you?"

"Gault will."

"Is what you've done...dishonest?"

"Yes."

Her voice was a sob. "I can't understand you! I know you so well, your hardness, your brutality. But I can't understand you."

"Scratch my ear—the other one. It itches."

"Tonight you're different. I don't know just how but...different. Is it because of Gault—because he's coming?"

"Maybe."

"Is that it? Are you getting revenge on Gault? Did he hurt someone—you—or your father?"

Drake Hughes' fingers were around Kit's wrist. Slowly, their pressure became greater and greater until he was hurting her cruelly there in the silence.

Then he said, "Abraham Gault *is* my father."

HE CAME up from Ogden in a green and gold private car—up through the dead land of the valley where the stamp mills pounded and

the smelters belched poison night and day.

He came clear from New York into the desolation, to squash a bug.

He was seventy, slim as a reed, straight as a flag pole. He had a deeply lined, tanned face, and he was the Champion. He'd taken on the giants and the wizards and the geniuses. He was cold and ruthless and without mercy, and he'd taken them on in ones and twos and had cut them all down from big men into little men. He was the Champion, and everyone knew it.

Abraham Lewis Gault. He sat at the head of the table in the conference room of Gault Ore and Mineral, and Frank Able stood beside him. When Gault came to town, Frank Able was the office boy.

"You've let things go to wrack and ruin. I'm disappointed in you."

"I did my best. This man Hughes is not run-of-the-mill. He's pretty hard to handle. He knows the law."

"To hell with the law. Haven't you learned anything? If the law is on your side, use it. If not—ignore it."

"He appeals to the miners. The people like him."

"To hell with the people. You're slipping, Able. I'm afraid you're—"

Someone knocked on the closed door. A frightened face was poked into the room. "There's a lady waiting. She wants to see Mr. Gault. Her name is Douglas."

Able was startled. He frowned. That was the trouble, working for a man whom the gods loved. You worked your heart out and things went wrong. He came to town and sat down in a chair and began having luck. The enemy came to his door and asked to see him.

"Show her in," Gault said. To Able: "Get out."

Frank Able sat in the anteroom biting his nails. He sat there for ten minutes wondering what was going on inside. Then, the door opened and Catherine Douglas brushed past him.

Gault roared, "Able! Find Drake Hughes. Tell him I want to see him. Here. Find him and bring him in. I'll wait."

Able went searching for Hughes, and it was strange about the Old Man. He'd gotten suddenly tired and a little older, and the wrinkles in his face were a little deeper. All in ten minutes, and Able couldn't understand it. But Able was glad, because he found a certain self-vindication in this. The deal was tough, and the Old Man knew it.

Drake Hughes came without a word, and that too surprised Able. Strange how everyone goose-stepped for Abraham Lewis Gault.

THEY FACED each other from opposite ends of the long conference table, the Old Man looking a little older, Drake Hughes' face washed clean of any expression.

Gault said, "You're looking well."

"I'm feeling well. I've worked hard, and it agreed with me."

"It's been quite a while. How many years has it been?"

"Seven years, three months, four days. I left New York the day after mother's funeral."

"I came back from South America and you were gone. I tried to find you."

"Mother was gone, too."

"Why did you leave without a word, Richard? Why did you change your name?"

Richard Davis Gault did not answer immediately. Somehow, there were no words. It was all in his mind —so clear, so hot, so bitter. But there were no words.

Only thoughts: (The bed was too

big and the room was too big and too cold. She lay there, pale and small, in that great heartless bed. She knew she was dying and she whispered, "He'll come, won't he, Richard? He'll get here—in time?"

(I was there holding her hand—keeping the death watch. She loved me and she was grateful, but I wasn't the one she really wanted to hold her hand when she died. She wanted him, and—damn it—was it asking too much that he be there while she drew her last breath?

(I told her—sure he was on his way—but I knew he wasn't. I knew that smashing a couple of men in South America and taking their silver mine away from them was more important to him than kissing his wife a last goodbye.)

"I asked you a question, Richard."

(And all the cruel and heartless things he did to her up through the years. He's asking now and I sit here mute because I can't tell him. If I merely hated him—despised him—I think I could put it in words, but it's deeper than that. It's so deep there aren't any words.)

"I'm waiting."

(Thank God she never knew about the women. Even while her spirit broke, little by little, she had the myth of his faithfulness to cling to. If she'd lost that, she'd have died sooner. I think I'd have killed him if she'd ever found out about the women.)

"I didn't like my name," Richard Gault said, "so I changed it."

That's hardly an explanation."

RICHARD GAULT stared at his father. It was all coming to the surface now—frothing up from the depths of his mind.

(I'm just like him in so many ways because I've got his blood in me. I'm cruel and heartless, but I'm no hypocrite and I know it. The stuff that makes him what he is also makes me what I am. We're out of the same mould.

(But this feeling I have against him is more than that. It goes deeper, and this blacker and deeper thing was formed within me the night she died and he wasn't there. This man I'm looking at isn't my father. I disowned him long ago and now he's my mortal enemy, and I've found the way to hit him where it hurts the most. I'm punching holes in his empire. I'm hitting the only thing he loves just the way he hit the only thing I loved.

(No—this man is not my father. I disowned him the night he broke my mother's heart and let her die alone.)

"I'm going to wreck you if I can," Richard Gault said.

"But why? In God's name, why? This will all be yours sometime!"

"I don't want it as an inheritance. I don't want a single thing from you. The only interest I have in anything of yours is to smash it up and stamp it into the ground."

Abraham Gault's face darkened.

His son went on: "You ask why—why—why, but I'm not going to answer. I suddenly find that I don't care whether you know or not. I'll only say this: I hate you. I hate everything about you. That comes no doubt as a surprise, because we were never very close. We've hardly been within speaking distance at any time in my life, and I don't think you ever before knew exactly how I feel about you."

A vein was standing out on Abraham Gault's forehead. He spoke in a choked voice: "You rotten, contemptible—"

"No doubt," his son broke in. "But I didn't finish. I hate you and I in-

tend to smash you down if I can."

Abraham Gault bit down on his rage. Amazingly, he made a last attempt, made a final bid for peace in a war he did not understand. "Is there no alternative?"

"None."

"Then," Abraham Gault replied, "you are no longer my son. I look upon you as a stranger—an enemy who has entered my camp—and I will deal with you accordingly. Good day, Mr. Drake Hughes."

Richard Gault arose from his chair. "Good day to you, sir." He walked toward the door. He went out of the Gault offices and back to the Heiress.

Abraham Gault sat for a long time staring at the chair his son had vacated. Then he roared, "Able!"

Frank Able entered the room. "Yes, Chief."

"I want you to tunnel under every drift the Heiress miners have drilled into the Gila. I want the tunnels about five feet under their drifts."

"I'll get at it right away. What's going to happen?"

"I'm not quite sure yet. But if... Hughes does what I expect him to, I may find it advantageous to blow up the Gila."

RICHARD GAULT did exactly what Abraham Gault expected him to. He thought the thing out carefully in his office at the Heiress, and when he was through thinking, night had fallen. He went straight to the Golden Elk where he found Yancey Davis sitting alone at a table with a glass and a half empty bottle.

"Have a drink," Davis offered.

Richard Gault knocked the bottle to the floor with a sweep of his arm. "Come with me."

He half carried the drunken judge to the court chambers and sat him down at his desk. He said, "I want an injunction."

Davis eyed him blearily. "Another one?"

"I want an injunction preventing Gault from moving ore from any of the mines adjacent to the Heiress."

The shock partially sobered Davis. "Do you know what you're doing?"

"Write up the injunction."

"You have four hundred miners in the Heiress. Gault Ore hires ten thousand men to work their properties."

"Write it up."

Davis shrugged and adjusted the lamp.

On the following morning, the early shift climbed the Hill and found themselves confronted with cold, formal notices tacked on the cage entrances. The gist of the technical language was plain enough: THESE MINES ARE CLOSED BY INJUNCTION!

Stunned, the men broke into small groups, milled about, discussed the portent of the messages.

Until now, it had been great fun; a sideshow for the entertainment of the town. But this was different. Fun was fun, but loss of their jobs was another thing. They went back down the Hill and piled into the saloons and stood about in the streets. There was an ominous undertone in Copper Butte, but the men were still uncertain, inarticulate.

From the window of Gault Ore, Abraham Gault stared out at the bands of idle miners. He smiled mirthlessly. "I think it's time to issue a statement," he told Able.

Able covered his resentment. All the Old Man had to do was come to town, and the pot had begun to boil. "He hasn't done a thing but tell me I'm incompetent," Able muttered,

"and already things are shaping his way."

Able and certain other people had a great deal to learn about the luck of mighty-statured men.

The notice was printed and cast broadside around Copper Butte: *The management of the Gault properties wishes to inform its personnel that all work will be stopped until further notice. Interests hostile to us have secured a legal injunction barring us from further operation. It is our intent to obey the law under all circumstances, and therefore we must let the law take its course. We deeply regret the hardship this stoppage will work upon our employees and we earnestly request that they refrain from any show of violence. Abraham Gault.*

"He didn't pull a blunder like this one until you came," Able said with some bitterness. "He never gave me an opportunity like this."

"Most unfortunate," Gault said as they watched the miners milling about in the street below. "Most unfortunate. If he had, however, I imagine you would have blundered yourself by having his injunction set aside."

Able said nothing.

"And now there are other things. I want to make arrangements for the spreading of certain rumors in case it becomes advantageous. Is Mike Toss still your superintendant at the Gila?"

"He was in pretty bad shape for a while. He's up and around now."

"Send for him."

THERE WAS fear and unrest among the Heiress miners. They went into the pits, but little ore came up the shaft and they were glad to finish their day. The eight p.m. shift showed reluctance to enter the cage. They stood around in groups near the shaft collar. Their unrest was apparent. They kept turning their faces to the lights of the town below.

And from group to group went shadowy individuals who dropped a word, gave vague whispered warnings, set small fires of doubt and then faded into the night: "Stay out of the pits—Hughes has threatened to wreck Gault no matter how— They had a showdown and Hughes told the Old Man he'd blow up the Gila before he'd let another pound of ore reach the top— This man Hughes is dangerous— He's liable to do anything— That's the reason the Old Man isn't having the injunction knocked out— He's afraid somebody will get hurt down in the pits— He wants the men to stay on top until this thing is settled— The Old Man's all right."

The mob in the streets of Copper Butte was stirring and quickening. The groups tightened, grew larger, coalesced into more solid and more dangerous masses.

The roar became articulate. It had been rumbling and vague, but now there was a name, a victim, an objective of wrath.

"Yancey Davis!"

Groups began hunting Yancey, but he was nowhere to be found. The mob thundered in and out of every saloon in Copper Butte. No Yancey.

They thought of the court house. That's where they'd find the dirty yellow pup! He was hiding under a desk in the court house! Get him out! Pull him out by his dirty beard and ride him out of town. Taking bread out of people's mouths! Granting injunctions all over hell!

THE MOB poured up the street and washed around the court

house. There were flares to light its way. The spearhead of the mob piled against the door of the dark and lonely building. The door was locked. It was a heavy door, and they were washed back.

Get a battering ram! Go in after the rat! The mob roared in a fierce exultant frenzy.

Richard Gault realized his mistake. He came down the Hill cursing himself for being such a fool. It hadn't occurred to him that his father would let the injunction stand. It had been but a preliminary move to render more valid the avalanche of law suits with which Richard Gault had planned to smother Gault Ore and Mineral.

Now, he wondered if it were too late to repair the damage he'd done to his own cause. The injunction had to be voided, and if this mob got to Yancey Davis first, they'd tear the old man to pieces. Richard Gault was not fooled about the mob's temper.

He skirted the segment that churned in the street and found the low alley window he wanted. He smashed it with his fist and stepped into Yancey Davis' chambers. He'd made it. But it was dark inside, and he couldn't be sure that Davis was there.

He lit the desk lamp, and in so doing almost set fire to Yancey's flowing white hair.

Richard Gault's lip twisted. Dead drunk as usual. Yancey was spread across the desk, head pillowed on his tired old arms.

Richard Gault seized the white hair and jerked Yancey's face into the lamplight. He slapped the face hard. Then he passed his hand across it slowly. With a curse, he let go of Yancey's hair, and the head fell to the desk with a dull thud.

Yancey had gone on one binge too many.

He was dead.

Richard Gault went out the way he had entered and climbed back up the Hill.

KIT DOUGLAS sat in the window of her hotel room and watched the flames grow greater and brighter as they ate into the dry wood of the court house. The violence of the mob had run away with it. Before they realized what they were doing, somebody had thrown a blazing flare at the wooden building, and now, without knowing it, both the mob and Kit were watching the lurid funeral pyre of Yancey Davis.

Kit had a sickness within her as she watched the flames shoot higher. Latest reports had it that the man she knew now as Richard Gault, was still with his miners at the Heiress. She'd wanted to go to him, but policemen stationed in the lobby of the National House had forbidden the guests to leave. The mob spirit had heightened in viciousness. Torch-carrying miners roamed the streets unchecked, and the mob was beginning to feed on itself. There had been scattered clashes—some violent and bloody—between various marauding groups.

Kit, white and drawn and sick to death of this inferno in which she was caught, left the window. She circled the room like a caged animal and threw herself, sobbing, on the bed. Finally, the sobs lessened, and she fell asleep.

Awakening came abruptly. She was not alone. Someone was there in the room with her. Total awareness sharpened her mind before she had moved a muscle, and she lay there hearing the stealthy footsteps approaching the bed.

She rolled to her back, her throat set for screaming, an arm across her breast. But the scream did not come. The sight of the intruder froze the sound in her throat.

It was Sam, the man from Galena Street; the bearded ruffian who had seen her unclothed in Jenny Wales' cottage. He leaped forward, and she saw the knife in his hand. But now he sheathed the knife, and his hand was across her mouth, holding back the scream. His other hand forced her back, helpless, on the bed.

"It's me—Sam," he whispered. "I remembered you from Jenny's. I waited for you to come back, and you never did. Why didn't you come back?"

He was drunk—drunk from both liquor and the madness stalking the streets of Copper Butte. He had seen a woman, and her body had stuck in his memory. Now, there was unrest and riot. Law and order were backed against the wall, and possibly any man could have any woman he wanted and this man had come after the woman he remembered.

Kit felt herself sinking deep in the bed; deeper and deeper until she was sinking down through her own consciousness and her own strength to resist. She felt rough hands upon her.

THERE WAS a knock on the door. The knock brought a slight spasm of strength. Kit turned her face away from the hand and a small fragment of her scream went out from her lips. The man snarled, and the hand settled again over her mouth.

But the door was opening. The bellboy, Kit thought. The blessed bellboy.

But it was not the bellboy. It was Abraham Lewis Gault. Sam scowled and came erect from the bed. Beside him, Abraham Gault looked thin and fragile and helpless. Sam grinned.

Gault slashed the grin off his face with a single murderous cut of the cane he carried.

Sam cursed and fell back, reaching for the knife on his hip. Abraham Gault stepped forward. Without removing his left hand from his pocket, he slashed with the cane again and again, always pushing Sam backward, never allowing him to get set.

Sam got the knife, finally, but it dropped from his fingers. Snarling, he turned on Gault with his bulk, but it was too late. He could not find Gault. His eyes and the flesh around his eyes had been cut and razored into a welter of blood.

Sam was blind.

He fell to his knees, groping, and Gault stepped behind him and prodded him with the cane. "Get up!"

Sam struggled to his feet and the cane point pushed him forward and out the door. Gault slammed the door, turned and wiped his cane with a snowy handkerchief. He dropped the kerchief in a trash basket, and glanced back toward the door.

"Carrion!" With this word, he dismissed the incident.

He turned to Kit. "Are you hurt, my dear?"

"I'm—I'm all right. Thank you."

"I came to suggest that you leave town. Affairs seem to have taken a violent turn. I'll see that you get to my private car and have it run down to Ogden."

KIT SAT crouched on the bed, holding her gown together. "What's happened to him? What have they done to him? Is he all right?"

"I'm sure he is."

"What do you...intend to do to him?"

"I? I will go about the business of protecting what is mine. If he gets in the way, he'll be injured."

Kit heard the roar of a passing miner band. "Injured. You mean... killed?"

"In the end, I expect him to crack. I think he'll run to save his own hide."

Kit bent her head into her hands.

Gault regarded her with a faint softness in his ice-blue eyes. "You're in love with him, aren't you?"

She didn't answer.

"I loved him, too. But that's over and done with. I pity you."

Kit started to say something, but at that instant a low rumble as of an earthquake sounded from the Hill. It rose and fell, faded and flowered into higher intensity. The building shuddered. Then the thunder faded and was gone.

"What—was—that?"

"I think the Gila has just been dynamited," Abraham Gault said. "Get ready. My men will get you to the depot." He turned toward the door.

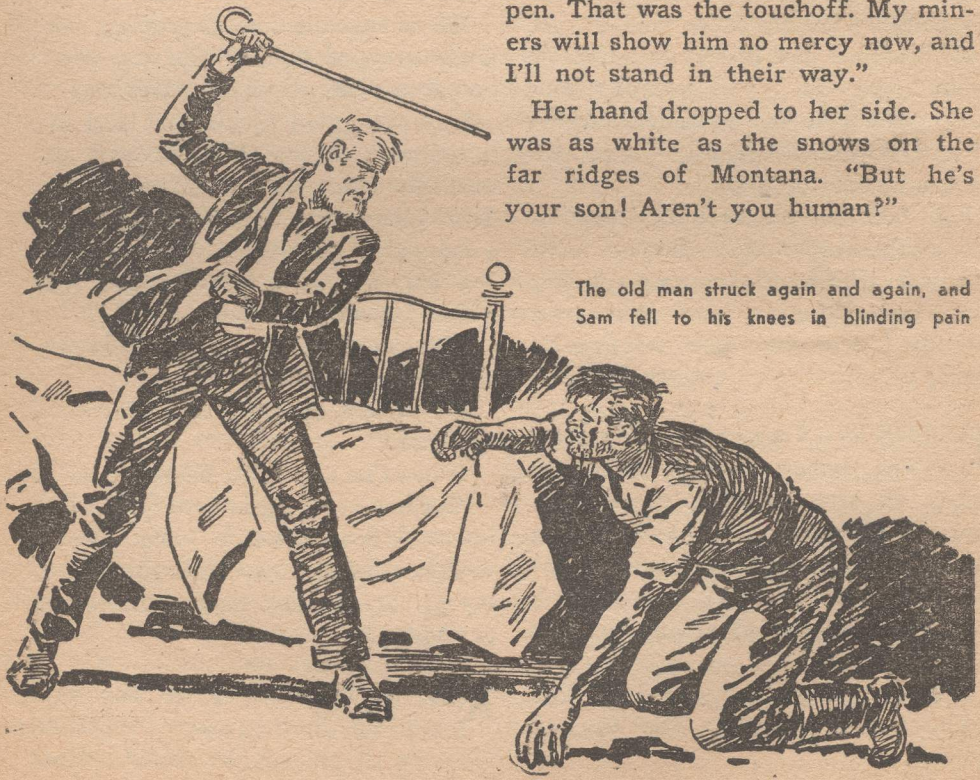
She grasped his arm and drew him back. "I'm going with you. You've got to wait for me!"

He stopped and regarded her almost pensively. "I wouldn't recommend it."

"You're going to the Hill, aren't you? You're going to see him. I want to see him, too. I've got to be near him."

"Can you stand it to see him smashed? That's what's going to happen. That was the touchoff. My miners will show him no mercy now, and I'll not stand in their way."

Her hand dropped to her side. She was as white as the snows on the far ridges of Montana. "But he's your son! Aren't you human?"



The old man struck again and again, and Sam fell to his knees in blinding pain

"He was my son. Humanity is a comparative quality."

"Wait for me. I'm going."

He shrugged, and turned away.

THE EXPLOSION in the Gila had a stunning effect upon Copper Butte. The repercussion in the Hill went out in wave after wave and stiffened the town, and for a long moment there was no movement anywhere. Men stood like statues in the streets. The torches burned unheeded in their hands. Then, each man turned to look at his closest neighbor.

Life returned quickly, and the roar again went up into the night sky. But louder now and more terrible.

The crazy idiot had blown up the mines! The Old Man had been right. He'd expected something like this, and now it had happened.

Were there any men underground? Sure there were. Ten—fifteen—a whole shift! Was it true that a shift had gone down? How many were killed? Nobody knows. They can't get in to find out, but somebody said they're screaming and yelling down there!

A whole shift killed and mangled!

Mike Toss, climbing the Hill with his foremen, turned and saw a vast blanket of torches sweeping up from behind. He stopped and waited, aghast at what was happening.

"Nothing will stop them now," he said. "It's riot and bloodshed and murder!"

Above him, he saw the flickering lights around the shaft of the Heiress. The Heiress miners were there, waiting, still loyal to the gangling maniac who had brought destruction on Copper Butte.

Straight toward them moved the maddened Gault miners, all brotherhood forgotten now. The lust to kill was paramount. The thirst for vengeance on everything and everyone connected with the Heiress overshadowed all else.

Mike Toss stood his ground, waving his torch frantically. "Wait a minute! Stop! Hold up! There wasn't anybody in the Gila! Damn it, there's an injunction on! Why would anybody be down there?"

The wave hesitated for a moment. Some of the men heard Mike Toss' words but the rest, pushing up from behind, heard only the roar from their own throats.

"Don't do anything you'll regret, for God's sake. You've got relatives up there and friends. They've done no harm!"

The mob swept Mike Toss and his group on up the Hill. It swallowed them up in its maw and carried them forward.

"Tis a dark night for Copper Butte," Toss moaned as he was pushed along. "It was a black day that thieving renegade ever came to our town."

AMPLE WARNING had been given before the powder blasts were discharged under Richard Gault's drifts in the Gila. Careful check had been made, and there were no miners anywhere underground.

Only Richard Gault himself had gone down to prowl the reaches of his drifts and crosscuts. He had no fear of the mob. In reality, he considered them stupid, and he knew they'd quiet down as soon as the injunction was lifted. There was nothing to be feared from a mob. They'd vented their wrath. They were through.

Nor was his father going to blow

up the Gila. Richard Gault had that judged for what it was, too. Mere rumor. Words used in this game of wits to intimidate the men.

But Richard Gault wouldn't be intimidated. Even now, he was prowling the lower levels laying plans for new forays into the Gila ore body. The future was quite clear in his mind. First, he was sure that the elder Gault would not allow the injunction to stand another twenty-four hours. Gault Ore and Mineral couldn't afford it. He knew that his father's next move would be an injunction against the Heiress that would in all probability stick.

But that wasn't going to stop Richard Gault. He grinned mirthlessly under his carbide lamp. He had his men solidly behind him. They'd do what they were told, and they'd go right on taking ore out of the Gila. Richard Gault needed money now more than anything else. In order to bring Gault Ore and Mineral to its knees, he had to have money for the legal fight that lay ahead. That money must come out of the ground. He chalked a white mark on the wall of a crosscut. That made four marks, four new drifts to be driven into the Gila ore body.

Then, the whole Hill rocked and shivered beneath him, and as he was hurled upward, against the roof of the crosscut, there was a single thought in Richard Gault's mind: The dirty unprincipled beast! He blew the mine!

The airsweep through the tortured rises and drifts and crosscuts was terrific. A hurricane blast that tore the breath from his lungs and rolled him along the floor of the crosscut like a dry leaf. He came up hard against the wall of a bend and gasped for breath as the wind held him pinioned forcefully to the wall.

His light had been snuffed out by the first savage gust but, oddly enough, his cap remained on his head.

The action faded slowly. The roaring wind reversed itself and swept back through the crosscut. The rumble and roar of splitting granite lessened. Only small fragments were falling now and Richard Gault, stretched on the floor of the crosscut, looked to his flesh and bones.

No bones were broken. He got to his feet, sucking air back into his lungs, and found that his body was still working. There were no telltale pains from within him. He'd been in a cut between two winding drifts and had thus escaped the full brunt of the blast. But he was in darkness, and blood was running down the side of his head. He found the scalp wound above his ear. It was superficial.

He grinned, suddenly happy. The Old Man had overshot himself! The town would never stand for this. They'd tear Abraham Gault to pieces. Even a case hardened western mining town wouldn't stomach this sort of barbarity. Abraham Gault was through! Richard Gault was in the saddle! But he had to get out of here. He had to find the shaft and reach the surface. He clawed his way through the darkness, hoping the Heiress shaft hadn't collapsed.

A WAR was in progress on the Hill; a war that went down in the history of Montana as the Battle of the Heiress. Two thousand miners armed with clubs, knives and fists, formed a great circle around the collar of the shaft. Within this circle, shoulder to shoulder, stood two hundred of the men who had cast their

lot with the invader, the upstart, the challenger of the Copper Trust. They waited silently. They were loyal and ready to fight.

The outer horde poised on the edge of battle and the shout went up: "We want Hughes!"

The hoisting engineer stood firmly at his post. Here was mining tradition that even riot and death could not displace. So long as there was a man down under, the bloodshed could eddy and flow, but the hoisting engineer was inviolate. No one would molest him. "Stand away!" he yelled. "Hughes is down the shaft! Stand away!"

Back from the scene of action, Kit Douglas tore at Abraham Gault's arm. "Did you hear that? Did you hear what he said? Richard is down there! You've killed him. You've killed your son!"

Abraham Gault made no move. He stood coldly, impersonally erect, staring at the mob. A slim, bright-bladed rapier hurled point downward into the ground. That was Abraham Gault.

"Most unfortunate, my dear. He was warned. There is nothing I can do."

Kit's reply was cut off as the attacking mob moved in. A great surge of vicious manpower sweeping in on the defenders. Kit was sickened, as she saw the last thin veneer of civilization wiped from these men. There was the sound of clubs against flesh and bone; the screams of pain; the lower pitched bullroars of passion.

Kit clung to Gault's arm, and he patted her hand gently. "It isn't as bad as it looks, my dear. They're using clubs mainly, and I doubt if anyone will be killed. A few broken heads possibly. We have thirty armed policeman ready to move in when the heat dies down just a little."

Kit turned and stared at him in wonder. His cold blooded calculations were even more stunning than the pitched battle. "You're—you're not human!" she breathed. "You're a machine. This is just another weapon you're using to gain your ends." Her mouth twisted in contempt. "Who are you to call Richard by any foul name? You're two of a kind, right out of the same mould!"

He did not look at her. "I use whatever weapons I can in a finish fight," he said coldly. "This isn't a struggle for pennies, my dear."

She drew away from him, shuddering.

Now, there was a lull in the fighting. Men stopped with their clubs half-arced, with fists scant inches from bloody faces. The hoisting engineer had yelled, "Stand away! Cage going down." The nonchalance of the man was almost ludicrous. He could have been merely bringing another snatch of ore up from the Heiress.

Action hung in midair as the cage went down. There was a breathless pause. It reversed and started toward the surface.

"He's coming up," Kit gasped. "He's coming up to be killed! Aren't you going to do something?"

Abraham Gault smiled without mirth. "Possibly my luck will hold," he said. "We shall see."

A SINGLE man was moving, pushing his way through the pack, as the cage moved up the Heiress shaft. A single man was going about some business of his own. He gained the collar and began pushing men right and left. And the men fell back because he was Mike Toss and he had authority.

Swiftly, he cleared a circle around the collar while the cable whined and the cage came toward the surface. The cage came into view, and there was Richard Davis Gault in the center of the open circle.

"Stand back," Mike Toss screamed. "Stand back and away, all of you! This thieving blackleg belongs to me! He's mine!"

Richard Gault stepped from the cage. He was a grim figure. His shirt was torn, and his huge torso was streaked with blood. The cut on his head had caked over, and the blood was turning dark. He looked like a malevolent Satan rising out of hell.

"This man is mine!" Toss screamed.

Richard Gault moved forward and the circle moved with him. Mike Toss moved also in the circle, stepping backward like a cat as, by common consent, they sought level ground for the coming battle. Richard Gault wore a fixed grin on his bloody face. His teeth flashed white from the flickering torches. All around him, men who had been lately belaboring each other stood side by side, held in check by the greater drama.

Someone cursed the darkness—someone back in the pack—and there was a concerted movement. These men were not going to be cheated. They wanted to see the show. Swiftly, kerosene was thrown on the walls of the Heiress tool shed. Seconds later the shed was a giant torch in itself, lighting the circle in which stood two men crouched and ready for battle.

"You licked me once," Toss said, "but I'm still a better man than you are. I had time to think, and I know why you licked me. You can't do it again."

"Any time you're ready," Richard Gault said.

There were no preliminaries. Toss, his great shoulders hunched down, moved in. Richard Gault waited. His head was low, his knees bent. His arms hung loosely at his sides.

MIKE TOSS came in slowly like a man walking up to a door—no rush, no hurry. When he was within range, Gault's right arm came up. It lashed out like a piston. Mike Toss dropped like a stone, and the fist passed over his head. He came up from the crouch with his right shoulder hunched forward. The shoulder crashed into Gault's thighs. Gault lost balance and went down. For an instant, he lay outstretched, prone, defenseless.

That instant was what Mike Toss had hoped for. As Gault went down, Toss came out of his crouch. When Gault hit the ground, Toss was already in the air and Gault could see the vicious spiked boots slicing down from above.

Gault had only time to stiffen himself. He hardened the muscles of his abdomen, strained against them. His eyes closed as the boots came down squarely upon his belt buckle with the sound of a man jumping on a slab of Heiress granite.

Richard Gault's muscles held. His guts were not torn to pieces as they should have been. But an overpowering nausea swept up through his body. It was like red fire, blinding him.

He twisted away and Mike Toss lost footing and went down. Richard Gault struggled to his feet. He was full of a sickness such as he had never known. Blindly, he sought for Toss, but the ground was heaving under him and he couldn't find his enemy. He staggered backward and there was Toss—on his feet—driving in.

RICHARD GAULT had an instinctive sense of timing. Now, it came to his aid. Without order from his brain, his right arm came up and pistoned out. It smashed an iron fist squarely against Mike Toss' jaw. It cracked like a pistol. It was a blow calculated to break the neck of a horse. But the sickness within him came flooding up and took the small killing edge off the blow.

Toss went backward staggering. He was on his heels, arms flailing for balance. He found the balance and straightened away. A grin split his face. It turned into a laugh; the laugh into a roar. He shook both fists over his head in sheer animal joy.

"Me and the Old Man!" he yelled. "You stepped out of your class this time, mister! You stepped out of your class!" And he drove into Richard Gault like a battering ram.

He took two punishing smashes full in the face, but he was in; he was in past the fists and they could no longer stop him. He wrapped his arms around Richard Gault, and they were like the death grip of a grizzly bear. He bent Gault backward, brought a knee up into his groin and slammed him to the ground.

He was on top of Gault instantly, his knees holding the fallen man helpless. His fists began working—a deadly chop—chop—chop, under which flesh and bone could not survive.

That horrible sound went on, and yet there was no cry for mercy, no sound of pain.

"Say it, damn you!" Toss grated. "Say—it—damn—you!"

But Richard Gault said nothing, and finally Mike Toss got to his feet sobbing and staggered away.

The shack flared brightly, throwing weird shadows on the strangely subdued men.

Nearby, Abraham Lewis Gault stood erect and unbending. But there was a horrible, empty look in his face, and there was a woman in his arms.

Catherine Douglas had mercifully fainted.

OVERNIGHT, Copper Butte was again an amiable, robust, lusty mining town—nothing more. The mob spirit died like a troubled breeze. Friends and brothers who had fought on the Hill stood shoulder to shoulder at the bars and walked side by side through the streets. Maniacs who had waved torches in the night walked solemnly in the wake of Yancey Davis' coffin and said he'd been a pretty good fellow. Drank a little too much maybe, but old Yance had been all right.

A collection for the building of a new court house was oversubscribed in two hours. The subject of the Heiress and the man who had turned Copper Butte upside down, was left strictly alone.

Not so with Abraham Gault, however. He was still the Old Man, and they cussed him out with the usual frankness. He represented the Copper Trust, and they still had the right to hate that vague and slightly undefined behometh. No one could take away their privilege of hating the Copper Trust.

Thus did Copper Butte return to normal.

RICHARD GAULT stayed in his room at the National House. He would open the door to no one. Kit finally gave up. As she walked down the hall after her latest attempt to see him, his door opened and a bell-

boy came out carrying a saddle pack. Kit blocked the bellboy's path.

"Is he...going away?"

The bellboy shrugged. "I guess so, Miss. But he ain't going by train. He's got a horse waiting downstairs."

"Then get me one, too."

Kit returned to her room and was dressed when the bellboy knocked. "It'll be about fifteen minutes," he told her.

To Kit, the fifteen minutes seemed like two hours. Then, she was following the bellboy downstairs and her heart was pounding.

He stopped and turned. "Were you figuring on going with Mr. Hughes?"

"Yes. I'll wait for him."

"He's gone, lady. He left half an hour ago."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I'm sorry. But you can catch him, maybe. He took the West Bend road toward—well, toward California, I guess."

Kit rode hard along the West Bend road, and there was nothing ahead. Then, she saw a speck moving the winding trail toward the lower ridges of the Continental Divide. She punished her mount.

The speck grew larger, and then he was there higher on the trail in front of her. She waved and called out.

He stopped and turned and looked backward. A moment of this, and he was again moving forward and there was a cry in her throat.

"Wait! Wait! Please!"

There was hesitation in his movements. Then, he pulled his horse to a final stop on the ridge above.

Kit Douglas urged her tired mount, and there was wonder in her mind: Why do I do this thing? What is this insane urge within me? Why must I be with him in spite of all, and what will my future be?

But she required no answer because, above her, filling her sky, was the smashed and beaten figure of Richard Gault, and Kit whispered, "My darling. Oh, my darling!"

THE END

LOST CABIN MINE

★ **By Carter T. Wainwright** ★

THE STORY is that seven German miners were prospecting along the south fork of Crazy Woman Creek, and there discovered gold. It was 1865, and they should have had more sense than to spend any time in that land of angry Sioux. But gold fever is a potent force, and the men seem to have disregarded the danger from Indians, or at least decided to take their chances. Their strike was a good one, and the party hurriedly threw up a cabin and settled down to pickaxing in earnest. In a week's time, they are reported to have dug out seven thousand dollars worth of gold.

Then, the Indians descended upon them, and killed them all except one. The survivor of the massacre managed to escape to the gold fields of Montana, and with him he carried the evidence of the gold strike.

He had no trouble in getting together a party to return with him to the cabin at the base of the Big Horn Mountains. This band of men were well-armed and wary of Indian attack. They were prepared, it seemed, to begin profiting from the new gold field. The German who was leading them seemed to know where he was going, and assured them they would soon be there.

And then, suddenly—the man went mad! He waved his hands, he ran around in circles, he laughed insanely. So that was the end of that. Though the other men in the party searched long and diligently, they could not find the lost cabin nor any trace of the gold strike. Nor has it been found to this day.

Thus goes the legend of the Lost Cabin Mine, one of many stories which abound in the West concerning gold mines which have been discovered and then apparently lost for all time. Almost every mountain has its tale of a lost mine.

Are they true, as passed down from one generation to the next? Are they at least based on fact? No one knows for sure. But prospectors still roam the deserts and the mountains, still searching and hoping.

RISKY BUSINESS

★ By Mildred Murdock ★

THE WILD horse has always been a part of the Western scene, and capturing him is seldom easy, but a venture requiring great resourcefulness, stamina and determination. The cattlemen's reaction to the wild horse was to shoot him, as he was a serious nuisance to the business of cattle raising. Others, however, caught the wild mustang for profit or sport. The term "mustanger" came to be applied to one who made a vocation, for at least part of the year, of chasing the wild horse. Professional buffalo hunters, deprived of their livelihood because they had killed all the buffalo, became the first mustangers, Excepting, of course, the Indians, who had been capturing wild horses since long before the West began to be populated by the white man.

There were many methods of pursuing, and sometimes catching, the wild horse. One of the methods was called creasing, which means to shoot the animal in the neck, close to the spinal column, so that he is stunned enough for a man to approach and tie him up. The trouble with this method was that it failed many more times than it succeeded, and dozens of horses were killed for every one caught. It was entirely too difficult a proposition to make the completely accurate shot required. The method was tried only by amateurs who rarely succeeded, or by professionals who badly wanted a certain horse and had the opportunity for a shot.

SOMETIMES, a snare was used. This was a rope, fastened to a sapling or limb, hidden on a trail which the herd was expected to use, or along which they were driven by the hunter. The lead horse would be trapped by the foot or the neck. The trapped animal would then do a great deal of lunging and threshing about, and the chances were that it would end up by being hooked to death. So this method, likewise, could not be depended upon for success.

The greatest sport, practiced most often by amateurs, was chasing the horses and then catching one with a lasso. By this method, there was apt to be a great deal of chasing, and very little catching. Sometimes, a band was enclosed in a large circle by a group of riders, and this gave a little more opportunity for a catch; but the horses were speedy and wily and knew the country over which they traveled, and were not easily roped. The ones that were caught were usually the colts and the poorer horses which could not go quite so fast.

In using the lasso, the end was fastened to the saddle or tied to the neck of the mount, while the loop caught the wild horse around his neck or a foot; or, again, the loop was at the end of a long stick held by the rider, making the capture more easy, providing the rider could get fairly close to the mustang.

Once a wild one was roped, however, the battle was not even half over. For the wild horses resisted desperately, and usually had to be choked almost to unconsciousness before they could be handled. Naturally, this was quite a job, and the hunter and his horse were sure to be pretty badly shaken up, or worse, before the mustang was finally tied so that it could not escape. Often, it was tied to a placid old mare or a burro, and in this way was brought in to the corral.

ROPING WAS also done from a place of concealment near a water hole. In the desert country, horses will go without water for a couple of days before hunting out a water hole, then will drink so much that they will not be able to run as fast or as long as usual. Taking advantage of this fact, the cowboy watched while the horse he desired drank its fill, then on his own fresh mount he gave chase, and was able to catch, rope and subdue the wild horse without too much risk.

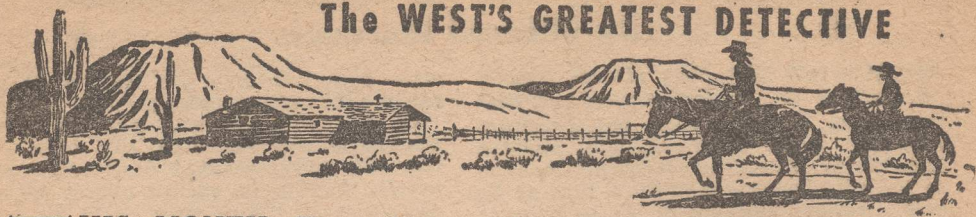
Then, there was the "walk down" method, used either for individual horses or, more often, for catching a large group all at once. Professional mustangers, who were out to catch as many horses as possible in a season, depended on this method, and used it with many variations. It consisted of keeping the animals constantly on the move, until they were tired enough so that they could be driven into a corral. The most successful corral for this purpose was one built with wide spread wings at the entrance, like a funnel. Once the horses were inside the funnel, the hunters closed in swiftly, and the horses were enclosed by corral walls before they realized what was happening. Often, the mustangers worked in relays to keep a herd of horses moving night and day, and the animals were given no opportunity whatever for rest or food or water, until they became so exhausted that they were easily driven when the men desired them to go.

The horses had to have water, no matter how wary they might grow as they were hunted, and so one of the most successful means of capturing them was a corral built around a water hole. Salt was used inside the trap as bait. Also, tame horses were placed there for the curious wild ones to investigate.

All of the methods involved a great deal of risk for the hunters, their horses, and the animals which they were chasing. Many a good saddle horse was killed or crippled or wind-broken in a hunt which resulted in a catch of only a colt or two and a few somewhat decrepit mustangs. Like the big fish, the really good wild horses usually got away.

MEMOIRS of JOHN SHEVLIN

The WEST'S GREATEST DETECTIVE



THIS MONTH, I'm going to tell you where to find some gold; about forty pounds of dust that was mined somewhere in the Gila range of what is now Arizona, carried across the state, and returned again to the earth.

If you're going to go hunting this cache, I'll even tell you what to look for. First, get a map of Arizona and locate the Eagle Tail Mountains. This is a formidable spur of the Rockies lying roughly in the west central part of Arizona. Set up your expedition with an eye to spending a little time down there, because you may not be able to walk straight to the cache.

When you get to the Eagle Tails, look for an overhanging cliff at the base of which is a natural rock barricade where a man could—for a respectable length of time—hold off a fair-sized army. This barricade is located beside the mouth of a narrow canyon. The canyon has a bend in it some hundred yards long, and it is impossible to tell, from the barricade, whether there is another outlet or not.

Look for the bleached bones of two dead men—one in the barricade proper, and the other somewhere up the canyon. These bones may or may not be there. If you can't find them, it doesn't mean that the gold isn't there, but if you do find them, you can be certain that you've struck pay dirt. This is the story:

SOMETIME in the year 1867, two men were riding hard across what is now central Arizona. They were traveling west, and they were carrying about forty pounds of gold dust.

A few days earlier, they had not possessed that gold. It had been the property of an old prospector who had no doubt put in a great deal of time and effort in digging it out of the Gila mountains.

The two had jumped the old prospector there; jumped him after he had sacked his dust and was ready to quit the claim upon which he'd been working. They relieved him of his treasure but did not, to their later sorrow, kill him.

Their original plan had been to head south toward Mexico, but they'd been frustrated in this when the old miner somehow contacted help, and they found a pack of vigilantes on their heels.

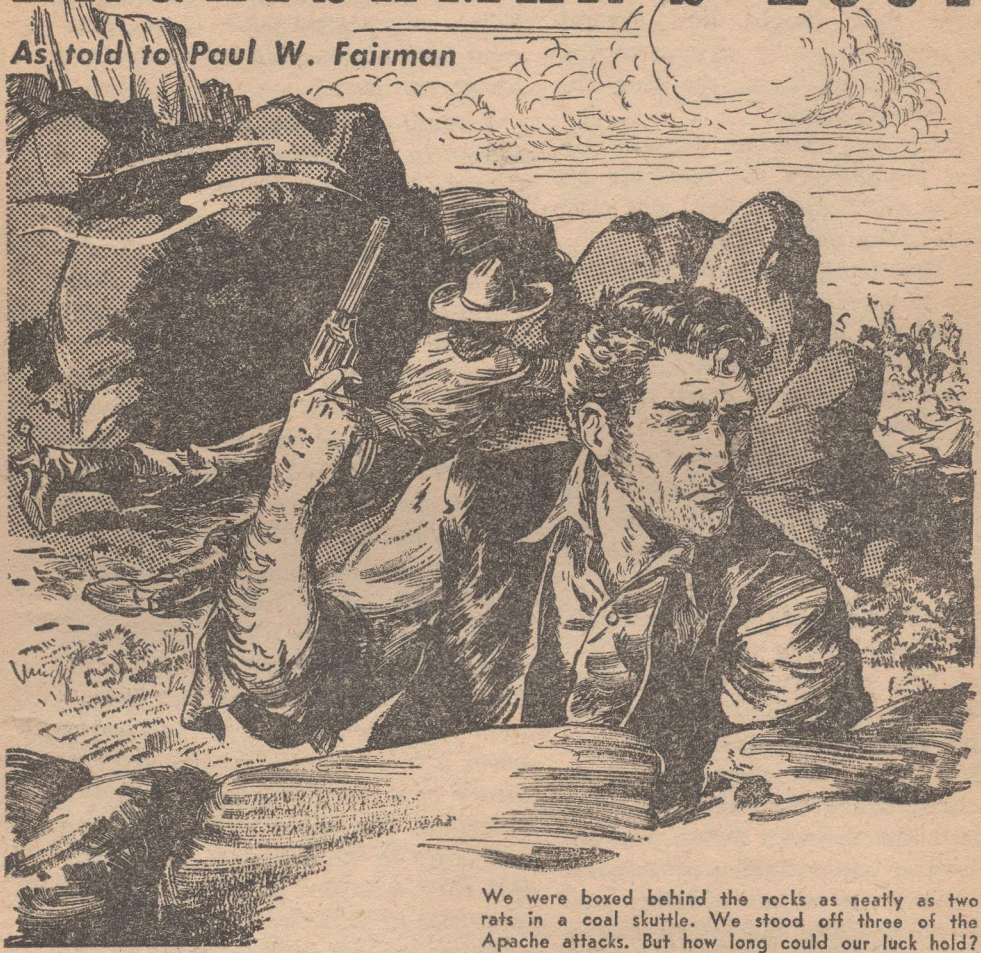
The westward retreat was forced upon them by this twist of fate. Why they continued to move westward after shaking off the pursuers is not quite clear; possibly they felt that California was as good a goal as any.

A few things are definitely known about these men. One of them was called Pete; he wore two guns and had a wooden leg. The other was a well-educated Englishman. Both men were criminals, but there is good indication that they were not murderers.

The Englishman was evidently the leader. He had an orderly mind, and an excellent command of language. He carried with him, among other things, a small black book .but,

The Case of the ENGLISHMAN'S LOOT

As told to Paul W. Fairman



We were boxed behind the rocks as neatly as two rats in a coal skuttle. We stood off three of the Apache attacks. But how long could our luck hold?

strangely enough, no pencil. This did not stop him from making certain notations in the black book, however. It appears that, in lieu of a better writing instrument, he sharpened down the tip of a lead bullet. With this, he neatly printed comments in his black diary.

Wednesday—We did not underestimate the amount of dust, but we made a serious mistake in not eliminating the old man. Caught him as he was leaving the Gilas with about forty pounds. He circled around and set the bobbies after us. We turned west. Shook them off but are still not safe.

Friday—Pete found a spring and just in time. The horses were fagged. We replenished our water supply. I took a bath.

THE COUNTRY across which the two men traveled was, in those days, quite treacherous. Pete, then, must have known the West quite

well. Otherwise, the two would never have made safe progress across such a wide area in such a comparatively short time. Also, the Englishman must have been new to the land, because Pete taught him several tricks well known to natives of the area. Several of these, the Englishman dutifully noted.

A horse can carry on indefinitely if you periodically rub moisture on its nose and keep the hard dry cake from forming on its lips.

But if Pete had the experience and ability to survive travelwise, the Englishman was also possessed of valuable qualities. He had courage, quick wit, and the nerve to carry through in tight situations.

This was demonstrated when, somewhere in central Arizona, the pair came face to face with what the son of Britain called *a contingent of cavalry.*

At that time, there was almost continual unrest among the Apache Indians. The red brothers were then fighting a sullen and vicious war against all men with white skin, and no doubt felt that they were justified in so doing. And they probably realized that it was a losing war, because their tactics indicated desperation. They gave no quarter, and asked none. They showed no mercy whatsoever, and an Apache uprising was the most dreaded plague of the southwest. When these feathered devils moved, they traveled fast and light, leaving their pathway strewn with multiple examples of their skill in the art of butchery.

So it was perfectly logical that the two desperadoes should encounter a column of cavalry during that time and in that country.

Pete wanted immediately to backtrack and avoid any contact with men in uniform. The Englishman, however, would not have it so.

Turning tail in this situation would have been the height of stupidity. I impressed this upon Pete and we rode forward to intercept the column. Pete faced it through but the little beggar was scared white. I could almost hear his wooden leg rattle from his nervousness.

I could detect no suspicion whatsoever in the leader of the troop, a Captain Weathers. He was a cleancut lad and appeared to me to be rather young for his job. He was a graduate of the American Sandhurst, West Point, and was extremely earnest and resolute concerning his job.

I inquired as to the whereabouts of California and the main reaction among the men was one of amusement. This I liked as I have always found that a show of ignorance in such situations is the best front.

They gave us some of their rations and I had a long conversation with Captain Weathers. The contingent was on the lookout for Indian trouble. They had been more or less permanently assigned to this job and had to cover a fixed figure in miles and territory in a given length of time. We remained the night with them and left early in the morning. At no time did they question us as to our past activities or what we carried.

When we left a great many of the chaps waved us on our way. A fine body and a most pleasant experience.

The two forged on west at a comfortable gait. They were no longer worried about pursuit, as is shown by subsequent entries in the Englishman's book. Pete must have been mentally unburdened, and happy in the knowledge of a successful endeavor. This was noted briefly by his companion: *Pete sleeps well.*

And there was a certain wry humor in this notation, because the writer himself definitely did not sleep well.

He, of course, did not know that he was traveling straight to his doom, but various entries in the black book show an uneasiness about the future. *...and somehow this has all the feeling of an ill-fated expedition.*

Even though we had to change our plans things still seem to be working out with good fortune. I suppose there is no reason for my apprehension.

THEY WERE a strange pair, these two—probably as far apart mentally as the poles. How the partnership was formed originally, one cannot guess. The Englisman, evidently finding little response in Pete, conversed a great deal with his diary. That was probably the reason for its existence.

I shall get back around the Horn at the earliest opportunity. I shall buy a small place no doubt in Surrey and will maintain a flat in London. What I'd give to have a block of good Thames fog dropped squarely down on this accursed desert!

It was on a Sunday that disaster struck. Pete spotted the Apaches, about fifty in number, while the pair were crossing an open salt flat. They were probably noticed by the redskins at about the same time.

Flight was the only alternative. Pete led the way, driving northwest on a tired horse with the Englishman hard on his heels and the Apaches hard on the heels of the Englishman.

Whether Pete knew of the barricade, or whether he found it by chance, will never be known. At any rate, the pair made it, and a few well-placed rifle shots brought their pursuers to a standstill.

The Englishman's observations, put down later, are of interest:

Tuesday—We couldn't bring our horses in, but the animals did not stray. They stood, heads hanging, in front of the barricade and several of the savages tried to frighten them into bolting. When this did not succeed they brought them down with their wicked little short-bows.

There were other entries which told of his debate with Pete as to the advisability of risking flight up the canyon. The Englishman had favored it, but Pete was afraid of a dead end in which they would be hopelessly boxed. They decided against the move.

...although it couldn't have made much difference. We are boxed in here behind the rocks as neatly as two rats in a coal skuttle. I think it would have been better to have chanced the canyon. That way we would have at least come to grips with our fate and have gotten it over with...

We haven't done badly in holding these beggars off. I wonder if they ever give up?

The "beggars" did not give up. They were amazingly tenacious, even for Apaches. During the course of the following day, the two renegades successfully stood off three attacks. They killed seven braves, and wounded over a dozen. There was one attempt under cover of darkness by a single brave who died from a slug fired full in his face by Pete.

However, the two were left pretty much alone after dark, as Indians are not inclined to carry hostilities beyond sundown.

ON THURSDAY, Pete got an arrow through his right bicep. The Englishman washed the wound with part of their remaining water supply, and bound it up. The wound infected, however, and on Saturday Pete was delirious for a time. The Englishman had to restrain him for-

cibly from staging a one-man counter attack across the salt flat in front of the barricade.

The crisis was faced on the following day when they had been without water for twenty-four hours. Here, we must conjecture somewhat as to events, but it appears to me that what happened was this:

They decided that they must make a break up the canyon and take the chance of running into a trap. If the canyon had an opening at the far end, there was the possibility of fighting a retreating battle and losing themselves in what the Englishman had referred to in another entry as: *...the intricate mazes in these Eagle Tails.*

Obviously, Pete knew where they were, and was sure of his ground. For some reason known only to themselves, they decided that only one of them should brave the canyon. Possibly their strategy involved a rear guard protection by the other, while the one checked for a canyon exit. The Englishman's only reference to this plan was a terse comment: *Pete won the toss.*

Later, he went into more detail—and still later, details I am forced to omit.

I failed miserably. And yet, did I fail? Was it my fault? God knows I did my best. I put bullets into six of the devils but I couldn't keep them away from that canyon. They went screeching in after Pete like a legion of demons. He tried to defend himself. He fired five or six times before they smothered down on him and dragged him out. Oh God! How can such things be?

The above entry was made much later, evidently after it was all over and Pete was dead. It was a part of a great deal of writing, the whole of which is a classic picture of degeneration. The degeneration of a man into an animal.

The bulk of this will not be quoted here. Realism is one thing, but stark, staring horror is quite another. Certain chosen excerpts tell the story clearly:

The cunning swine tied him down just beyond rifle range. I've tried but I can't reach him with a bullet...

They are happiest when he screams...

I think he is dead now. He hasn't moved for some time...

Then after Pete died they pulled up the stakes but left them fastened to his wrists and ankle. One of the pigs took his wooden leg and stumped around to the amusement of the others. I've heard that Indians do not laugh. That is sheer tommyrot.

THE TIME element vanishes now. From here until the end could have been hours or days, but certainly not more. The last two sane entries in the book were these:

I buried the dust under the floor of this rat trap. They could not know we had it and, God willing, they'll never find it. I can think of no reason why they should dig for it. Oddly enough, it is good to finally have a worthy motivation. I will never use that dust but it is in my mind that they must not find it. Translated into guns which they do not now possess, they could multiply what I have seen a hundredfold...

They dragged Pete back up the canyon. Why, I don't know. I did not fire at them and possibly that was a mistake. They will become bolder. But they can enter here only one at a time so an assault is out of the question.

The other entry is short:

I suppose I must destroy my book. I'll not be able to use it now.

This is followed by a line of well known verse: *A corner of some foreign field that is forever England.*

The end of the Englishman's diary is unreadable. The bullet he was using wore down to a flat end, and he no longer bothered sharpening it. Yet, he continued writing for several pages. What happened after that, one can only conjecture.

THE DIARY from which I have quoted is in my possession. It was presented to me in 1901 by Sam Barton, a Texan with whom I struck up a correspondence. I was doing some features at the time for various newspapers, and Barton contacted me through an editor and said he had a story he'd like to have me write. He told me of this diary and, later, when he came to St. Louis, he brought it with him. Barton's stipulation was that his name be mentioned in the article. This I promised, but for one reason or another, the article was never written.

Barton said the book had been lying around in his home for some ten years; that an uncle of his, now dead, had gotten it from a man in a saloon who was using the empty pages to keep tally on a solitaire game he was backing against a cowhand for five dollars a card. This could be accurate, because there are such figures in the back of the book.

Barton was supposed to pick up the book from me after I wrote the feature, but time dragged on, and later I heard that Barton had died. I never got around to sending the thing back, and now I wouldn't even know where to mail it.

At a time when my interest in the affair was high, I had plans of looking into it; to see if I could find any record of who the Gila Mountain miner was; to try and trace the early troop movements and locate documentary evidence of Captain Weather's existence.

I never did these things because I had only so much energy to expend on the book, and I used it up in an effort to trace the Englishman. His name was in the notebook but, for obvious reasons, I haven't quoted it in this article.

I succeeded partially in verifying him—but only partially. Who he really was, I never found out.

But I see no reason why the gold shouldn't still be there.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The next story from John Shevlin's casebook, "The Case of the Blackened Banker", appears in the April 1950 *issue of* MAMMOTH WESTERN.

WAYS TO FIND GOLD

★ **By Louis L. Warren** ★

MANY A MAN entered the Gold Rush depending upon superstitions of some kind or another to help him find gold. The extreme ignorance of some people of even the rudiments of mining, when coupled with simple and credulous natures, made them ready prey for the fakers who were always around to exploit such people.

There was the gold magnet, a metal disc which was intended to be worn near the heart of the prospector. When gold was near, said the salesmen, the gold magnet would send electric shocks to the heart. Since gold was known to be deposited in the beds of streams, energetic and knowing salesmen found a ready market for diving suits, and for a telescope which was supposed to be effective for examining the bottom of streams.

The divining rod was used extensively, since it cost nothing and was believed in, at least half-heartedly, by a multitude of folks. A freshly cut forked piece of hazelwood was held lightly in a horizontal position. One end was supposed to dip down when it passed over a gold deposit.

By the freaks of fate which uncovered many an unexpected gold mine, some of this hocus-pocus occasionally paid off, thus keeping alive the faith for other prospectors.

PEACE IS A FIGHTING

And in order to maintain a law-abiding town, you must be willing to back the law up with your fists or guns

Of a sudden, the world tilted crazily, and he became entangled with flailing hooves driven by a savage fury yelling and lashing

WORD

By Frances M. Deegan

IT WAS ON a Sunday when Pat Murray first rode into Lordsville, which is probably the reason why the first person he spoke to was Lu Tolliver. Everybody else was in church, or at least out of sight during the Sabbath services.

There were three churches in Lordsville, and only five saloons. That's the kind of town it was. That's the kind of town Pat Murray was looking for—one with plenty of peace and quiet.

He was a lean, dark young Irishman with eloquent black eyes that could flick a man with a whip-like taunt, and caress a woman with heart

stirring tenderness, all in the turn of a moment. He had slender, quick moving hands which he carried a little away from his sides when he walked, although his slim hips were bare of guns. They looked bare, too, as if the guns had been there very recently.

He dismounted in the Sunday quiet, savoring the peaceful air of the town, and then discovered that the Elite Cafe was closed. He left his horse there and started along the board walk toward the hotel.

That was when Lu Tolliver broke up the Sunday peace by riding into town hell bent for election. She came larruping down the main drag in a cloud of dust, and when she saw Pat, she hauled up short and stared boldly. Her horse snorted and rolled his eyes indignantly. Under her brazen stare, Pat lifted his hat politely and kept on going. There may have been a hint of disapproval in his cold politeness.

She let him get past about six paces, and then she said, "Hey, stranger! What church do you belong to?"

Pat concealed his annoyance, and turned to look at her gravely. "I," he said, "am of the Mohammedan persuasion. I have already said my morning prayers."

"You could pass for an Arab at that. I'm a heathen myself. Not that I got anything against religion, it's the fool rules they make up to go with it." She glanced toward his horse, and then looked Pat up and down. "You're lookin' for a job," she stated with conviction.

Pat's annoyance increased. He knew he was travel-worn, but he hadn't thought he looked that hard up. If it came to that, she was no fashion plate herself. She sat astride the restless horse in worn levis and faded blue shirt. Her hat hung down the back of her neck, and a mass of tangled, auburn hair hung about her face. She had freckles and hazel eyes, a short nose and a willful mouth. She looked like a wild woman, and a very seedy one at that, not likely to be offering any jobs. And, therefore, it was none of her business whether he was or was not looking for work.

"Why, ma'am," he said mildly, "whatever put that in your mind?"

"You just came off the trail," she said bluntly. "You been ridin' a far ways, but you're not wearin' any side arms. Man gets to where he has to pawn his gun, it's time he hooked up with a payin' job."

"I'll think about it." He bowed, and started to turn away.

"Fifty a month," she said. "Job of Deputy Sheriff."

That stopped him, and he took another look at her. She was dead serious, scowling at him. "You the sheriff?" he inquired.

"I oughta be! My pa ain't the man he used to be. He should've had a son. Instead, he got me—and rheumatics. And a town full of culture and civilization. If Stem Baxter and his bunch decide to visit Lordsville, there ain't a man in town big enough to stop 'em."

"Your pa is the sheriff?"

"Yep."

"And who is Stem Baxter?"

"Mister, you sure must've come from a long ways off. Everybody in these parts knows Stem Baxter. He already owns three towns, and Lordsville is just about next on his list. It's prosperous, and it's got no protection."

"I take it you don't like this Stem Baxter. But what makes you think I'd be willin' to stand him off, if he decided to take over your town? He sounds like a successful operator.

Maybe I'd rather be on his side."

"Maybe," her voice was nasty, "you already are. That's the way he operates. Sendin' toughs in ahead of him to start trouble and then when it gets out of hand, he rides in with the rest of his gun slingers and offers to protect folks and their property—for a high price. I'm warnin' you right now, you better declare yourself, or get outa town. My pa ain't so crippled up he can't handle you saddle bums one at a time."

"Thanks for the warning," Pat said. "Now, you can run back to your pa and tell him Pat Murray is in town, mindin' his own business. And he don't aim to be pestered by any two-bit lawman snoopin' at his heels. Nor any of his relatives, either."

HE TURNED back toward the hotel, and noticed that church must have let out within the last few minutes. There was a group of well dressed people in front of the hotel. They seemed to be staring at him, and suddenly one of the women screamed and a tornado hit him.

The world tilted crazily, and he became entangled with flailing hooves driven by a savage fury yelling and lashing as he went down. He lost all sense of direction, tried to roll clear of the hollow thunder the horse made on the board walk, and felt the crushing drive of a sharp hoof in his side.

He was dimly and painfully aware of voices yelling, of strident anger in the Sunday quiet, and of hands pulling at him. Then, for a while, his shocked and battered body seemed to drift in a thick gray fog.

It was pain that brought him out of the fog, probing at him with long crooked fingers, maliciously intent on finding his most sensitive nerves. Anger came next and cleared the last of the fog. He became aware of his surroundings. He was lying on an iron bedstead in what was obviously a hotel room. Someone moved close and put a damp towel on his face. He reached up and yanked it off. The effort cast him something, but he glared at the face above him. Then, he was startled and a little frightened. It was the face of an angel. He had seen pictures of angels with softly curling blonde hair, wide innocent blue eyes, and gentle faces. But this was no picture.

His alarm must have been plain to see. A deep masculine voice soothed, "Take it easy, son. You're all right now."

"Oh, papa!" the angel said. "He is not all right. He—he might have been killed by that—"

"Hush now, honey. Don't you fret about it. Soon as we get Doc up here, we'll have this young man fixed up good as new." A big man moved up beside the angel and put an arm around her.

Pat focused his blurred gaze on a genial red face with calm gray eyes and a faded mustache. It was a complacent, well fed face, but it was friendly, too.

"Mighty nice o' you," Pat gasped, "to take this trouble—"

"No trouble, mister," the big man said. "We don't aim to treat strangers the way you was treated. That was...a kind of accident. I'm Charley Anderson, Arrow A, and this is my daughter Violet. I sent my foreman after Doc Worth. He'll be along directly. And here's Mayor Tim Balsam. He feels right bad about what happened."

AROUND, red faced man rolled into view and beamed at Pat cheerfully. "The town of Lordsville regrets this, sir, but I won't trouble

you now with a formal apology. Your introduction to Lordsville has been painful, but I hope and believe the rest of your stay will be more enjoyable."

"Howdy," Pat said. "I'm Pat Murray."

"I hope you wasn't in a hurry," Anderson said. "Might be you'll be laid up a while."

"No hurry," Pat murmured. "I was ...just lookin' for a quiet place.... to settle down. I thought maybe this was it."

"Oh, papa!" Violet cried softly. "And see what happened to him! You've got to do something about that—that awful girl. This is too much. On Sunday, too!"

"Sure, honey. We will. We'll speak to Sheriff Tolliver, eh, Mayor?"

"You can count on that!" the Mayor boomed heartily. "I'll take steps to make it official this time. I'll see that the County Commissioners pass a resolution first thing tomorrow morning. Public disgrace... conduct unbecoming, and so on..."

By the afternoon of the second day, Pat's aches and pains had settled down to a steady, throbbing discomfort. His broken ribs were tightly bandaged, and the rest of him had been patched and rubbed with arnica. But none of that mattered nearly so much as the gentle presence of his ministering angel. Violet had insisted on staying at the hotel to take care of him. Each time he dozed, Pat woke to a fresh surprise at his amazing good fortune.

"The luck of the Irish!" he murmured, watching his beautiful nurse.

She was everything a man dreamed of beside a lonely camp fire. She was utterly feminine, the soft curves of her body were a delight to watch as she moved about the room with light-footed grace. And her voice came sweetly through lips that tantalized Pat, weak as he was, with the desire to kiss them.

Whenever she left him, he let himself drift into that light half-sleep that comes so easily to the injured, and in which dreams lurk, hoping to dream the thing he so ardently desired. Instead, he kept dreaming about a redheaded virago who chewed tobacco and slung a sixgun, and chased him endlessly over a scorching desert.

He came out of the chase, aching and sweating, aware that someone had entered the room. He saw a fat man standing there looking at him like a mournful bulldog. The big face was flabby and creased with old pain. The man nodded lugubriously, and clumped to the chair beside the bed. He gripped the back of the chair and lowered himself painfully to the seat and sighed.

"I'm Sheriff Anse Tolliver," he said unhappily. "I got to apologize to you fer what Lu—my daughter, Lucy Tolliver—fer how she acted. She's... Lu's kinda worried about me. She gets excited an'—"

"Don't take it so hard," Pat said, not liking the old man's air of humiliation. "You'd ought to talk her out of those wild ideas she's got."

"My fault, I reckon. I'm the one give her the ideas. But I can't git nobody else to listen to me."

"You mean about this Stem Baxter and his crew of wreckers?"

"THAT'S IT. He's a slick operator. Not even the U.S. Marshal can pin any of the dirty work on him. But it stands to reason he's behind it. He always shows up to save the pieces, an' first thing you know, he owns the town. Folks hereabouts seen what he done to other towns, but they don't think it can happen

here. They think they're as civilized as any town back East, an' things like that don't happen back East, so they can't happen here." The sheriff lifted his mournful eyes. "You from down Pecos way?"

Pat returned his gaze blankly. "If I was," he said, "I don't reckon I'd mention it. There's been so much gun fightin' down there, no man could come out of it with a clean book. I sure wouldn't want to be tabbed for one of those tough killers."

"I heard o' some o' them. Seems like I heard tell of a young fella with a name like yours. Pat Murray. I'm pretty sure that was his name. He was hell on wheels with a pair o' .44's. An' he fought clean, too. I never heard he went under..."

"They all go under, sooner or later," Pat said. "It's in the cards."

"I was kinda hopin' maybe you was him. A fightin' fool like that would sure be a big help around here, time the trouble starts."

Pat remained silent, his eyes studying a spot on the ceiling.

"Well..." The sheriff sighed hopelessly. "Even if you was him, I don't guess it would do no good to ask your help. Lu went an' spoiled it. She was smart enough to spot a good man, but she didn't handle it right. It ain't her fault she's got a temper. An' she just found out there was somethin' mighty queer goin' on out at the Ward brothers' Star W spread. Looks like the trouble will start there. I don't know..."

The old man's abject air of defeat made Pat squirm uncomfortably. Instead of sympathy, he felt only a young man's contempt, and his voice was irritated when he said, "Cheer up, sheriff. We all got to die some time, and bullets are better than bellyaches. At least, they're quicker."

"Oh, sheriff, you mustn't!" said a light, cool voice, and Violet stepped into the room. "Doctor Worth says he must be kept absolutely quiet, to give his bones and nerves a chance to knit. That was a very bad accident, you know."

"Yes, ma'am." The sheriff groaned to his feet and dragged off his hat. "I was just goin'. I only stopped in to..." The old man shook his head and moved clumsily to the door. "I sure hope you get better soon, son," he mumbled. "I...well, I'll be seein' you."

PAT HAD a momentary feeling of pity for the old sheriff, but then Violet was close, leaning over him and pushing his damp hair back with light fingers that tingled his brain.

"I'll wash your face," she said. "And then you can have a nice nap before supper. I've got a kettle of chicken broth simmering. You've got to get your strength back."

"Yes, ma'am," Pat murmured contentedly. "You've got no idea how much I want to get my strength back."

Pat's contentment increased as his body healed, and soon he was able to sit on the railed porch where he could view the quiet, orderly town. He looked at it dreamily, picturing a rosy future for one Pat Murray, whose turbulent past was done, now that he had found a peaceful haven and the girl he had dreamed about. He never doubted for a moment that he had come home at last, nor was there any doubt about the wonderful thing that was happening to Violet and himself.

The day she came into his room and found him dressed, her pretty smile turned to dismay. "I really should be getting back to the ranch," she said breathlessly, "but I...I hate to leave

you. A nurse feels that way about somebody she has taken care of, you know."

"I don't believe it," Pat said softly. "I don't believe you feel that way about every busted-up waddy you ever nursed."

Color flooded her smooth face, and she was suddenly shy, looking down at her tightly clasped hands. Her lips trembled, but she made no denial.

"If you go," Pat teased her gently, "I'll just naturally have to climb on my horse and follow you. You know that, don't you?"

"Oh, no. No, you mustn't do that, Pat! Doctor Worth says you won't be able to ride for days, maybe weeks."

In her distress, she moved closer. Pat lifted his arms, and she walked into them as naturally as a bird settling lightly into its nest. Pat kissed her tenderly, and the warm sweetness of it held them both in a spell that had nothing to do with time.

At last, she caught her breath with a little sob and let her bright head rest against his shoulder. "Oh, my dear," she whispered. "What will people say...me staying on here when you're up and around?"

Pat touched his lips to the fragrant hair. "I expect," he said softly, "they'll say we're in love. What I'm more interested in, is what your papa is going to say. I don't reckon he's goin' to like it at all when he finds out I'm takin' you away from him."

"But you won't be taking me away!" she cried joyously. "That day papa talked to you, he was impressed with your savvy about cattle ranching. He means to offer you the foreman's job on the Arrow A. Wes Gannon is getting old, and wants to quit."

Pat stared at her flushed face and wide blue eyes, astonished anew at his amazing luck. It seemed almost too good to be true. Some ancient Irish superstition stirred in him like a dire warning. When wishes were granted, you paid a forfeit, and sometimes the price was heavy. Then, his young confidence came back, and he was certain that no price could be too high for the treasure in his arms. He kissed her softly.

PAT WAS sitting on the hotel porch when the strangers rode in and, for the moment, he forgot his new outlook on a peaceful life. All his senses were instantly alerted, and he read the unmistakable signs of trouble as the men rode down the main street of the town and came on toward the hotel. There were five of them, fully armed, and they rode single file, keeping a nice distance between each rider, looking the town over.

The leader was a big, burly man with a ragged black mustache, and he rode straight to the hotel hitchrack and dismounted without once looking at his followers or giving any orders. He hit Pat with a hard stare and went inside to the desk. It was as if the whole thing had been rehearsed many times. The other four men came on and dismounted one at a time, and each found something to interest him, as if each man had ridden into town alone, and had nothing to do with the others. It was all too casual, too practiced, and Pat felt the familiar tingling along his nerves—until he recalled himself, and remembered that this was none of his business. He was a peaceful citizen with a future, and whatever these hombres were after, it had nothing to do with him.

The first man to follow the leader

was short, stocky, tough with red whiskers. He got down and strolled on past the hotel to the harness shop next door, and stared at the fancy saddle in the dusty window of the shop. The second man was a shifty-eyed bean pole with a loose mouth and no chin. He walked across the street and leaned against the wall of the barber shop as if he were waiting his turn, although the barber himself was sitting in his chair reading a paper. The third man was small and dark, and moved like a jumping-jack with quick jerks. He went back down the street toward the sheriff's office. And the fourth man was a pale-eyed blond, tall and lean, and limber as a bleached snake. There was a peculiar grace about his deliberate movements, a smooth flowing control that gave the suggestion of a treacherous speed waiting to strike. He drifted up on the porch and sat down beside Pat without appearing to notice him.

"Nice day," Pat said pleasantly.

The cold, pale eyes turned and looked him over contemptously. "Anybody ask ya?" the snake rasped.

"Well, excuse me, mister," Pat said meekly. "I been tromped, an' I been laid up for a spell. Fella gets kinda loneseome, just settin' around. Get's to the place where he'll talk to anything, talk to a mean-eyed sidewinder if he crawled up on the porch just about now."

The pale eyes reached for him with a hard and hungry stare, but Pat's lean face was bland and amiable, and totally innocent of any intention to cast slurs on the stranger.

The jumping-jack came back up the street with the sheriff. Tolliver's melancholy face was set in grim lines as he lumbered up the steps to the porch and paused there to look at the blond man, and then at Pat. He nodded, and his eyes were full of a somber meaning, but all he said was: "Glad to see you're feelin' better, son."

THE BURLY man appeared in the doorway. He glanced at Pat, and got a quick sign from the blond man before he spoke to the sheriff. For all his bulk, his voice came out in a high whine. "My name's John Blake. Owner of the Horseshoe B up in Freeland County. I been on the trail of three hundred head of stolen cattle wearin' my brand. I just found 'em."

"Uh-huh." The sheriff nodded gloomily. "They turned up one night on the Ward brothers Star W range. The Ward boys claim they don't know where the cows came from."

"Now, ain't that peculiar!" Blake whined angrily. "My cows, wearin' my brand, an' the law don't intend to do nothin' about it!"

"I didn't say that," Tolliver denied wearily. "You kin have your cows. The Ward boys don't want 'em."

"Huh! You expect me to believe that? You think I'm dumb enough to go after them cows, an' ride into an ambush? Oh, no! You're the law here, an' it's your job to—"

"You kin call in your other two watch dogs," Tolliver said. "You rode in here lookin' fer trouble, but you ain't goin' to get it. If you expect me to arrest Ben an' Chris Ward for somethin' I know they never done, you're goin' to be disappointed. But I'll ride out to the Star W with you whenever you're ready to start drivin' your cows home."

"You—an' who else?" Blake snarled.

"Jest me," Tolliver sighed.

Pat was still sitting on the hotel porch after the sheriff had ridden out with Blake and his hardcase

crew, and the town was quiet again. But the rosy glow had faded, and a nagging dissatisfaction had replaced the peace and contentment. Down the street, a group of townsmen had gathered, discussing the event. Pat watched them morosely, but they soon broke up and went on about their business, showing neither alarm nor suspicion.

LU TOLLIVER came riding into town from one of the lanes that branched off into the residential section. Pat sat up and stared in shocked disbelief. She still wore the faded shirt and levis, but a gun belt was strapped about her waist, and she carried a rifle in the saddle scabbard. She got down in front of the hotel and stalked inside without noticing Pat. He could hear her firing questions at the clerk, her voice rising angrily over his protests.

"Lu!" the clerk's voice shrilled. "For Heaven's sake, you can't do that!"

"Oh, shut up!" Lu snapped. "I wouldn't be doing it, if there was a man in this town with guts!"

Her quick steps came back toward the door and Pat got up, wincing involuntarily.

"Lu—" he said, and she turned her blazing contempt on him.

"Sit down, you lily-livered polecat! Two-gun Pat Murray! What a joke! I wish I knew what broke your nerve and made you start runnin'. I'd sure put myself out to make it happen again, right here an' now. You can't run far enough or fast enough to suit me!"

"Wait a minute, Lu," Pat said mildly. "You can't ride after your pa—"

"The hell I can't! And don't you dare try to hold me up now with a lecture on how a lady oughta behave. You better run an' hide behind the sweet smellin' skirts of that doll-faced little hypocrite you been makin' love to, before I lose my temper again an' finish the job she interrupted before!"

She jumped down the steps and yanked her reins loose, and swung into the saddle with more force than necessary. The solid slap when she connected with leather must have stung, because she rode off with tears in her eyes.

When Pat went through the lobby, the narrow-jawed clerk was standing outside the desk wringing his hands. He stepped in front of Pat indignantly.

"She's crazy!" he wailed. "I wish I'd never told her nothing. She—why, no tellin' what she'll do!"

Pat shoved him out of the way. "She'll get a skinful of lead, most likely," he growled, and limped back to his room.

THE ROAD out of Lordsville was wide and fairly level at first, but before he had gone a mile, Pat was sweating with the torment of forcing stiff and sore muscles to behave normally. He had never realized before how many muscles he used to sit on a horse. After another two miles, the tracks he was following left the road and cut across a stretch of barren country that was broken up by ragged gullies and rock formations. He gritted his teeth and turned off the road. The rheumatic old sheriff couldn't be enjoying the ride any more than he was, he thought grimly. And he, at least, had the satisfaction of knowing that the stiffness would loosen up after a time. He forced his attention on the land he was crossing, fixing it on his memory and noting its peculiarities.

In a deep gully, he dismounted and unstrapped his bedroll and took out his guns. He put a fresh load in each gun, and filled the slots in the specially made double gun belt, and strapped it on. He tried several swift draws from various positions, wiped the sweat from his face and neck, and took up the trail again. A sense of urgency was pressing him, although he knew the brief relief from the saddle had freshened him.

The tracks were plain enough until they reached the foot of a low ridge which marked the end of the broken country. The group of six men had ridden at a comfortable pace to this point; but here, one rider had pulled out and taken a position in the brush which covered the approach to the ridge, as if to guard their rear. He had remained there long enough to roll a smoke, but not long enough to finish it. The half smoked cigarette had been dropped, and his horse had turned away from the trail heading over the ridge at a long angle to the left.

The tracks of Lu's horse which had been easy to read over the others because of the faster pace, now left the trail, too, and turned to the right. Pat nodded approval. The girl was showing sense up to this point. The other rider was the trouble maker, angling off to make his play from an opposite direction, and start the racket. To the approaching group of men, it would appear that they were being attacked by the Ward brothers, and the ensuing gunfire could be made to look justifiable. An old trick, and a dirty one.

If there had been any doubt in Pat's mind before, there was none now. And the cold pressure of anger changed him in a way that was both subtle and startling. All the lazy charm of an amiable young Irishman had left him, and there remained a frozen-faced man hunter with a bitter mouth and implacable black eyes. He turned his horse to the left, stalking the lone trouble maker like an Indian in unfamiliar country.

The sharp crack of a rifle split the silence, and Pat spurred to the ridge top as sixguns opened up somewhere below him. He unlimbered his guns, and swore savagely when he discovered that a rough outcropping of stone hid the gunmen from his sight. A man cried out hoarsely, and the firing stopped. Down below, Sheriff Tolliver appeared, going at a clumsy, stumbling run toward the huddle of ranch buildings across a bare, open yard.

PAT HAD dismounted and was crawling out on the rock when the sixguns burst out again, and the heavy-footed sheriff threw up his arms and went forward on his face in a queer, shambling fall. Two rifles were talking now with sharp, spiteful cracks. Lu had opened up from a cleft of the ridge off to the right when her father fell, and the trouble starter was shooting at her from behind the ranch buildings. And now the attention of all of them was drawn to that lone dissenter.

Blake's high whine burst out with profane orders to "get the so-and-so from behind!" Two of his riders were starting away to circle the cleft, when Pat bellied down near the rim and loosed the deadly duet of his .44's. A horse screamed and thrashed, and the red-whiskered tough fell clear and rolled under the shelter of the rock. The jumping-jack howled as one of the lead notes smashed his leg, and his horse bolted. The others recognized the authority of the duet and bolted after him, Blake in the lead, followed by the chinless wonder, and

the unshaven little tough, now mounted on the sheriff's horse.

Pat emptied his guns after them, but a twist in the trail soon covered their retreat. He slid back off the rim and sat up, his fingers busy reloading while his eyes scanned the ridge and the buildings below for a sign of the trouble starter. He knew now it was the blond snake who had crawled around behind the Ward headquarters to start the ruckus. Then, he caught the sound of a horse pounding away to the left where the ridge broke into a canyon.

Pat rode back to the trail, passing the dead horse to enter the ranch yard. Lu was there before him. She had not moved her father, but knelt there in the dust holding one swollen, rheumatic hand and crooning softly as a mother to a sleeping child. She did not look up until Pat had dismounted and walked over to the other side of the fallen lawman.

He was ready for her anger, and welcomed it now because it would take her mind off her grief. "I was too late," he muttered.

"YES, I KNOW," she said quietly, and Pat stared at her in sharp wonder. There was neither anger nor reproach, only the slow tears which she seemed to be unaware of in this moment of revealing softness. Minutes before, she had been trying to kill men with a rifle, but now she was filled with a deep tenderness which left no room for hate or anger.

"I saw you," she added, as if that were explanation enough. As if, seeing him there on the rock, she understood how he had come there, and why.

"I'm sorry, Lu," he said bitterly.

"No," she returned, still softly. "He knew. He wasn't afraid. Only—only sad, because he knew he was bound to fail, and leave the town without any protection. He knew that, and still he tried. He was trying to get to the ranch house to protect the Ward boys, and...he didn't have a chance."

"The Wards?"

"They got Ben. Down there by the cook shack. Chris got away."

"Got away!"

"He was right to run," she said. "After his brother went down, he couldn't have stood them all off. His horse was saddled. He went past me. It was the only way out."

"He could run," Pat said somberly, "but the sheriff couldn't. Your father wanted me for a deputy. I think he'd be pleased if I took the job, even now. Don't you?"

She gave him a straight look in which there was a deep, knowing sadness. "Your—your girl wouldn't like it," she said.

"She'll understand," Pat said confidently. "She drove out to the Arrow A today. I think we'd be smart to ride over there, instead of headin' back to town."

"No!" Lu said sharply. "I can't go there! Why, they wouldn't even let me in the house; they think I'm—"

"You'll go," Pat said firmly. "I can't leave you here, and you are not going back to town alone. Those buzzards have already told their story, about how the Wards attacked them and killed the sheriff. Everybody knows you rode after your pa, and even a numbskull could figger you witnessed what happened here. You wouldn't last two minutes. Now that I've bought in, you'll do as I say."

The Arrow A spread was even richer than Pat had imagined. One glance at the home ranch buildings told him that. They were painted

white and green, and sprawled over several acres in a wide bend of a creek which fed a lush growth of willows, cottonwoods and brush, and even a small orchard of fruit trees.

"Fine place," Pat said conversationally.

Lu made no answer. Her face had become set in an unreadable mask, and she kept her gaze straight ahead. Before leaving the Ward ranch, they had carried the sheriff and Ben Ward into the house and left them there, and she had gone out to her horse and mounted without argument.

"The Arrow A," she had said tonelessly, "lies straight west of here. We can go through that canyon to hit the road." After that, she had nothing more to say.

PAT HAD allowed the silence to continue until now, but her set, stony look disturbed him as they neared the Anderson house, and he was fearful lest her uncertain temper explode and wreck his plans. He had no doubt but what the Andersons would offer her the shelter of their home, once he had explained everything.

Violet and her father were both standing on the wide central porch when they rode up. Three men who had been working the horses in a nearby corral, stopped their work and watched them curiously.

Pat took one look at Anderson's grim jaw, and Violet's shocked blue eyes, and stayed in the saddle. Until now, he had not thought of the appearance he and Lu made, both of them armed and dirty and smoke grimed. An unreasonable anger welled up in him, and he spoke harshly.

"The sheriff has just been killed," he said. "I brought Lu here."

"Tolliver?" Anderson barked unbelievingly. "Killed? No! How?"

"Gunfight. At the Ward ranch."

"I don't understand this at all," Anderson growled. "What are you doing here, wearin' guns an' talkin' gunfights? I thought you were laid up. Violet said—"

"Oh, papa!" Violet cried in a frightened voice.

Pat stared at them bleakly without speaking. He could neither understand nor control the resentment rising in him. This was his gentle angel, and her big kindly father. He loved them both...

But he and Lu still sat their horses. In spite of their battleworn appearance, they had not been invited to get down.

Violet hid her face in her hands, and Anderson frowned at them with bewildered distaste.

"Well," he said at last, "light down, and let's try to get to the bottom o' this. It's come as a surprise, I can tell you." He put a protective arm around his shuddering daughter. "Come on, honey. Let's go inside."

Pat scarcely noticed the fine furnishings of the big ranch living room, the piano, the rugs and curtains and bric-a-brac, and the big comfortable chairs. Anderson put Violet into a chair and stood beside her, indicating nearby chairs with a wordless gesture. Neither Lu nor Pat sat down. She stood a little apart from him, silent as a squaw, as he told the story.

He told it briefly, from the time the sheriff first spoke to him and gave him a chance to reveal his identity as an experienced gun fighter. He had a sense of talking against a solid wall that was going up, stone by stone, in front of him. But instead of stopping him, it made him all the more determined to make them understand.

AS HE talked, Violet's delicately sweet face took on a look of horror, and her father's genial, self-satisfied expression had completely disappeared behind a black scowl.

"You mean to tell me," Anderson growled at last, "that you're a professional gunfighter?"

"If you mean, can I handle guns," Pat said thinly, "the answer is yes. If you mean, am I a killer for hire, the answer is no. When I was offered a big piece of money for gunning out a man I had nothin' against, down on the Pecos, that's when I quit. That's when I decided to ride up this way and find a quiet, peaceful place to settle down. But I've got an obligation here now. When I turned down the sheriff's bid for help, he went out alone and got himself killed. You've got a lot of influence here. I want you to use it to get me appointed acting sheriff. Pronto."

"Oh!" Violet started up from her chair, and put her hands out as if to ward off the terrible thought. "How could you? How could you deceive me so, when I—I thought you were a decent, clean—"

"Violet, you must know I didn't lie to you! I meant every word I said. I meant to give up gun fighting, and be just what you wanted me to be. That's why I turned the sheriff down, and now he's been killed. Can't you see I've got to take up the fight now?"

"Once a gunman, always a gunman," Anderson said grimly.

"Why, you're blaming me!" Violet cried shrilly. "How dare you say it was my fault the stupid sheriff got killed! How dare you come here with this—this woman, both of you with blood on your hands. If that isn't proof of your deceit, I don't know what is! Turning to her after she almost killed you—"

"Hush, now, honey," Anderson gathered his screaming daughter in his arms. "Don't now, pet! Maybe," he said sternly to Pat, "you better go."

"I guess you're right," Pat said. "I guess maybe it was a shock. But after you've had time to think it over, I know you'll see it my way. If you could just explain it to her, so she'll understand why I'm doing it..."

He straightened his shoulders and turned to smile at Lu. There was a hint of heartbreak in the smile, but something gay, too, as one might smile at an understanding companion who was capable of sharing trouble. "Shall we go?" he asked gently.

The breath went out of her in a slow sigh, and her heavy eyes lighted momentarily with a deep flame, then she turned and walked out without having said a word.

THEY ENTERED the town of Lordsville after dark like a pair of hunted outlaws, and concealing their jaded horses, approached Mayor Tim Balsam's pretentious home from the rear. Pat's soft knock on the kitchen door was followed by scuffling and whispering sounds, and finally the Mayor's heavy voice faltered: "Who—who's there?"

"Pat Murray. Open up!"

"Just a minute... It's Pat Murray," he announced in a hoarse voice to somebody inside. "That feller that got tromped. You reckon—"

"Come on, open up, and be quick about it!" Pat growled.

The bolt shot back, and as the door opened cautiously, Pat slammed in, pulling Lu with him, and closed the door with his heel.

"Oh—ah, here's Lu Tolliver," the Mayor said foolishly. His cheerful politician's beam had deserted him, and his red face was harrassed and worn with fright. Three of the

County Commissioners were with him. They were all frightened. It showed in their eyes and uncertain mouths, as they stared from Pat to Lu with a kind of silly stupefaction.

"Glad I found you gents together," Pat said. "We haven't much time. Let's get down to business..."

This time, Lu spoke up, telling the same story Pat had earlier recited to the Andersons. This audience was a willing one, and Pat soon learned the reason for their fright.

Infuriated by the unexpected resistance they had encountered, Blake and his crew had rushed their plans, using more than their usual ferocity to intimidate the town. Under the pretense of looking for Chris Ward, they had beaten up the barber, and gone on to the general store. Here, they made only a sham of demanding information about Ward's whereabouts, before proceeding to wreck the place, knocking down old man Curtis and his young clerk and stomping on them. From there, they went blustering their way in and out of stores and offices and even homes, threatening the astonished and helpless citizens.

"You say they're the ones killed the sheriff?" the Mayor mumbled, and looked at Lu sickly.

"We both saw it," Pat snapped. "He was shot in the back going toward the Ward house. He warned you this could happen. You wouldn't listen to him. It's your fault as well as mine that he got killed." He opened his hand, and the sheriff's star slid out on the dining room table around which the men had gathered.

"He offered me the job of deputy. I ought to be wearing that star right now. I want your authority to put it on."

They stared at the symbol of law and order lying there mutely without a wearer to back its authority.

"You think..." The Mayor looked up at Pat half hopefully. "You think you kin—"

"I'm your man," Pat said.

WHEN THE four horses came down the road and turned into the Mayor's front yard, Pat was crouched in the shrubbery that decorated the garden at one side of the ornate house. The dining room shades had been raised, and the Mayor and the three Commissioners sat around the table in shirt sleeves, engaged in a quiet poker game.

Again, Blake gave no orders, but Pat identified the men as each dismounted and went about his business. The short, red-whiskered tough stayed with the horses, Blake and the slippery blond gunman went to the veranda and stood at either side of the big front door after ringing the bell. The chinless bean pole slipped around the opposite side of the house to scout the rear. Pat's mouth tightened with grim satisfaction.

The Mayor played his part with a politician's practiced manner, even though he was doubtless shaking in his boots. He admitted Blake and his blond henchman, and conducted them to the dining room where Pat could observe them and hear what went on. Blake was full of tough confidence, and he wasted no time on formalities.

"You gotta do somethin' about some law around here, Mayor," his high whine rose belligerently. "My men been havin' trouble. It was bad enough seein' the sheriff killed an' one o' my boys wounded, an' I ain't gonna quit till I get that murderin' Chris Ward. But damn if I'll stand fer the rough treatment we're gettin' here. We need some authority to back us up. I got a suggestion, an'

I reckon you sure better take it."

"I would be glad to hear any suggestions—" the Mayor began pompously.

"You already met Al Ching here," Blake's whine rose as he indicated the blond gunman. "He's my best man, an' he already had some experience as a deputy lawman. You couldn't do better."

"Ah...yes. I'm sure we are all grateful for your generous offer," the Mayor declared bravely. "But the fact is, Sheriff Tolliver had already picked his successor, before he went to his untimely death. It was unfortunate that the young man was unable to—"

"Who?" Blake yelped.

"I don't know if you're acquainted with him. He was laid up at the hotel for several days on account of gettin' tromped, but—"

The blond Al Ching made a startling noise. "That weak Willy!" he jeered. "Why, hell, boss, that's the softie was settin' on the hotel porch when you met the sheriff!"

The burly Blake grinned briefly and maliciously. "Now, ain't that somethin' to know?" he shrilled. "My suggestion still stands, Mayor. You can have your sacrificial lamb fer sheriff if you want, but what you really need is a good town marshal. Al Ching will take the job. Hundred a month, and as many deputies as he needs at seventy-five each."

"Well, now," the Mayor temporized. "That calls for a special meeting of the Board of Trustees. Tell you what. I'll call a meeting first thing in the morning..."

PAT SLIPPED away through the bushes as the Mayor talked, and he was none too soon. Already, the bean pole scouting the rear had become suspicious, having caught the sound or smell of the two horses hidden in the pines back of the Mayor's barn.

He had gone around the barn from the opposite side, and now decided to continue full circle, returning to the front of the house to give a quiet warning. Pat was waiting for him, and as he stepped cautiously around the corner of the barn, a gun butt slashed viciously at his lowered head. He grunted, and Pat hit him again, followed and caught his shirt front as he staggered back, and silenced him with a final clout on the side of the jaw that turned him limp as a handful of string. Pat took his gun and his hat and let him there, his hands bound with a gaudy red silk bandanna.

The tough little horse guard was squatted down with his head cocked toward the house when Pat walked toward him out of the bushes. All he saw was a slack silhouette, wearing a familiar hat on the back of his head, and Pat was almost on him before he gave a startled oath and started to rise.

Pat jumped him, his gun slicing down like a hatchet, but this one was tougher and quicker than the first. Halfway up, he ducked aside. The gun butt racked his ear as he scrambled to his feet and gulped air for a loud yell, reaching frantically for his own gun. Without stopping to recover his balance, Pat let his own momentum carry him forward. He fell on the little tough with his full weight, and they hit the ground with a jar that knocked the breath out of both of them.

Pat was momentarily paralyzed with the pain and shock, and they sprawled there in a grotesque embrace of helpless hate. They began to move slowly and ponderously, like mindless creatures caught in some

prehistoric slime and struggling feebly toward life. Pat had the tough's gun arm pinned down and still gripped his own weapon, but lacked the strength for a knockout blow. He brought his arm slowly around, his fingers crawling with infinite care around the cylinder until the gun was reversed and the smooth butt nestled his palm. The sluggish limbs under him were coming to life, and a knee nudged him painfully. He jammed the gun barrel into the man's gasping mouth. There was a sick, gurgling groan and all resistance ceased.

Pat entered the house noiselessly through the front door which the Mayor had left ajar. The voices from the dining room had become louder and harsher.

"I got no intention of waitin' till mornin'!" Blake whined furiously. "I happen to know you four men run the town and the county. Makes no difference if you call yourselves trustees or commissioners, or what the hell! You make the appointment now, or I'll—"

"You're under arrest," Pat said from the doorway, and the blond snake struck with the suddenness of blurred lightning.

PAT HAD gambled on the man's speed, and planned his own moves with that in mind. Even as he spoke, he stepped into the room, and the blond's fast shot whipped past him into the dark parlor and shattered glass; but the sound was lost in the steady roar of the .44's which had leaped into Pat's hands, and he walked the two gunmen down with the merciless thunder of a juggernaut. His guns started their full-throated duet the instant they cleared leather, the first shot hit the floor and inched up as he came on.

The wildly staring gunmen tried to hop out of the hot lead lashing about their legs, their aim completely thrown off by this unorthodox attack. They were unable to keep up with the deceptive smoothness of his swiftly coordinated movements, so that the whole hellish performance seemed to take a long time. Actually, the blond gunswift had time for only two wild shots, and Blake fired once before they were cut down. The blond tried another shot from the floor, his face contorted with fear and frenzy, and Pat kicked a chair over on his face, and twisted the gun out of his hand as he pawed at it.

Mayor Balsam and the Commissioners were stunned and sick. They came up off the floor gaping in terror at the demon they had loosed. The sheriff's star, which old Anse Tolliver had worn so long with humble obedience, now winked from Pat's breast with a baleful malevolence; and Pat looked at them with cruel black eyes, the hell of destruction still riding him.

"There's your trouble," he said harshly. "All wrapped up and ready to go."

"D-did you kill the other ones, too?" the Mayor quavered.

"Wake up!" Pat snapped. "They're not dead. They'll all stand trial, only these two won't walk so good for a while. They got leg wounds, is all."

"But such a—such a..." The Mayor clawed at his face and looked helplessly at the Commissioners. They were haggard and equally speechless.

"So you don't like the way I handled it," Pat said icily. "What did you want me to do: Walk up and pat 'em on the shoulder, and give 'em a polite invitation to jail? There's only one way to handle toughs like this. You've got to be about ten degrees

tougher. Sheriff Tolliver tried playing square with 'em, and got shot in the back—"

"He's right!" Lu Tolliver had come down the back stairs and stood in the kitchen doorway. She looked sick, too, her face so pale the freckles stood out in startling contrast. "The way those rats threatened you, I should think you'd be thankful there was a man here with enough guts to stop 'em before they went to work on you! I'm grateful to you, Pat Murray. I c-can't thank you enough for—for what you've done, and I—" Her voice thinned and broke on a sob.

PAT'S RIGID face relaxed, and warmth melted his eyes. "Take it easy, Lu," he said gently. "This has been rough on you, and I hate to ask it, but if you could just come and show me the way around the jail, I'd sure be grateful. You'll know about the keys and such."

She nodded dumbly, and brushed tears off her face with quick impatience.

"Well, say!" the Mayor spoke with strained heartiness. "I reckon you're goin' to need some help, gettin' all your prisoners downtown. I'll just step out an' hitch up. If one or two of you fellas want to come along an' give me a hand, why we'll ... Say! This is quite a—quite a big evening for the town of Lordsville, at that! Looks like we really pulled off a coup all around. Don't forget, there's one more at the hotel with a busted leg. We'll pick him up on the way. Five of 'em! Why, say..." He moved kitchenward, speeding up his talk as he moved faster, coming to life with purpose and vision.

Two days later, the austere, black garbed Stem Baxter rode into town on a fine gelding. The three men who rode with him were handsomely equipped, and there was a sober air of competence about them. Their appearance might have been impressive to a town disorganized by terror, but on this day, a decorous Sunday quiet reigned in Lordsville, although it happened to be Thursday. The whole town was in mourning for Sheriff Anse Tolliver, who lay in state in the county courthouse.

Final arrangements for the most elaborate funeral in county history had brought all the public officials, as well as prominent members of all three churches, together at the courthouse. Stem Baxter strode into this gathering with the solemn dignity befitting a public benefactor, his three riders close behind. Mayor Balsam met him in the rotunda where Sheriff Tolliver's flower-decked bier commanded respectful attention.

"Mayor Balsam, this is indeed a sorrowful occas'on," said Stem Baxter, and the full force of his character was revealed in the authoritative, deep sounding voice. He seemed to relish the attention of the large audience.

"It is indeed, sir," the Mayor responded in ringing tones. "'I came not to bury Caesar, but to praise him.' There lies a man who—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Baxter somewhat hastily. "I, too, have come for a worthy purpose. The moment I heard of your disastrous loss, I foresaw the consequences. I came at once. As you, and all the good people of Lordsville may know, I have had experience in dealing with the costly confusion which results when a prosperous community is suddenly deprived of law and order. It does you great credit, Mr. Mayor, that your loyal citizens should wish to arrange a fitting funeral for a brave sheriff at a time like this, when trouble threatens the peace and security

of their homes. I do not belittle your sentiments when I warn you that, even as you pay tribute to your dead sheriff, your danger increases. You cannot afford to be without protection—"

"Nor do we intend to be!" boomed the Mayor, raising an oratorical finger. "As Mayor, I have not and never will permit this community to be without lawful protection—"

THE BOMBASTIC dialogue might have gone on indefinitely. The audience was enjoying it thoroughly. But Charley Anderson had been shaken out of his easy going complacence by the events of the past few days. His big red face was grim as he pushed his way to the Mayor's side.

"Just a minute, Mayor," he interrupted flatly. "Let's get this straight." He scowled at Stem Baxter, who lifted his beak nose and stiffened defensively, his hooded eyes watchful. "You mean to tell me," he shouted at Baxter, "that you rode in here to offer us your brand of high-price protection?"

Baxter stared at the big cattleman with the pitiless eyes of a vulture. "And why not?" he returned coldly. "I have the resources to protect a community three times the size of this one. I make a business of it. Wherever there is trouble, I offer my services. I heard you were having plenty of trouble here."

"Maybe," Anderson said tautly, "you been misinformed."

"I think not. There's your dead sheriff."

"An' there's our live one!" Anderson barked, swinging a big arm. "Step out here, sheriff, an' tell this schemin' sidewinder where to find his trouble!"

"You lookin' for trouble?" Pat inquired amiably, strolling out of the crowd, and running lazy eyes over the three riders who had stiffened alertly.

Baxter maintained a rigid control. "Trouble is my business."

"Then you've got no business here," Pat said. "We don't tolerate trouble in Lordsville, not in any shape or form."

Stem Baxter was a tall man, and he was craning his neck to run sharp eyes over the crowd.

"They're not here," Pat said, and the eyes jumped at him with a brief glare before the lids drooped to cover them.

"I beg your pardon?"

"If you're lookin' for the five mangy coyotes you sent in here, couple days ago, you won't find 'em."

"I don't understand you." Baxter was the picture of affronted dignity.

"Oh, yes, you do. You were in an almighty big hurry to ride in here and save Lordsville. You must have a first rate courier system to keep you informed. Because the minute you heard that Blake was rushing things, and overstepping himself, you came to put out the fire, 'way ahead of schedule. You knew right well if they went hog wild we'd have the militia in here to keep law and order, and freeze you out. Your information was all right, as far as it went. But it didn't go far enough, and you got a little ahead of yourself."

THE CROWD was moving back now, the Mayor and Charlie Anderson had stepped aside, and Pat stood alone facing Baxter and his three riders. All their attention was focused on Pat, straining for his next words. He had not yet given them the cue for action. He had not told them what had happened to Blake and his four trouble makers. There was a chance that Baxter could disclaim connection with them.

"Speakin' of trouble," Pat said easily, "there's two Deputy U.S. Marshals in town. Trouble is their business, too. They stepped off the train this morning, and their information was a little more recent than yours. I know that because I telegraphed the information myself. Get this, Baxter. They're standing behind you right now, along with Deputy Sheriff Chris Ward. They've got their guns on you, so turn around easy...easy there!" The furtive movement of one rider was halted as the .44's leaped into Pat's hands, and that man was the last to turn, dazedly, and look into the guns of three hard faced men who had moved up from behind as Pat held their attention.

"All five of your roughnecks are in jail," Pat informed Baxter now. "They talked you right into jail with 'em."

THE HOTEL dining room was crowded, but room was hastily made for Sheriff Murray when he came in with Lu Tolliver. Two of the Town Trustees were unceremoniously hustled away from their table without dessert.

Pat ordered two steaks with all the trimmings, and scowled at Lu when she protested. "You'll eat," he told her firmly. "You haven't eaten for two days, and you look like a sick cat."

She was indeed strange and wan, with her red hair pulled back in a severe knot, and wearing a black dress that was so modest it gave her a demure, frightened look.

"Th-there's your girl over there," she said nervously. "At the big table with Mayor Balsam and—"

"What are you scared of?"

"Nothing. Nothing, but she keeps looking at you. She's been looking at you all day."

"You must have been watching her pretty close."

Anger flared in her heavy eyes, and flushed her face with swift color as Pat grinned at her. "Looks like your appetite's comin' back," he said slyly.

When her steak arrived, she attacked it savagely.

Anderson's big shape loomed up beside them as they were finishing. "I'd like a word with you, Pat," he said gruffly. "Soon as you're free. I got to be ridin' back tonight, but... Violet's stayin' over. We got the same front rooms we had before."

"Sure" Pat said. "I'll stop in."

When he walked into the parlor of the Anderson suite a few minutes later, he held Lu's arm in a firm grip. Violet had jumped up and started across the room, but the look of joyous expectancy died, and she turned to her father with a reproachful little whimper.

"I didn't mean to interrupt you," Anderson said, looking at Lu uncomfortably. "There was just one or two things I wanted to get straight between us. I ain't one to beat around the bush—"

"Neither am I," Pat said, without releasing his grip. "Lucy didn't want to come up with me, but I figger she's concerned in this, too. Just like she was the last time we got together. I reckon we can take it from there."

"Pat, I... You were..." Violet's hands fluttered appealingly. "I didn't understand!" she cried. "Oh, papa, tell him how wrong you were!"

"I was wrong," Anderson said heavily. "I didn't believe things like that could happen here, but I see now they could, and did. The way you handled it was— Well, I don't guess it could've been improved on by any man. Mayor tells me you got

statements involving Baxter from the two men that didn't have gunshot wounds. I don't care how you got 'em. You know your business a damn sight better'n I do. Whatever you did to get the goods on Sam Baxter, I say it was justified. I want you to know that my offer still stands, but it won't be just a foreman's job. It'll be more like a partner. That's how I'd want it. An' now that you cleaned up the Baxter crowd, I don't guess there'll be much to hold you on the sheriff's job. You can turn it over to some good steady fella, an'—"

"No," Pat said. "You were right the first time. 'Once a gunman, always a gunman.' But there's different kinds. That's what I've got to prove. That's the part of my obligation to Sheriff Tolliver that still stands. That was a fine funeral you gave him. You showed lots of respect for him—after he was dead. While he was alive, he was just a guntotin' handy man, hired to do the dirty jobs nobody else would stoop to. And as long as law-abiding folks have no respect for their law, they'll draw trouble like an uncovered honey pot draws flies. That's my job now, teaching respectable citizens to respect the law enough to back it up."

ANDERSON NODDED somberly without speaking, his mind taking in the hard truth of Pat's words.

"But Pat! Oh, my dear!" Violet took a step toward him. He had released Lu's arm, and she had moved aside, trembling a little. "Don't you see?" Violet cried. "You don't have to do that. You've already proved to everybody how brave and fine a sheriff can be. I do understand now, just as you said I would, when you—you told papa you were doing it for me."

"You were right the first time, too, Violet," Pat said gently. "I was deceiving you. I was deceiving myself, too, thinking I could give up my guns and live the soft life. I wasn't cut out for that kind of life, and I have no right to ask you to live my way. Besides, your papa wouldn't let you. Isn't that right, sir?"

Anderson took it without flinching. "That's right," he said in a dry voice, and then pride lighted his eyes as he looked at his daughter. Violet was taking it, too. Like a lady.

She smiled with a sad, angelic sweetness. "Since you are so bound and determined to throw yourself away," she said clearly, "I can only wish you luck in your...crusade." Her smile did not include Lu as she said, "Goodnight, Miss Tolliver. Goodnight, Sheriff Murray."

"Good night," Pat said hastily, and ushered Lu into the hall. He had the uneasy conviction that something was about to break, and he was not sure where it was coming from. Lu's head was high, and she was rigid as a corpse under his hand. Behind him, he had left a tension that was due to snap—and did, with a high shriek that was instantly smothered, doubtless on Anderson's broad chest.

LU STUMBLED on the hall carpet, and burst into tears with a suddenness that shocked him into anger.

"Stop that!" He shook her furiously. "Stop it! If you think I'm going to drag you bawling through town—"

"I'm—I'm not b a w l i n g!" she sobbed furiously.

"You're giving a damn good imitation of it. You women!"

"Why, you lowdown hyena! Who do you think you're talkin' to? Draggin' me in on a scene like that, so you wouldn't have to face her alone, and makin' me look like the cat that stole the canary!"

"I did not! I wanted you to have the satisfaction— Oh, shut up!"

They marched down the stairs and through the crowded lobby like bitter enemies on the way to the dueling field. Nobody stopped them.

As they neared the Tolliver house, Pat sighed. "I guess it'll always be like that."

"Like what?"

"Fightin'. We'll always be fightin' over something."

"A-a'ways?"

"What do you think?"

"Pa said I might outgrow it—after a while. He said he did, after he got married and settled down."

"We'll see. One good thing about gettin' married, I'll have the right to beat you anytime you get too fresh."

"Why, you—"

"Shut up," Pat muttered, and pulled her expertly against him, finding her lips with a hunger that had none of the gentle sweetness with which he had kissed his dream girl. The last memory of his peaceful pipe dreams exploded in the violence touched off by the meeting of their lips. It had the feel of drums and wild music, and flaming stars loose in the night.

"How long," asked Pat hoarsely, when he let go of her long enough to catch his breath, "does a wedding have to wait—after a funeral?"

"I don't know," she murmured. "But let's not ask anybody. It might be too long."

THE END

GOLD COSTS LIVES!

★ **By Charles Recour** ★

THOSE WHO chose the Overland Trail to California during the days of the gold rush, couldn't have chosen a harder way. But because going by way of "the Horn" was quite expensive, the cheaper land traveling was often preferred. Usually, the easterners—and by "easterner" is meant anybody east of the Mississippi—would see an advertisement in the papers to the effect "that a Company was being organized to go to the gold fields—one and fifty dollar subscription required." This meant that a party of men was being gathered for the long and rough trail, and that new recruits and their families were invited, upon payment of an initial sum.

Usually, the starting point would be someplace like Independence, Missouri, where all sorts of equipment for the western trade was manufactured. Here guns, powder, clothes, wagons, draft animals and all the other necessary paraphernalia, could be obtained. In particular, Independence was noted, along with Philadelphia, for the quality of its wagons. The familiar Conestoga and similar carriers were skillfully built here.

After wagons and guns and equipment had been purchased and assembled, the group would assign a captain whose title and effectiveness were purely nominal. He had very little actual authority, but he served as a sort of focal point for the general discussions among the men. The party might consist of anywhere from twenty-five to a hundred and twenty-five people. When the journey began, the train would stretch out for miles, the speed being limited by that of the slowest wagon. The wagon trains always started out with enthusiasm. The potential gold hunters could mentally see their fortunes made, little realizing the terrors to come.

As the breakdowns, the weariness and disgust became more common, the men would lose their dash and life and the journey would look more and more like a funeral cortege. But most kept it up grimly determined to win through. Fights, lovemaking, marriages, births, deaths—all normal living went on under the most primitive circumstances.

The trail would be dotted with abandoned wagons, and thousands of items of personal equipment ranging from guns to clothing, as the travelers lightened their loads. When wagons broke down and distributing the goods became impossible and the wagon was beyond repair, the only solution was to abandon. The left-behind material was usually destroyed, or left in very bad condition.

Then, as the Great Plains crossing took place, the trail would be marked with

death cattle skeletons, with the graves of men and women and children who had succumbed to the hardships. The marker might be a crude wooden cross, or perhaps just the skull of an animal with the ominous words written on it: "Here lies—..."

Crossing the plains meant, also, almost inevitable encounters with the fierce Pawnees or the savage Sioux. Pitched battles raged, for the troops hadn't yet dotted the Plains with Army posts.

Nevertheless, the travelers made it through. They were pioneers in the fullest sense of the word, and the end of the trail was worth it to them.

IN THE GOLD RUSH

★ By A. Dobe ★

FORTY THIEVES—Law was often conspicuous by its absence in early gold mining camps, but crime in infinite variety was always present. In Nevada County, California, around 1850, there was a fantastic criminal organization which called itself the "Forty Thieves". The chief purpose of the organization was for the members to help one another avoid capture. They sometimes did this by completely outrageous practices. Should one of their number be justly suspected of a crime, others of the gang would pick out an innocent victim and then proceed to trump up false evidence pointing to this person. They would even go so far as to get up a miners' court, according to the custom in the lawless mining camps, with all the members of the jury being their own men. The victim would be accused, tried, and sentenced to be flogged. Often, the actual thief was the one who wielded the whip.

BY THE GREAT HORN SPOON!—This was a favorite exclamation during the times of the Gold Rush. It came from the fact that horn spoons were used extensively by the miners to help them find gold. The horn spoon was a device made from the horn of an ox. With it, several ounces of soil at a time could be scraped up to be washed for gold.

GOLDEN FERRY—When the rush was on to some new and rich gold field, nothing could deter or discourage the swarming tide of prospectors headed toward the spot. The crowd stampeding into the Carson Hill field had to cross the murky, dangerous Stanislaus River. Many men, as well as horses, were drowned while attempting to cross the boiling waters.

Then, a man named Jim Robinson saw an opportunity. He rigged up a precarious ferry, with a barge and some ropes. It was safe enough if the crossing was unhurried and the barge not too heavily loaded. But Robinson had difficulty in preventing it from being overcrowded on each trip. Men thronged the shore ten deep, waiting to get across on the ferry. Robinson had found a gold mine for himself, richer than most of the placers in the vicinity. In the first few weeks in which he operated his ferry, he collected around ten thousand dollars in fares.

FIREWATER FORT

★ By Jon Barry ★

BEFORE THE government stepped in, in the early days of trade with the Plains Indians, the chief medium of trade, prized far above even firearms, was whiskey. And it proved a two-edged weapon to many a greedy white trader who thought he'd get away with something.

As soon as the news got around to the Indians that traders were at their posts with new lots of goods—and firewater—they'd drop everything, ignore the weather, and come scurrying into the trading post. The first drink was expected to be "on the house". This would be waited for avidly. Then, trading would begin, with the trader trying to cheat the Indian at every turn. The cheapest, sheddiest goods were exchanged for magnificent furs, buffalo robes and pieces of Indian handicraft. All the while that the trading was going on, the traders' assistants would see that the Indians became properly "lubricated" so that their judgment was dulled and their only demands, more liquor.

The Indians would do anything to get at the liquor barrel. One particular episode, oft repeated, is that in which a crowd of thirsty Indians, lining up before the liquor-doler, just couldn't wait to get a taste of the precious fluid. One buck who had had his turn, filled his mouth to capacity with a huge mouthful of alcohol. Then he went from friend to friend, squirting it into their mouths. This enabled them to hold out, even if impatiently, until their turn at the barrel.

But all things have to be paid for. Gradually, as the Indians became familiar with white habits, they watched where the liquor was stored when it was delivered. From then on, it was simply a matter of raiding at the right time and place. And nothing was more inflammable than a liquor-soaked Indian bent on revenge. Many of the excesses against the settlers, innocent and guilty alike, can be traced directly to liberal dosing at the liquor barrel.

Finally things had to be taken in hand. Citizens' groups, as well as government representatives, attempted to put a stop to the terrible practices of the traders, and succeeded to a great extent. But by this time, enough damage had been done.

Colonel Pitkin is said to have remarked that he would "rather face ten Indians with rifles than one liquored up." This exaggeration holds a fountain of truth.

CROWD IN

By Bill Kirk

Zeff's greed had finally caught up with him. And now, the only man who could have saved him, was the very one from whom he had to flee

THE WILDERNESS

POUNDING HOOVES broke the stillness of the desert night. Zeff Hackett cursed fluently, folded the map and placed it snugly in his shirt pocket, and crammed the ore specimens back into the saddlebag. Springing nimbly to his feet, he kicked sand on the fire, leaving only the moonlight to play upon the sharp angles of his greed-filled old face, in his glittering blue eyes and on his gaunt, slightly stooped frame.

Galloping hooves could mean only one thing—trouble! Someone had found Jim Lassiter! Found him alive! And Lassiter had talked—damn him!

Hackett stepped gingerly to the side of his blue roan and pulled himself into the saddle. Gnarled fingers, etched with the crust and grime of forty-odd years of prospecting, curled around the barrel of a loaded Winchester strapped to the

It was all or nothing now. Zeff used the animal's body as a shield, and pumped two quick shots into the man

horse's rangy body. Taking the rifle from its sling, he pointed its long muzzle in the direction of the approaching rider.

He spat into the dust, wishing now he'd used the rifle on Jim Lassiter instead of driving off Lassiter's horse and leaving his partner alone in the middle of the desert to die of thirst. You couldn't depend on a man staying alone any more, even in the desert, the west was getting so crowded.

Maybe he was wrong. Maybe the rider wasn't after him. Maybe.

But no sense taking chances. Too much at stake. He patted the holstered sixgun on his hip, and ran his fingers fondly over the stock and barrel of the Winchester. The rider was very close now. Let him come. Lawman or not, Zeff was ready.

"Rein up! And reach!" Zeff's voice cut the night air like a whiplash.

A startled grunt escaped the rider. His mount drew to an abrupt halt. "What th—!"

Horse and rider were silhouetted in the circle of the Winchester's sights. "Make one move, and I'll drop you," Zeff promised, peering through the haze. "Now, who be you?"

"Name's Jim Lassiter. Looking for my partner, Zeff Hackett. Struck a silver lode up Canyon City way..." The stranger talked fast, knew plenty—but the voice did not belong to Jim Lassiter!

Crack!

The rifle spat lead. Missed. Zeff Hackett pulled frayed nerves together, jerked his sixgun out of leather and trained it on the man.

Hackett's voice came out a high, dry squeak. "You're a liar! You ain't Lassiter. You're law!"

"No! No! I ain't law! And I ain't Lassiter, either." The stranger's hands still clawed at the stars. He was talking fast again. "I got news of Lassiter, though. And I'm really lookin' for his partner, Zeff Hackett. You're him, ain't you?"

"Mebbe. What you want Hackett for? What's the news?"

"Lassiter wasn't dead when I ran across him in the desert. Not yet, he wasn't. He told me what you done to him, and as how you'd be headin' for Yuma to have the ore specimens analyzed and to put in the claim for the mine. I been ridin' hard tryin' to catch you, thinkin' we could make a deal."

"What kind of deal, when I've got the drop on you?" sneered Zeff.

"WON'T DO you no good to shoot me, Hackett. I got a letter in Jim Lassiter's handwritin' that'd keep you from gettin' the mine."

"Letter! What letter?" Zeff's trigger finger loosened.

"Lassiter was purty thirsty. It weren't no trouble at all to get him to sign over his half of the mine, for the promise of a drink o' water." The stranger laughed. A hard laugh. "Don't worry, Hackett. I didn't give Lassiter the water. If I had of, reckon I wouldn't be half owner of a silver mine."

"Why, you snivelin' thief!" Zeff choked. "Figured to cheat me out o' the mine, did you? Well, you got just one more think comin' before I put a hole in your head."

"Better do some thinkin' yourself, Hackett. Pluggin' me wouldn't get you nowheres, long as there's the letter Lassiter wrote."

"Letter can't hurt me none. It'd only prove you saw Lassiter after I did, an' that he was still alive."

"Mebbe," drawled the stranger. "But then, you'd lose the mine. I mailed the letter to myself at Bloodstaff, with instructions on the envelope for it to be forwarded to the Yuma Bureau of Claims, jest in case I didn't show up to claim it. Know

what the letter says, Hackett? Says I'm Jim Lassiter's son and next o' kin. Kill me, an' you'll be stretchin' a rope for both killings!"

Zeff felt the short hair at the back of his neck grow rigid. Then, his eyes became hard glints of blue steel as he calculated. Abruptly, he laughed. "You've slipped up, Mister whoever y'are. You've give me the answer how to get hold o' the letter, using Lassiter's name!"

The stranger remained calm. "Don't ever think it, Hackett. The letter ain't addressed to no Lassiter. Got my real name on it, an' I can't recollect I told you what my real name was. So reckon you better play your hand proper. Can I take my hands down now?"

"Not yet, you can't," said Hackett warily. "Set still while I take your iron." Cautiously, Zeff prodded the roan forward, his finger applying half the needed pressure to trip the hammer of the sixgun. "One false move, an' I'll shoot to kill, letter or no letter."

Wordlessly, the stranger surrendered his guns, dropping his arms as Zeff moved away.

"Ride," ordered Zeff. "To Bloodstaff. You lead. Stay just ahead of me. We'll get that letter."

A long time the two men rode in silence. Then, a sudden thought struck Hackett. His eyes bored into the other man's back.

"How come you to look for me, since the claim ain't filed yet an' all you'd've had to do was claim full ownership with that letter?"

"Had to," was the reply. "We got each other dead to rights, Hackett. I got the letter. You got the map."

"Map!" Zeff's hand clutched at his shirt pocket for reassurance. "So that's it. Yuh don't know where the mine is!" Then, slyly, "What map?"

The man ahead didn't bother to look back. "The one you took from Lassiter. He told me about it."

Now, Zeff Hackett understood. "An' if I hadn't got the drop on you, you'd've killed me an' took the map. That it?"

"Somethin' like that," drawled the stranger. "Somethin' like that."

THE RED DOG saloon was crowded with men. Zeff Hackett and the stranger stood at the bar, drinking sparingly, eyeing each other with hatred and suspicion. Studying the stranger, Zeff was unnerved by what he read in the man's frosty grey eyes. Killer's eyes, they were—cold and deadly. His hands were small, like a woman's, and just as smooth, as though he'd never soiled them working.

Yet, his blue shirt was dirty. Range dust had turned it the color of wet sagebrush. He was lean—lean like a man who has been hunted a long time. He looked naked without his guns. In Arizona, a man without guns was like the desert without the sun. A few men at the bar seemed to notice, and they looked at him queerly, but said nothing.

"Soon's the Post Office gets the letter in," said Zeff, "we'll pick it up an' high-tail it for Yuma. When's the mail stage due, bartender?"

"That was the stage you heard a few minutes ago," answered the tough-looking bartender. "Have another?"

"No, don't think so."

"Aw, come on," said the stranger. "One more, to our new partnership!" He grabbed the bottle off the bar.

Impatiently, Zeff held out his glass. "Drink, an' get out."

"Sure. Last one. Well, here's to you, partner." The stranger lifted his drink to his lips—then in the same motion, dashed it into Zeff's startled face. Before Zeff could re-

cover, the other man had snatched the bottle off the bar and crashed it against his head. The world went black for Zeff Hackett as men started to yell in confusion. A pair of small, smooth hands clawed at his shirt pocket.

The shirt pocket was the first thing he thought of when he came to—or, rather, the map that was supposed to be in it. He felt sick, but not surprised. Two cowpokes helped him to his feet. One of them asked, "What'd you say to your partner caused him to hit you thataway?"

BUT ZEFF wasn't listening. He was making for the door, shoving his way through to the street. Outside, he glanced in both directions, saw the black-lettered sign saying U. S. Post Office, Bloodstaff, and broke into a wobbly sort of run toward it. Out of breath, hardly making himself understood, he fired questions at the postal clerk.

Yes, said the clerk, a man who called himself Denton, Frank Denton it was, had just picked up a letter. Tall man? Dirty clothes? Small hands? Same one all right. He'd just grabbed the letter and tore out in a helluva hurry. Knocked a man down on the way out, took his gun, jumped a horse and rode off hellbent for election toward Yuma.

On the street again, Zeff ran panting to his blue roan, swung astride with unaccustomed agility, and veered its head in the direction of a wisp of dust fading into the distance.

The blue roan broke into a full gallop quickly, easily. The wisp of dust wasn't so far away. The roan was fast—fast as greased lightning. Besides, Zeff knew a shorter way to Yuma than straight down the road.

At the edge of town, Hackett veered the roan sharply to the left, headed him for a range of low hills. Farther on, the road ran into those hills, near Dead Pass. Zeff remembered there was a little gully at the end of Dead Pass. The road went past there, and Zeff would be there waiting.

It was an ideal place for a killing. Private-like, and close in, a regular coffin of stone. The little gully offered good concealment from the narrow strip of road some twenty feet below. Just room enough for himself and the roan.

Zeff thought at first he'd use the rifle, strapped and loaded again at the roan's side. But then he thought better of it. Hell, a sixgun killed just as dead at only twenty feet.

Zeff sat down on a boulder, cocked the sixgun and cradled the muzzle between his knees so that it pointed at the road below. It wouldn't be long before Denton showed up. Soon, Zeff Hackett would have map, letter and silver mine, all to himself.

But he was too intent on watching the road.

Denton's voice coming from behind him was like the kick of a mule.

"Figured you'd play it this way, Hackett. Drop your iron and turn around, slow."

INSTEAD of obeying, Zeff jumped from the rock with another sudden burst of agility. It was all or nothing, now. Sidestepping nimbly, he reached the roan's side. Using the animal's body as a shield, Zeff pumped two quick shots. The shots went wild, flicking fragments of stone from a boulder in back of Denton. He hadn't had time to draw a bead—and Denton's one shot had come just a shade quicker.

Zeff's gun slid from his wounded hand, clattering to the rocks and sliding from view down the side of the gully to the road below. Panic

seized him. He looked at his broken, bleeding hand in terror.

Denton's laugh was harsher even than gunfire, and more sinister. He spat a brown stain of tobacco juice at a rock, wiped the excess of his mouth with the back of his left hand. Leisurely, he stepped around the roan to where he commanded a full view of his victim. "Know any prayers, Hackett? Better say 'em. Quick!" Denton was chuckling. "Me, I gotta get ridin' to Yuma. Gotta file claim on my silver mine."

The four remaining teeth in Zeff Hackett's mouth began to chatter. His number was up. No use pleading. He and Denton were men of the same calibre. Both had left Lassiter to die of thirst. A man like that was without mercy. If positions were reversed, Zeff knew he would not hesitate to shoot Denton. Zeff licked dry lips and looked into the muzzle of Denton's gun. It looked long and deadly, like the rifle strapped to the side of the roan.

The rifle!

Zeff's heart leaped as he realized the rifle was within easy reach of his uninjured left hand.

And Denton was on a direct line with its muzzle! Just a few inches to one side. If Denton would only move a little to the left!

"Got any last requests?" Denton asked. "Want me to write your maw? Haw, haw!"

Hell, it wasn't necessary to make Denton move! If only Zeff could shy the roan a little. Zeff started talking fast, not saying anything.

Denton was pulling a fresh wad of tobacco from the pouch in his pants pocket, punching the stuff into his face.

NOW! HACKETT took advantage of that barest fraction of inattention, pressed against the roan's side, shied him just a little.

Denton never heard the sharp, vengeful crack of the rifle. He died instantly.

It was Zeff's turn to laugh. Hardly had Denton's body come to rest, Zeff was upon him, tearing feverishly at Denton's clothes for the letter and the map. The blood from Zeff's gunshot hand ran out on Denton's body. The hand hurt—bad—but he disregarded it for the present.

He sat down on a rock and read the letter.

Lassiter's jerky handwriting leaped out at him from the dead, accusing Zeff Hackett as his murderer, willing the silver mine to his son who used the name Frank Denton. His full name, the letter said, was Frank Denton Lassiter. He'd dropped his last name when he'd run away, years ago...

It was all there, much more. But Zeff's hand was starting to give him real trouble. He'd have to get back to Bloodstaff, quick, and get it tended to. He'd always bled a lot. Even a scratch...

Zeff Hackett rose unsteadily to his feet. He was weaker than he'd thought!

Only one more thing to take care of. He fished through Denton's pockets again for a match with which to burn the letter, found one, and had just lighted a corner of it when—

"Better let us read that first, old timer." It was a new voice, having a ring of authority. Its owner held a gun.

There were two of them. Lawmen. One of them made a lunge at Zeff, snatched the flaming paper from his hand, snuffed out the fire, and began to read the letter.

Zeff Hackett glowered at the deputy star on the other man's vest. The West was gettin' so crowded now, no matter where you went, somebody

was there, ridin' herd on a man...

The deputy said, "Thought we heard some gun-talk up here a while ago. Nearly passed on by, but when we heard the rifle go off, the sound guided us in." The man kept his eyes and gun trained on Zeff, directed only his voice at the other lawman. "What's the paper say, Hank?"

"This feller's death sentence, looks like. It's a letter by a Jim Lassiter accusing Zeff Hackett, his life-time partner, of leaving him in the desert to die of thirst after the two had finally struck a lode. That's you, Zeff Hackett, ain't it?" he said, looking at Zeff.

"Nope," Zeff denied, seeing a possible way out. "That's him." He pointed to the dead man.

THE DEPUTY laughed. "And that makes you Denton? That's good. An old codger like you claiming to be Jim Lassiter's son. And how old would that make Jim Lassiter? About a hundred and ten? No, old timer, it don't add up. If you was Denton, wouldn't be very likely we'd catch you tryin' to burn up a piece of paper making you the sole owner of a silver mine. Besides, I'd know Denton anywheres. Frank Denton. Ain't you never seen his picture? Posted everywhere from Omaha to San Diego. Thousand dollars reward for him, dead or alive."

The greed that had made him kill Jim Lassiter leaped into Zeff Hackett's eyes, for a moment making him forget how weak he'd grown from loss of blood. "Then I'm entitled to the reward!"

"Ha! Not on your life, old man. This here letter puts the killer brand on you. Its evidence will hold up in court."

"That letter can't be used against me."

"Why not? Lassiter's body was found yesterday, where you left him."

"But dead men can't write letters," argued Zeff. "Which proves this Denton feller seen Lassiter after I did."

The deputy with the gun said, "How you going to prove that? Lassiter's dead. Denton's dead. Maybe dead men can't write letters, but they can't talk, neither. Alive, Denton could've cleared you. The way he is, looks like you made a little mistake. Killed your star witness."

The man was right. It wasn't going to matter how the letter had come so far, or who had brought it.

The lawmen had to lift Zeff Hackett into the saddle when they started back to Bloodstaff. Zeff peered at the road ahead through watery eyes.

Somehow, the trail looked shorter now. And he knew he was going to reach the end of it before his captors did.

THE END

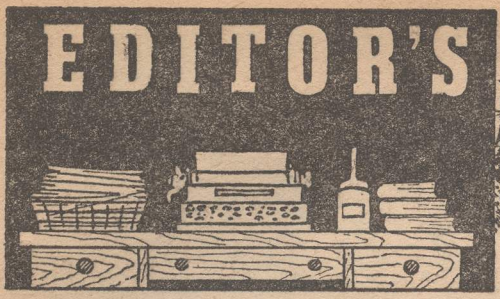
DON'T MISS THE APRIL 1950 ISSUE OF

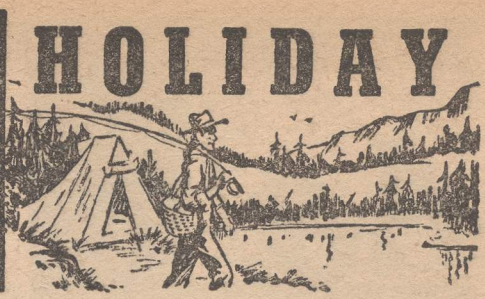
MAMMOTH WESTERN

Robert Arnette's new, powerful novelette—"Next Time *You* Die!"—about a man who was tired of fighting battles that showed no hope of ever being won—or enemies who couldn't be licked. But under the contemptuous lashing of a beautiful woman's scorn—Tom Barrett did a round-about-face and became a feared power to his enemies.

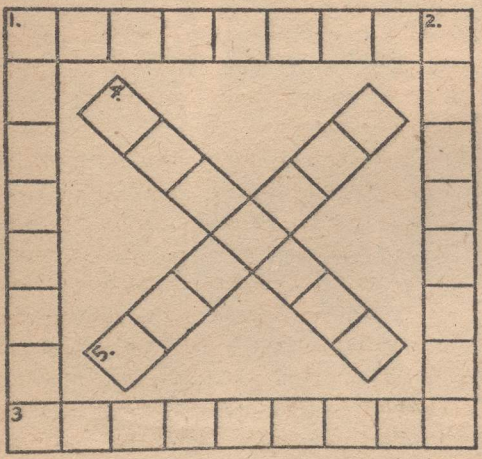
For the excitement of the chase and the battle—for unexpected thrills in love and war—don't miss this issue of **MAMMOTH WESTERN** on sale at the newsstands February 14.

EDITOR'S HOLIDAY





CROSSWORD PUZZLES—something different again for this month's Holiday. We hope you'll have as much fun working them out as we had in putting them together. So get out your pencil, and follow the trail of our branding iron. Then, check on page 155 for the correct answers.



"THE SQUARE-X"

1a. Western gunslicks are always riding up on one of these.

1d. He sent them to that big pasture up yonder.

2. If a waddy lit into a cowpoke bigger than him, he got .....

3. When they drove herds to the railhead, they always tried to go around the .....

4. You might go around without your pants, but never without these.

"So I hauled out my old ..... and let him have it."

1a. This is how the cowmen liked to keep the range.

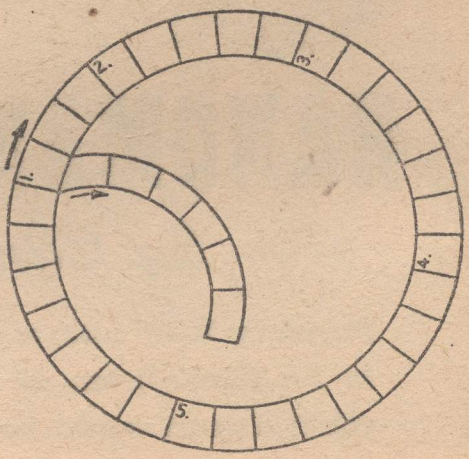
1d. The bad lones took this trail.

2. The curse of the cattlemen.

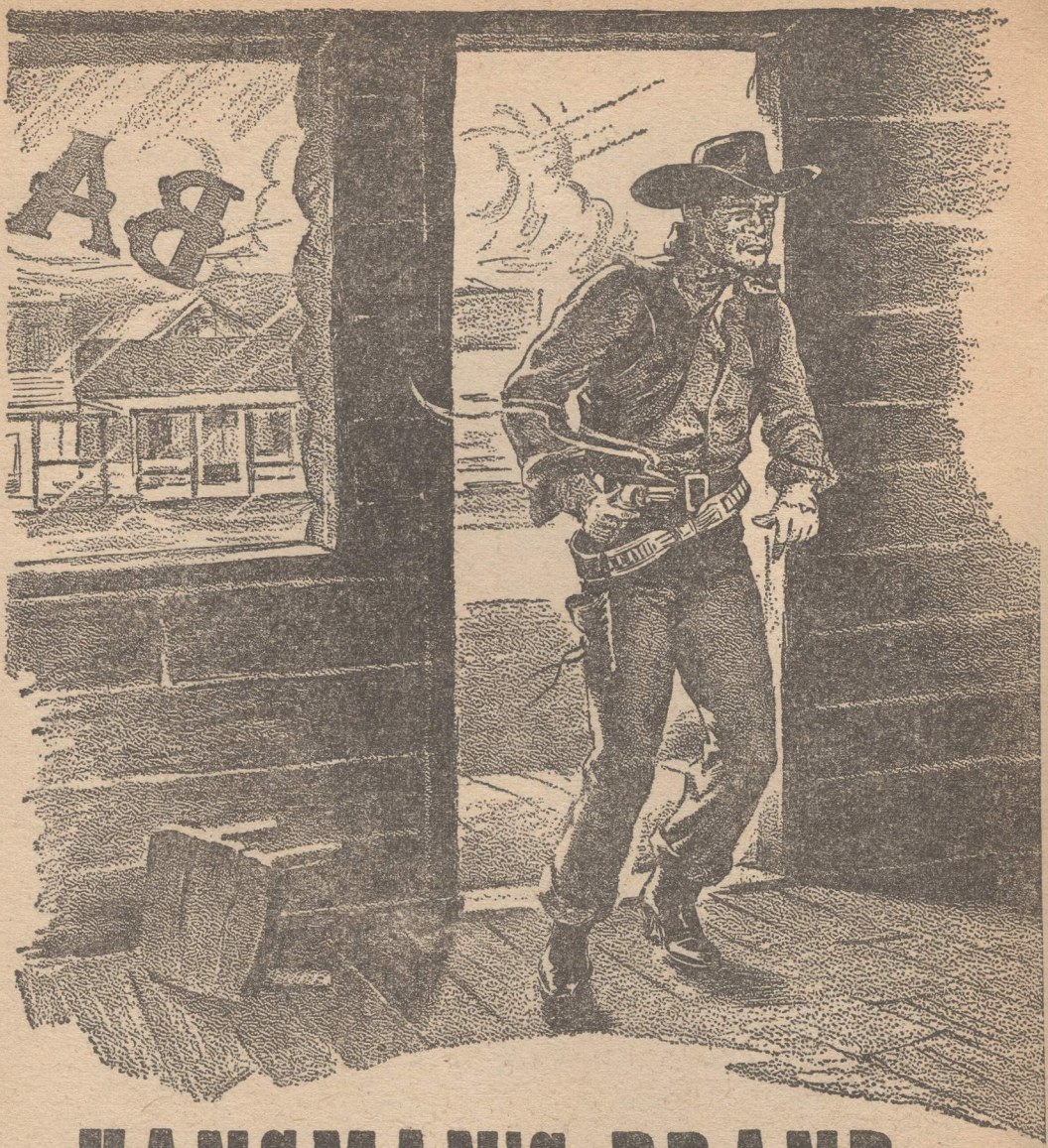
3. The bad ones feared these guys.

4. This was about all some of the nesters could raise.

5. An apt name for many a mining town. (Hint: This is a coined word.)



"THE CIRCLE TAIL"



HANGMAN'S BRAND

By Clint Young

Pouring lead into a man's guts didn't seem to be Kim's idea of fun. But you can't tell what a man might be driven to do for a girl

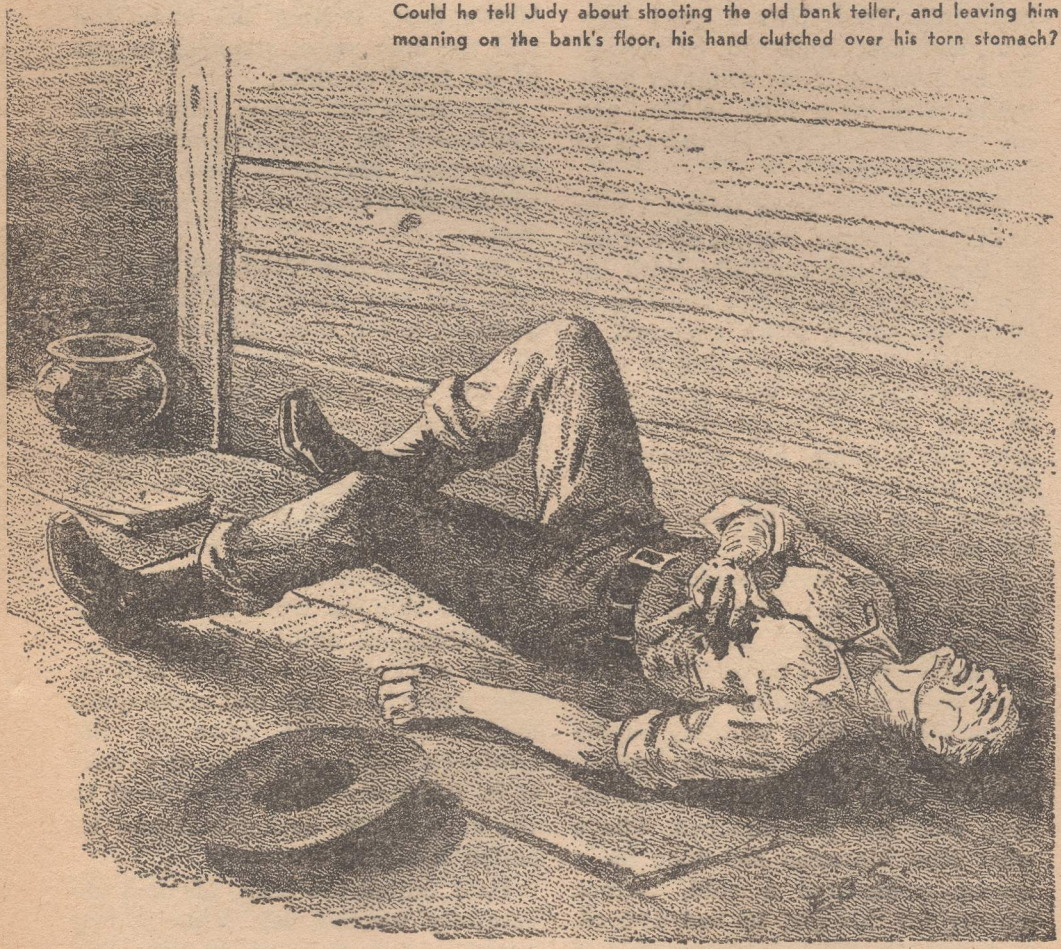
EVERY MORNING at precisely nine-fifteen, Fred Noyes came out of Tornado's two-story frame hotel and tramped down the pine-plank sidewalk to the Grubstake Lunchroom. This morning, Kim Morsman, Tornado's town marshal, had an office chair tilted back against the outside front wall of his office, and was basking in the warm April sunshine.

A solid-flowing air-current from the flats surrounding Tornado, sweet-scented with the heady odor of the early grasses, washed down the main street, and Fred Noyes breathed deeply, glad to get away from the stuffy gloom of the depressing hotel lobby.

He waved a friendly greeting to Kim Morsman. "Nice day for your wedding, Kim," he called to him.

"Sure is, Fred," Kim called back. He was a young man who'd done pretty well for himself in the year he'd been around Tornado, first riding for two months for Ted Streeter's S-Slash, then signing on as a deputy when Jeb Anderson's arthritis began kicking up, finally taking over the marshal's job when Jeb got around to retiring.

Slim, lean-hipped, flat-bellied, Kim Morsman wore his walnut-handled Colt with an easy grace, and what



Could he tell Judy about shooting the old bank teller, and leaving him moaning on the bank's floor, his hand clutched over his torn stomach?

Fred Noyes liked about him and what Ed Rollins down at the bank liked about him was that he wasn't prone to drag out his gun at the first sign of trouble. Driving lead into a man's guts didn't seem to be Kim's idea of having a pleasant shindy.

Fred Noyes had seen him do it twice, and each time he'd noticed the expression on Kim's face, the thin, pressed-out line of his mouth, the odd sick shadow in his pale eyes, like it was a repetition of something in his past rising up to haunt him.

Ed Rollins had said, "Hell, we got no call to go huntin' along Kim's back-trail, Fred. He's a good marshal, and that ought to be enough for us. Besides, if my daughter Judy wants to throw a loop on him, you can bet he's told her all there is to know about him."

But there are some things a man can't tell a woman, least of all a woman he's courting carefully with intent to marry. Kim didn't know much about the way a man's supposed to feel about the girl he's going to marry. He'd heard there were some women who lost all perspective over a man, who'd follow him wherever he went, who believed he was right no matter how wrong he was or how bad he had been.

Judy Rollins, he'd decided, wasn't a woman like that. Her pale, rather slender face would show only a shocked surprise if he told her about Rico, painted a word-picture for her of the old bankteller writhing on the bank's floor-boards, his hand clutched over his belly, moaning brokenly, his eyes wild and pain-wracked. That's what Kim Morsman had done for a woman—committed a cold, vicious murder for this girl he had desired. Vida Sontag. He had been wild and irresponsible, and he had wanted both excitement and for Vida to love him, to look up to him.

He had left her, afterwards. Sick with himself at what he had done, grateful to have escaped with his life, he had left Rico and Vida far behind, and started life anew. A clean life, this time. A safe life.

BUT NOW, Vida was in Tornado, in the hotel.

Kim watched Fred Noyes carefully until the hotel-owner turned in at the restaurant for his morning chunk of pie and cup of coffee. There'd be a good twenty minutes before Noyes would head back...

Kim tapped once, lightly, on Vida's door, twisted the knob and slid the door, open, stepping in out of the hotel corridor.

The room was empty. Kim stood flat-heeled, his eyebrows puckered in annoyance, sharpened now by his sudden awareness of the need for haste.

He had to find Vida and find out what she was doing in Tornado. If possible, get her on the noon stage to Webster City. The wedding was set for four o'clock, and there was no knowing what Vida's reaction would be when she learned of it.

He was remembering now how he'd pulled the Rico bank holdup on her account, and how she'd held off an angry lynch-mob with a double-barreled shotgun while he cut away the hangnoose around his neck.

The mark of the rope was still on him, a raw burn that had never quite healed, low enough down for the silk neckerchief at his throat to cover it. Instinctively, his hand went to the knot in the neckerchief and he pulled it tight.

He'd waited too long, planned too carefully for this day. Vida Sontag wasn't going to step in now and break up his play.

Evidences of her lay around the single-windowed room, in the frilled

petticoat lying aslant the unmade bed, in the mustard-yellow bombazine thrown over the back of a chair, in the amber combs of tortoise-shell strewn on the top of the dresser.

Even the breath of her was there, stirring him as her presence had always done, the way Judy Rollins never did. He didn't love Judy, but he'd make her a good husband. He'd take the position Ed Rollins had offered him in the bank, and when Ed died, the bank would be his. He'd have a place here, then, solid and respected, and he'd never give Judy cause to say maybe she should have married Rance Kellogg.

"LOOKIN' FOR someone, Morsman?" It was Kellogg's voice from the hall doorway.

Kim wheeled sharply to face him. "What else would I be doin' here, Kellogg?" he asked drily.

The big rancher put one shoulder against the doorjamb. "I wouldn't know, Morsman. I saw you tramp into the hotel and I followed you to get something off my chest."

"Well, get it off."

"In here?" Kellogg moved his head from side to side, surveying the room. He dug his fists into his pockets, grinning faintly. "I saw this woman come on in the stage last night. A blonde hurdy-gurdy. Anybody's woman." His eyes met Kim's squarely. "Yours?"

Rance Kellogg jerked his head aside, but Kim's arcing fist slammed into the side of his head, smashing it against the doorjamb. The rancher tried to yank his fisted hands from his pockets, but Kim hit him again, rocking him out into the hall, tumbling him into the far wall of the corridor.

Kim stood over him, breathing hard, the first flush of bright anger fading from his lean features. "I don't like that, Kellogg," Kim said harshly.

Kellogg rubbed his jaw, looking up at Kim with dislike.

"And I don't like you, Morsman." The rancher hoisted himself to his feet, and Kim braced himself for a rush that didn't come.

"I'd like to take you on," Kellogg said. "Fists or guns, it makes no difference, and I guess it's because you'll be walkin' up that aisle this afternoon with Judy Rollins instead of me." He wiped his hand across his jaw again and looked at his palm.

"There's something about you that smells, Morsman," Kellogg went on. "Something on your back-trail you ain't been able to wash off. You didn't make much of a hand out at Streeter's S-Slash, which shows you're no cowpoke. And since you've been in the marshal's office, I've noticed you handle that sixgun like you were born to it. Twice, you've killed men here, and each time you've gut-shot them. That don't prove you're an ex-owlhooter, and I don't have any proof. But I'm givin' you a warning: You try playing Ed Rollins for a sucker, you treat Judy any way but right, and I'll follow your back-trail to when you were a button! I'll dig up whatever there is to dig up!"

KIM MORSMAN forced a thin smile. Oddly, he felt no dislike for the big rancher. Rance Kellogg was stolid and hard-working, with the kind of one-track, purposeful mind that would make him successful. Maybe Judy would be better off marrying Kellogg.

But it was Kim's proposal she had accepted, and whatever Kellogg's suspicions, Kim wasn't relinquishing this chance to secure a position for himself. The rancher's threat didn't worry him. Once the wedding was

over, Kellogg, like most men, would accept the inevitable.

"You've had your say," Kim told him quietly. "Now listen to me. Keep off my toes." He jerked his head toward the door to Vida's room. "I know what this woman is. I came up here to tell her to take the stage to Webster City, to get out of Tornado. That suit you?"

"Sure." Rance Kellogg matched Kim's smile. "But I wonder if it'll suit her. I saw her right after you came into the hotel. She's waiting for you in your office."

Ted Streeter was coming down the bank's steps when Kim came even with it. He was a thin man, more bone than muscle, more muscle than fat. His angular face broke into a broad, knowing smile when he spied Tornado's marshal.

"Couldn't ask for a nicer day to get hitched on, son." Streeter's voice was deep and resonant, and it boomed along the street. He seemed pleased with himself. "I'll be there, and the whole damned S-Slash crew'll be there. Don't you go forgettin' where the church is at."

After the S-Slash owner had forked his cayuse, Kim stood irresolute for a moment, then climbed the steps into the bank. Ed Rollins called, "Howdy, Kim," with real warmth, and waved him back into the corner office.

Kim put his question and Judy's father regarded him with a faint surprise. "Why, I suppose most everybody in these parts knows Ted Streeter sold off a lot of spring beef this year. Those pure-bred Herefords of his bring a fancy price."

"How much?"

The banker shook his head. "When you're working here, it'll be different, Kim. All I can say is that Streeter just made a good-sized deposit."

Kim put his hands flat on Rollins' desk. "I've got to know, Ed," he insisted. "Seeing Ted leaving here reminded me of the sale. This is business. My business as marshal."

Rollins hesitated, then said, "Fifteen thousand."

Kim smiled faintly. And he'd wondered what Vida Sontag was doing in Tornado! He should have guessed. This was a pattern repeating itself.

BACK IN RICO, Vida Sontag had scouted the bank for Carl Bastine's gang. Because of her, Kim, young and not knowing any better, had thrown in with the gang. That was his first and only holdup—and a chance shot, skidding his gateway mount from under him, had put a hempen rope around his neck.

He'd deserved a lynching. The dying bankteller, rolling in his agony, was ever-present in his mind's-eye. The man had pulled a derringer from his pants' pocket and Kim had triggered without thought, piling lead into his guts.

But the mob didn't know that and didn't care. They'd grabbed one man of the murder crew and were going to swing him.

Vida had saved him from that at the risk of her life. He could still see her, the scatter-gun held loosely against her full-moulded body, her hair the color of sun-dried gramma, fluffing out as she whipped her glance from side to side, alert for any hostile move.

He'd wondered about riding off and leaving her, but he'd known no mob would tear her apart for what she'd done. Not such a lush female as Vida Sontag.

He remembered other things about her—her wildly unpredictable passions, the hot recklessness that had led her to work with Bastine's crew of owlhooters.

And she was still with them! He was sure of it. Already she would have sent word to Bastine somehow about Streeter's sale of beef, about the location of the bank, about who was the town marshal.

Maybe they'd think they had him over a barrel. But he knew too much of the way Carl Bastine worked to get caught in this.

He'd hustle Vida onto the noon stage, knowing Bastine's gang wouldn't strike until Vida was safely out of town. And when they did, he'd be waiting for them. This might be a nice day for the wedding after all.

"There's going to be trouble today, Ed," Kim said swiftly. "Damned bad trouble." He'd spoken too quickly, and now he noticed the puzzled frown on the banker's face.

"At least, I think there will be," Kim corrected himself. "This woman that came into town last night. I got an idea she's part of the Bastine gang."

"A damned slippery cuss," Ed Rollins murmured. "Holes up back there in the Carnations." He thought a moment. "But he ain't never hit this far from his hide-out."

"Maybe he's spreadin' out," Kim said. "I'm thinking he is. Streeter's crew will be in about noon. I'll swear some of them in, and we'll have a reception committee waiting for Bastine."

Ed Rollins still appeared unconvinced. "Hell, it's this wedding's got you jittery, son." He sighed as if humoring Kim. "But if it'll make you feel any better, I'll oil up that old Navy Colt in my desk."

KIM LEFT the bank, his stride quickening as he continued on to his office. It was funny the way this was affecting him. Knowing he was going to see Vida again, a strange excitement rippled through him. He was aware of it, yet reluctant to admit its presence.

This was his wedding day, the day he'd planned for so carefully, the day on which he would make a secure place for himself in Tornado. He'd never had a real home before. He'd drifted, killed a man, and been almost lynched for it. But that was all in the past.

Yet, this woman out of the past drew him to her.

"So you're the marshal of this place!" Vida Sontag uncoiled her long graceful form from his chair. Her slow smile broke on even white teeth. Her deep sultry eyes played over him, caressing him, and he felt the quick inflaming surge of his old passion for her. "You're doing all right, Kim."

"Good enough." He moved to close the street door, then thought better of it. Rance Kellogg and Fred Noyes were over on the hotel porch. Closing the door might arouse Kellogg's suspicions further.

He gestured toward the door in the back wall of the office. "Maybe we better talk back there."

He was on her heels when she stepped into the corridor leading to the rear. She turned unexpectedly and bent toward him, an open invitation on her lips. Kim hesitated, then took her roughly by the waist and pulled her to him.

Hers wasn't the contained emotion of Judy Rollins. Here was a woman who would give all she had to the man she loved, who would live or die for him.

She moved against him, arms around his neck, returning his kiss with a harsh and violent longing. For a moment, he forgot Judy and the job at the bank and the shrewd planning he'd done. Holding her hungrily, he forgot that Carl Bastine was

laying his plans to stick a gun in Ed Rollin's face.

This woman was in his blood. He saw it now. She always had been and always would be. And he was in hers.

Vida whispered, "Come with us, Kim. In two years, you and I will have enough to cross the line into Mexico where the law can't touch us. This bank job will start us off again. We—"

Kim Morsman broke away from her.

"I'm going to be a partner in that bank, Vida," Kim said flatly, "and neither you nor Bastine is going to stop my play. If he tries anything, he'll be bucking my lead!" He paused and added harshly, "I'm marrying the banker's daughter—today."

THE SWIFTNESS of Vida's anger startled him. Her eyes clouded and her voice became taut with rage, wire-thin and brittle.

"But what about me?" she cried passionately. "Why do you think I held that gun on the lynchmob? I love you, Kim. You'd have stretched a hemp rope if it hadn't been for me! You owe your life to me! And you think you're going to stop this holdup and marry yourself off to someone else!"

The old scar of the rope-burn, under Kim's neckerchief, began to glow hotly. She was offering him herself —but if he took her, he'd be back on the owlhoot, long-riding, bellying in the brush, with hot lead singing its deadly lullaby around his ears, his picture on a hundred "Wanted" dodgers!

He had to quiet her, get her out of Tornado, then take care of Carl Bastine and his gang. In that brief moment, he saw Judy Rollins slipping away from him, his plans shattered, his security lost.

Her slim fingers were at the waist of her shirt. She jerked her hand up and he saw the short-barreled pocket-size .25, its dark snout trained on his belly. He swiped at it and she dodged back, laughing at his desperation.

Her back was to the wall, her eyes gleaming with a savage possessiveness. She wanted him and she'd fight to get him.

"These cow-town bankers have a strange sense of honor, Kim," she taunted him. "Carl and the boys will loot the safe, and the banker will sell everything he owns to pay off the people whose money it was. You'll get his daughter, maybe. But that's all you'll get."

The truth of this lanced through his confused thoughts. It would be like Ed Rollins to do that. The old banker was straight as a pulled string. Tornado and its people meant more to him than his own life.

Kim glanced down at the law badge on his vest. Up to now, that star had been only a means to an end, to the place he wanted. Yet, that very star was his place!

Fred Noyes, Ed Rollins, and the rest looked to him as an honest marshal, the arm of the law, a man who would let no personal interests come between him and his job.

His place!

There was no hope for him now and he smiled grimly, accepting what was to come.

HE SAID, "Vida, I'm taking that gun."

He started toward her, then stopped suddenly as the rattle of gunfire rocketted through the street, bounced and echoed along the false-fronts. He heard a man's hoarse cry and then a woman's scream, frightened, grief-stricken.

Vida urged him swiftly: "Well, Kim? That's Bastine, pulling the

job early. You can still go with us."

The crash of exploding shells had died off and merged with the swift drumming of hoofs, heading out of town toward the gang's hide-out in the Carnations.

The light quick patter of female feet hit the boardwalk outside the office and ran into the other room. They hesitated, and then Judy Rollins burst in on them. Her slender face was ash-gray, tearful.

"Kim," she cried brokenly, "they shot dad!"

She saw Vida Sontag then, and came to an abrupt halt.

Vida had slipped the .25 back into the waistband of her skirt. She viewed Judy coldly for a brief moment, then smiled at Kim derisively. "I'll see you again, marshal," she murmured, sliding gracefully between him and Judy.

Kim saw the puzzlement on Judy's face as she strained in her grief to grasp what had been going on here. She took his arm and he shook her hand off, gently.

Outside, the whole town was clustered on the bank's steps, Rance Kellogg bulking big in the crowd.

Kellogg pushed toward the marshal. "All right, Morsman," he snapped. "Where were you when they killed Rollins?"

Kim ignored him, his eyes raking over the mob. Ted Streeter was there, his eyes accusing. Fred Noyes looked blank, bewildered. The death of Rollins had whipped the S-Slash crew into a fighting mood.

It would do no good to tell them he'd warned Rollins. As Tornado's marshal, suspecting a hold-up, his place was at Rollins' side. But he had failed the town, and now Rollins was dead, as horribly as that old man in the bank at Rico had been gunned down by Kim himself. For the first time in his life, Kim Morsman felt a strange loathing for himself.

His eyes sought Rance Kellogg's. "Rance..." Kim had never called Kellogg by his first name before... "Rance, I'm deputizing you and ten men. Throw leather on the best broncs in the feed-stable. We're going after them. And I promise you this: We don't come back until Carl Bastine's dead!"

Kellogg's grim look faded. "Sure, Kim." He lifted his big hand, glanced uncertainly at his palm, then tapped Kim lightly on the shoulder. "Be right with you."

Somehow, Kim found a proud pleasure in the offer of friendship. Kellogg knew, not the facts, but that there was something more to this than lining up a routine posse. And he wasn't asking questions...

VIDA SONTAG was on the walk as they came down the street. She beckoned to him and Kim edged his mount over to her.

"Don't be a fool, Kim," she whispered intensely. "You take them to the hide-out and they'll want to know how you knew about it. Or are you figuring on crossing them someway?"

Kim shook his head. "This time, I'm crossing nobody but myself. But, if you're still willing, maybe you and I can get to Mexico after all."

"If I thought you meant that..." She saw his nod, and without another word she turned in the direction of the livery stable.

The outlaws' trail sped straight across the flats, four of them, dipping into a dry streambed, climbing through a sage-covered meadow and lifting in a northwesterly direction through the foothills of the Carnations. Mexico lay to the left, and ahead were the shelves of the mountain range, criss-crossed with ravines, pocked with high basins

Kim swung off the trail, bearing southwest, and he heard the sharp, shouted objections from the strung-out posse behind him. He pulled to a stop finally, a quarter-mile from Bastine's owlhoot hide-out, waited for the posse to close up.

Fred Noyes said, "That woman, Vida Sontag. She's been killing her horse to catch up with us."

Her horse was slick with sweat and lather when she shoved in among them. Her eyes were bright with recklessness. Her face was flushed, but she said nothing, only moving to Kim's side.

"There's a box canyon up ahead," Kim told them. "Leastways, that's what it looks like. Anybody'd think an owlhooter would be a damned fool to hole up in it. But there's a back-trail that scales up under the summit of a ridge. A couple of men could hold us off while the rest make it up the ridge. Then they pour lead at us while the others scramble up after them."

FRED NOYES lifted his head suspiciously. "How do you know that, Kim?"

"Take it the way he says it, Fred." Rance Kellogg looked at Kim. "So what do we do?"

"I go in alone."

"Like hell you will!"

"I'll go with him." Vida Sontag reached out and took Kim's hand. "There's a chance that way, Kim."

Kim knew what she was thinking. Carl Bastine might be fooled into believing Kim had decided to throw in with them, that Vida had won him over.

They rode in that way, side by side, the ex-owlhooter with the hangman's brand on his neck, and the woman who had saved him from the lynchnoose.

At the entrance to the canyon, Vida murmured, "Kim, when it's over, I'll be up on that ridge...waiting."

Carl Bastine let them get past him, then stepped out from under the rock overhang. His sixgun hung loosely in his hand, a fixed smile was painted on his heavy-lipped mouth.

"Hell, this hombre ain't throwin' in with us now, Vida," Bastine growled. "That bank was tipped off. Keno and Jake ate lead, and we had to leave them back in the hills."

"Where's Sid Greet?"

Bastine pointed with the sixgun. "Behind you."

Kim glanced around at the dark-bearded man who was advancing toward them, a Winchester ready across his body.

The posse would be filtering toward the mouth of the canyon, the first shot the signal for them to make their rush.

Bastine put his gun on Kim's chest. "Drop your gunbelt," the outlaw ordered.

Kim slid out of the saddle, facing Bastine, his arms held away from his waist. Slowly, he drew his left hand to his beltbuckle, then his right had dipped to his Colt in a blurred motion.

Behind him, his mount was between him and the other gunslinger. Vida was back there, too, somewhere. He saw the tail of her chestnut fling out as she pivoted it toward Sid Greet.

HE SAW all this and he saw the quickening surprise on Carl Bastine's face. But the man's gun crashed and the slug sliced along the old rope scar on Kim's neck, ripping through the silk neckerchief and chunking into the body of the horse backing him.

The animal squealed in pain and smashed into Kim as his cocked gun

exploded. The bullet flew wide of Bastine, and Bastine fired again.

But Kim was rolling wildly, trying desperately to get clear of the flying hoofs. From down canyon, he heard the posse beating toward them.

Bastine heard them, too, cursed, and ran out of Kim's line of vision. Kim twisted onto his back and lunged to his feet. The saddle of Vida's chestnut was empty. Kim's head swivelled, searching for her, panic shocking through him.

Sid Greet's Winchester roared angrily, and Kim snapped a shot at him across the canyon. The bearded gunslinger grunted as the driving lead spun him around. He tried to right himself, but his knees wouldn't hold his weight. They wilted under him and he landed face down in the brush.

Kim spotted Bastine then. The man had grabbed the riderless chestnut, intent on beating up the back trail out of the canyon. Bastine glimpsed him at the same time, and the echoing explosions merged into a steady, lilting roar.

Kim crumpled to his knees under the crashing impact of lead. One gun was gone, the other was a dead weight in his hand. His body felt as if it didn't belong to him, inert, useless, trying to drag him down.

Bastine was crawling toward him, his face blood-streaked. He was wiping the blood from his eyes. Kim triggered, and the hammer fell on a spent cartridge.

"KIM!" VIDA was beside him, her arms pressed to her breast, a red stain welling out over them. "Sid Greet," she whispered.

The small Colt was in her hand, and Kim tore it from her fingers. The gun hardly even bucked in his hand, but the small bullet gouged a hole in Bastine's forehead, and Bastine floundered to his full length not fifteen feet away.

Kim lost sight of Vida. His vision blurred, and he was barely conscious as Rance Kellogg turned him over on his back.

Kellogg said, "I—I don't know, Kim. He—he got you pretty bad."

"Vida?" Kim's voice was a pain-wracked whisper.

Rance Kellogg shook his head. "She died beside you."

Kim turned his head and glanced up toward the ridge. It was curious, he thought. There was Mexico, less than fifty miles to the south. A man could ride up on that ridge and see the whole world lying before him, with maybe a place in it for him and his woman.

Rance Kellogg and Judy Rollins had their place.

But for such as him and Vida, there was another kind of peace, the peace of death. And Vida had already found it. When it's over, I'll be waiting for you, she'd told him. Well, he wouldn't keep her waiting very long...

THE END

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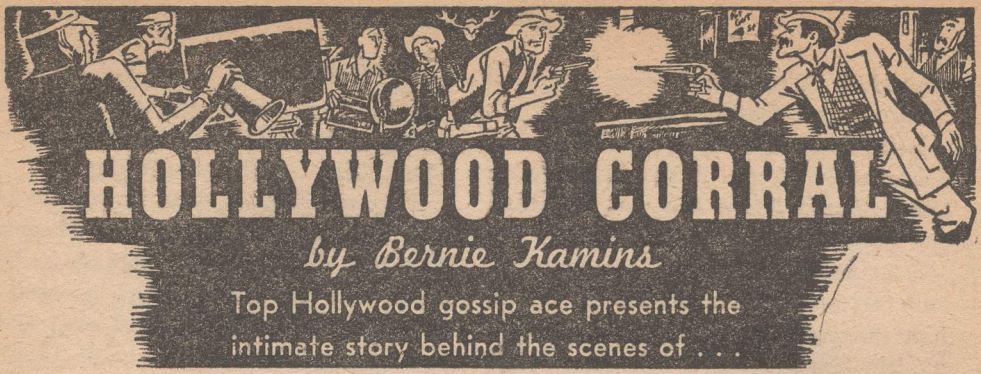


HOLLYWOOD CORRAL

by Bernie Kamins

Top Hollywood gossip ace presents the intimate story behind the scenes of . . .

"THE KID FROM TEXAS"

★ ★ ★

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Billy the Kid	**Audie Murphy**
Irene Kain	**Gale Storm**
Alexander Kain	**Albert Dekker**
O'Fallon	**Will Geer**
Morales	**Martin Garralaga**
Sheriff Rand	**Ray Teal**
Sheriff Copland	**Paul Ford**
Minninger	**William Talman**
Sheriff Pat Garrett	**Frank Wilcox**
Jameson	**Shepperd Strudwick**
General Wallace	**Robert Barrat**
President Hayes	**Robert Warwick**

A Universal-International Picture

Screenplay by	**Robert Hardy Andrews, Karl Kamb**
Directed by	**Kurt Neumann**
Produced by	**Paul Short**
Release date	**December 1949**

(Title and release date subject to change)

★ ★ ★

Universal-International's technicolor "The Kid From Texas" is the first semi-documentary story of Billy the Kid ever to reach the screen. In the opinion of researchers identified with this newest production, the three previous filmizations of the Kid's life were highly romanticized versions of Hollywood dream-ups.

Audie Murphy, most decorated hero of World War II, portrays the role of Billy, co-starring with Gale Storm and supported by such sterling actors as Albert Dekker, William Talman, Robert Warwick, Frank

Wilcox, Robert Barrat and others.

Murphy is ideally cast for the role, being the same wistful type that research shows Billy to be, and possessing incredible ability in the handling of guns.

William Bonney, better known as Billy the Kid (Audie Murphy) is befriended by Roger Jameson (Shepperd Strudwick) and given a range-riding job by him. Jameson is a business partner of Alexander Kain (Albert Dekker) whose young wife Irene (Gale Storm) fills young Bonney with yearning. Gun-fighters from a rival ranch kill Jameson, and Bonney goes berserk, swearing to avenge Jameson. He kills many rival gun-fighters, and escapes from Kain's burning home after it has been surrounded by a posse. Kain and many of the Kid's other pals are killed. He realizes eventually the futility of his love for Kain's widow and, when trapped in a friend's home by Sheriff Pat Garrett (Frank Wilcox), fails to draw his guns and is killed by Garrett.

Audie snuffs out the lives of twenty-one men in the picture, the exact amount claimed by his blazing guns in real life.

One newcomer to Hollywood merits special attention for his excellent job in this picture. He is William Talman who plays the role of Minninger, one of the principal heavies. Talman accomplishes an outstanding portrayal as a menace here. Audiences will remember him as a recent stage star.

Kurt Neumann did a splendid job of directing for Producer Paul Short, who has taken Audie under his wing and plans full-fledged stardom for the young war veteran. The photography by Charles Van Enger and his Technicolor aides is of top quality. All in all, "The Kid From Texas" is four-star entertainment in any reviewer's log book.

* * *

TO THE din of banging hammers, I pulled open the heavy door of Stage 16 and entered into the midst of about thirty cowboys.

"Hi, Bernie!" Albert Dekker, the center of attention, as usual. He was demonstrating the art of rolling a cigarette with one hand.

I remembered when Dekker learned this trick a few years before. It was on a location trip with Leo Carrillo, who is master of all cowboy arts. arts.

A few minutes later, Dekker and I were sitting on a couple of barrel kegs. He explained all the banging: The boys were making two rails and were nailing them to the floor in a hurry. The rails were for the camera truck. The coming scene was one in which a wagon speeds headlong into the face of the camera. That meant that the camera had to be drawn back rapidly—also noiselessly. The little sound box at the end of a long pole even catches heavy breathing, so that the rails had to be laid down carefully, allowing the camera apparatus to role back without making even a creak.

"Are you going to reach the final fadeout of this picture standing on your feet and breathing?" I asked. The tall, blond actor has met a violent death in a dozen roles.

"No such luck," Dekker grinned. "My finish in this picture finds me caught in a burning house. This time I get knocked off in a gun battle."

He went on, "You know, the only one sorry for a villain is himself. Just imagine, I got killed by Edmund O'Brien in 'The Killers'. I was polished off by Ray Milland with a knife in 'California'. Barry Sullivan wounds me fatally in 'Suspense'. I was also stabbed to death by a knife

in 'Two Years Before The Mast'."

Al doesn't get the worst of it all the time, though. In 'Slave Girl', he is dressed in lavish and jeweled costumes, and not only does he have a retinue of beautiful slave girls, but he eats rare delicacies besides.

In actuality, he studied psychology when he was a football hero at Bowdoin. He has three beautiful children, and he has one of the strangest hobbies in Hollywood: He makes fine cheeses in his cellar.

THE DIRECTOR, a short stocky fellow, yelled "Ready!". Behind us, beautiful Gale Storm emerged from her dressing room. She stepped up carefully into a two-horse rig. The reins were carefully placed in her hands while the horses were fed lumps of sugar.

Finally, the entire scene was prepared to the satisfaction of the director. At the drop of his hand, Gale flicked the reins and the horses dashed forward on the set. As the horses raced the few feet toward the camera, twenty men holding on to ropes quickly pulled the camera back along the newly built rails. This action took place at least about fifteen times, until Gale had her stint down pat.

The red light went on over the door, and a bell rang to signal that the cameras were about to turn and that rehearsals were over. At the signal, Gale again moved forward. But this time, the horses veered a little bit to the left. The right wheel caught on a movie gate post and pulled the fence down. The wagon tipped over on its left side, the right wheel hooking onto a gate post.

In a flash, cowboys were lifting Gale from the wreckage. Both a nurse and a doctor were at her side. Fortunately for Gale, she received only bruises and a bad shaking up. An hour later, the scene was repeated and worked out beautifully, without mishap.

After lunch in the commissary with Audie Murphy, Dekker and Bill Talman, as well as producer Paul Short, we went to the back lot. A beautiful eight-room, two-story mansion stood erect.

"Cost me $7500 to build that. Watch what happens to it in a few minutes," the producer said to me. And then he went about his business of supervising the coming scene.

I soon saw what he meant. Director Neumann turned his cameras on the house and called for a take. The home was serving as a fortress for Billy the Kid, and was surrounded by a hard-shooting posse. Audie Murphy, making his last stand in the dwelling, in the role of Billy, was blazing away when the building went up in smoke

The smoke completely surrounded the building, climbing higher and higher and higher. After the cameras stopped turning, I went over to see how the smoke was made and how it was regulated. The smoke is made by a chemical preparation with a Nujol oil base. Black powder is also used in the preparation. Off stage, a special effects man holds a large bellows. He pumps the bellows at the proper time into a can which resembles a large ash can. The can is attached to a peppered pipe which encircles the house. The force of the air pressure blows the gun powder and the chemical preparation through the holes in the pipe, and there arises a mist that resembles smoke.

In this particular case, the interior of the building really was set on fire so that there would be real flame effects. The outside of the building, which was adobe, was left standing like a huge shell, but the whole in-

terior actually burned down to the ground. This is a wonderful scene. The county and studio firemen who did the burning, were on duty all night.

AFTERWARDS, I congratulated Producer Short on this remarkable scene, and commented on the fact that Short was really going to make Audie Murphy a star with this picture. "But," I asked, "don't you think that fans will write in and protest because you are making Audie an outlaw?"

"If they do protest, I have an answer for them," said Short. "Remember that Clark Gable, Alan Ladd, William Powell, and scores of other well-known actors of today, started on their screen careers as tough guys and the worst kind of villains. Today, they are idols to people all over the world.

"Some of the boys—I'm thinking of Bill Powell in particular—were out and out vicious and all evil on the screen for years, with no expectation of getting on the sunny side of the street. Then, all of a sudden, someone got the idea that they would all be handsome guys if they shaved and were dressed in pretty clothes, and would really be very charming guys if given the right lines to say. So explain that."

Then the ones like Gable, according to Short, started out playing heroes you love to hate. "This," he said, "is where Audie Murphy will be started."

In "The Kid From Texas", of course, as Billy the Kid, Audie kills a score of people.

"BUT THEY'RE all heels," Short said. "And you know there's a reason for the killing. While you don't condone it, there is a certain sympathy in the end. Besides that, he gets killed himself, like Gable did in the powerful movie 'The Last Mile'."

"How do you like being a killer of twenty-one men?" I asked Audie Murphy when I finally got the chance to get him alone in his dressing room at the end of the shooting day.

"Well, I don't know about the killing part of it," Audie answered, "but I do know that I like acting. And this particular role appeals to me especially, because I like handling guns."

Then, foretelling my next question, he went on: "You see, I hunted a lot when I was a kid. Whatever game I killed, was badly needed for my family. Sometimes I could only afford to buy one shell, so I had to learn to shoot pretty accurately."

THIS SHOOTING ability came in handy during the war. As most everyone already knows, Audie was the most decorated soldier in World War II.

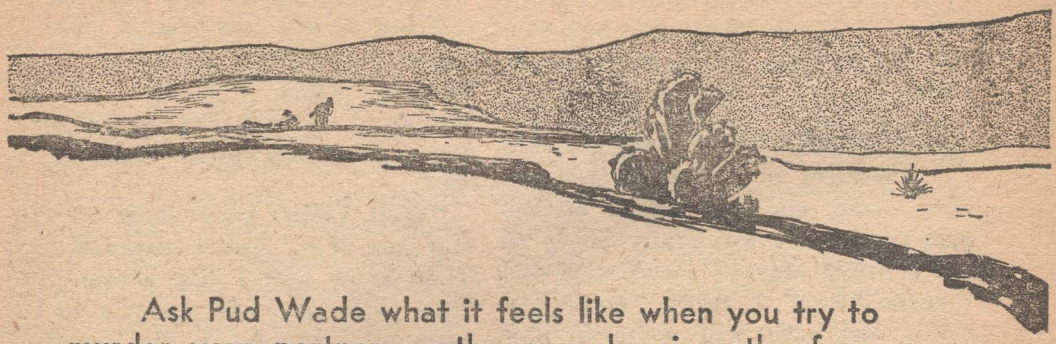
I also spoke to the most undecorated soldier in the last War, by his own description. This was Bill Talman.

Talman, the Broadway star, plays an important role as the heavy. When Audie introduced me to him, Talman gagged, "Here on the set you see the most decorated soldier of the War and the most undecorated soldier of the War."

In actuality, Talman enlisted as a private, and came out as a staff officer. This bit of information came from Murphy. Talman then came to Hollywood, but not to be a movie star.

He was representing Actor's Equity, but he met a studio executive, was screen tested, and now has a long term contract with RKO—the first star to be signed by Howard Hughes since he took over that studio.

BLEACHED BONES



Ask Pud Wade what it feels like when you try to murder your partner — the apprehension, the fear, the terror. And then . . . when you miss your mark . . .

PUD WADE couldn't stand the suspense any longer. He was on the verge of a mental crack-up. Just a slight shove might send him hurtling over the brink of sanity, into the canyon of madness. His guilty conscience was filled with a nightmare of apprehension. His numbed mind was in an ice-pack of constant terror. He needed sleep, but he was afraid to close his eyes, or to leave the bedside of the man he had tried to murder.

Dad Carey might regain consciousness at any moment. Even in his delirium, he might say something to let those grim miners there in the cabin know that Pud had set off the explosion in the mine and sent a landslide down on the old man. For Dad Carey must have realized that it hadn't been an accident!

"You'd ought to git yourself some sleep, Pud," Sheriff Seth Parker said in a sympathetic tone. "There's no need you standin' here by your pardner's beside night and day, a-wearin' yourself to a frazzle. We'll take good care of him. Go on, you hustle yourself off to bed."

A miner took hold of Pud's arm and tried to force the issue. "You come on over to my cabin, Pud. It's nice and quiet there. You do what the sheriff says."

Pud shook him off and shot a frantic glance at the unconscious man's bearded face against the pillow. Dad Carey stirred slightly, and a moan escaped those lips that had made no coherent sound for two days and nights. Fear struck at Pud's nervous system like a club of iron. It lashed through his wizened body, and left him trembling with a great dread that Dad Carey might live to talk.

What if the old man regained consciousness long enough to tell the onlooking miners that the Lucky Boy prospect had struck a bonanze ledge, and that Pud had tried to kill him in order to get the mine all for himself!

Pud was glad that he had saddled a horse and left the animal concealed in the brush behind the cabin. If Dad began talking, he would make a run for it, and do his best to get across Brimstone Desert that sprawled like a smoldering white sandy griddle below the mountains.

By Dupree Poe

As he filled his canteen with the poisoned water, he looked around craftily and saw, in the distance, as the lawman dismounted and fed water to Pud's fallen horse

"I can't leave good old Dad Carey!" Pud protested. "Leave me alone, boys!"

Dad Carey's eyes fluttered open. For a moment, those eyes were veiled with bewilderment. Now, they cleared with a look of understanding. He gazed straight at Sheriff Parker and said in a voice that was almost too low for Pud to hear: "Sheriff, I'm a-dyin'...and there's somethin' I've got to tell you..."

Pud screamed wildly. He drew a gun and leveled down on the lawman and the startled miners, holding them in their tracks while he backed toward the door.

"Put up that gun, Pud—you

danged fool!" A burly miner lunged at him.

Pud's gun thundered. The bullet hammered past the big man's head and slammed into the log wall. Now, Pud turned, running. He dashed from the cabin and rounded it. A moment later, he was in the copse of pine trees where he had left the horse. There was a filled canteen of water on the saddle-horn. He knew that water would take him across Brimstone Desert and to the little cowtown of Dawson that was on the new railroad beyond the badlands.

"Pud's gone plumb stark crazy!" somebody cried.

PUD HIT the saddle and rode hard down the timbered slope. For an hour, he heard no sound of pursuit. Then, he looked over his shoulder and saw Sheriff Seth Parker on his trail, riding at an easy pace as though he was certain he might overtake his quarry someplace on the blistered desert. Pud sunk steel to his horse, pushed him hard. He intended to out-ride the lawman, leave him far behind.

When he left the slope and headed across the blistered desert sands, Pud showed his horse no mercy. The sun beat down on him, and he drank greedily from his canteen. His skin began to feel hot and parched.

When night came down, the sudden change from hot to cold tormented Pud almost as greatly as the heat of the day. He saw that the horse was suffering, but he spared no water for the animal. Nor did he pause. For he knew that a persistent sheriff was hounding his backtrail.

Before noon next day, Pud's canteen was empty. He cursed himself for not having brought a larger canteen. His tongue began to swell like a ball of cotton in his dry mouth. His blistered face felt like a ham sizzling in an oven. Then, the horse went lame, began to stumble. Pud cussed mightily, but that did no good. Finally, the horse dropped, exhausted, almost falling on the rider.

Pud left the dying animal, plodded on afoot, with the empty canteen slung across his shoulders. Scorched sand stretched for miles ahead, but he saw signs of a patch of scrawny vegetation in the distance. A water hold! He pushed on, driven by desperation. Then, over his shoulder, he saw a rider plodding slowly along on his backtrail. The sheriff was riding slow and easy, saving his horse. He was a man who believed in treating animals kindly.

The chase ended at a stagnant waterhole. Pud took one look at the cracked earth, and saw bleached bones of animals that had come for water. He recognized the signs. "Poison water!" he gasped through swollen lips.

His eyes were feverish and filled with grinding sand. His skin was cracked and blistered. His lips were swollen, and so was his tongue. For a moment, he stood on unsteady legs, fighting off a strong desire to sink down on his knees and drink his fill of the poisoned water.

He looked around and saw that merciless stalking lawman drawing closer. The sheriff's horse looked fresh enough, and there might still be good water in that canteen! Pud drew his gun and sent two shots toward the approaching rider. The range was too great. The bullets did no harm.

THE SHERIFF moved forward, more cautious now. Pud knelt in the sump of the water hole, fearing the lawman might draw a gun and shoot him down. His empty canteen dropped to the ground, almost rolled into the water. A crafty look

flicked the outlaw's cruel eyes. He filled the canteen from the hole, then looked above the natural parapet and saw the lawman get off his horse and give the animal a drink of precious good water that he had poured into the bowled crown of his hat. Pud went wild when he saw the water.

"Any old fool who'll do without water to give it to a horse, is simple enough to think I'm sprawled here, dying, and he'll rush right over to save me," Pud told himself. He figured there should be a little water left in the lawman's canteen. "I'll drink it dry and leave him nothin' but the poison stuff in that can of mine," he said aloud. "Then, when he takes a swig from that stuff, I'll let it hit him, take his hoss and make some tracks across the desert."

He closed his eyes when he heard the ponderous lawman coming. The sheriff stood over him, anxious, with concern in his voice. "Are you alive, Pud?" He extended a filled canteen and Pud reached for it greedily. The trick was working! Pud took six long swigs. The precious water sloshed over his parched lips and rilled down his blistered chin. He had a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach, but he told himself that he would soon be on his feet and the lawman would be dead. But there seemed to be a powerful lot of water in that canteen!

"You pore locoed son, drink all you want," the sheriff said kindly. "You must have stumbled all the way across old Brimstone, too danged crazy to know you had a full canteen of water in your hand. Drink it, son, you've got plenty."

Pud shoved the canteen away from his parched mouth. Already, the pain of death was in his stomach. The sheriff had handed Pud his own canteen!

"Old Dad Carey will shorely be glad I found you in time to save you," the sheriff said softly. "He'll be up and around in another month, and he'll want you there at the mine with him."

Pud got it. Dad Carey hadn't even known he had tried to kill him. The lawman had been after him to save his life, thinking he was crazy! Now, the sheriff was saying, "...hey, Pud, are you listening?"

But Pud was dead!

THE END

TRAVEL ... ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

★ **By Milton Matthew** ★

A HUNDRED years ago, if you wanted to travel west in the roughest way, you grabbed the stagecoach to Santa Fe from somewhere in Kansas. There was nothing like it, and there will never be anything like it again. For sheer, ornery cussedness, that trip takes the cake.

Originally, it was a government mail installation. The mail boys, usually two of the drivers, filled their flat bed wagon with corn for their mules, then headed west. There were no clearly marked trails and, in winter, any possible trails were blotted out by the snow. At night, after unhitching the mules, the wagon tongue would be pointed in the general direction in which the wagon was heading. In the morning, it would serve as the initial pointer.

Fording creeks and rivers in winter was a seemingly impossible task. But it was usually done! The mules would be forced to wade through the bitter cold water, the ice covering of which would have to be smashed beforehand by the drivers. Then, gasping and straining, the wagons would either make it through—or get stuck—or tip over on a rock! Frequently, the drivers would tumble into the icy drink. It certainly wasn't travel as we know it today.

There was always the added danger of an Indian attack, too. But, usually, determined and good shooting drivers could back them off without too much trouble.

SHAKEDOWN PERFORMANCE

by W. P. Brothers

THE LATE morning sun was bright, and beat down out of a clear sky. It was going to be a hot day, Fortesque Brace thought absently, as he watched the dust jump in little spurts from beneath the heels of a passing waddy.

He finished pasting the words "Tonight" across the advertisements on the San Miguel Opera House. Then, he put down the can of paste and brush, and stepped back to squint at his work.

He was a big man, and he was fat. Heavy jowls hung down from his jaw, and his good humored eyes were set deep in his fleshy face. Over an enormous stomach, he wore a black and white checkered vest from which dangled a golden watch chain. A grey knee-length coat stretched tightly across his broad back. A derby hat was pushed far back on his perspiring forehead.

Fin Baxter came out of his Silver Dollar Saloon and headed toward Brace. He'd met Finlay Baxter only once in the three days he'd been in town, but Jawbone Reilley, his advance publicity man, had written about Baxter.

It was part of Jawbone's job to spot important people. He'd size them up, and leave Brace a report in care of the local bank. Brace kept out of a lot of trouble by following Jawbone's advice.

Finlay Baxter, Jawbone had written, *owns the Silver Dollar Saloon. He's trying to be a big-shot, but I think he's on his heels. Be careful. Probably dangerous.*

Now, the man approached Brace and studied the advertisements for a moment. His thumbs were hitched in his belt, he wore tight fitting doeskin trousers and an open stitched silk shirt. Two pearl-handled sixguns dangled at his hips. His black hair was pasted flat to his head; he had thin lips and an angular jaw. Brace judged him to be near thirty-five.

"You still figure on opening tonight?" Baxter asked.

"Sure," Brace said. "Why not? This is July second."

"Thought maybe you'd heard the talk."

Brace looked at the man closely. "What talk?"

"I won't mince words," Baxter said. "Some of the better citizens have been up to see Judge Slocum about your show. Claim scanty dressed women aren't good for public morals."

Fortesque Brace shifted his heavy weight to his other foot. "Well, now that's all wrong," he protested. "My show's entertaining. It's perfectly fittin' for the women folks."

"I hear talk of Judge Slocum issuing an injunction," Baxter said

The fat showman was concentrating on pasting the ad on the Opera House building

smoothly. "Thought maybe I could help change his mind."

"That's right polite," Brace ran a hand over his beefy jowls. "I'd be much obliged."

"Of course," Baxter continued, "the Judge'd need some consideration..."

Brace's eyebrows went up. His eyes never left Fin Baxter's thin face. "How much..." his voice trailed off.

"I think five hundred dollars would be reasonable. You stand to take three—four times that much out of San Miguel on a three night stand."

The big showman couldn't keep the expression of surprise from his face. "That's more money than I'd care to spend on Judge Slocum's 'consideration'."

A hard, steely glint came into Fin Baxter's eyes. "Maybe you better think it over," he said. "An injunction closing your show could be issued in ten minutes. And cowhands riding thirty or forty miles are apt to be a little rough with someone who'd let them down."

Fortesque Brace licked dry lips. What the man said was true. But the show was so close to being on the rocks now, he couldn't pay five hundred and still have enough left to get to Remos, their next stand. Nor did he have enough to get to Remos if they didn't open their three days here in San Miguel.

Brace grunted. "I'll think it over," he said. "I'll let you know."

Fin Baxter's lips curled into a thin, tight smile. "If you plan to open at eight, I'll expect you before seven."

With that, the man spun on his heel. He stalked back toward his saloon, hands resting lightly on the butts of his pearl-handled guns, his fancy boots making hollow sounds on the board sidewalk.

Brace watched the retreating back, and his face furrowed into a troubled frown. Like Jawbone Reilley, he saw that Fin Baxter was trying awfully hard to be a big-shot. A shakedown wasn't surprising—but Fin Baxter representing the local judge was another thing.

THREE RIDERS came down the the street. Horses and men were caked with sweat and dust and moved slowly, heads down. They pulled up at Fin Baxter's Silver Dollar. Waddies starting their Saturday night early, Brace thought. This fourth of July celebration in San Miguel had promised to fill the house three straight nights. It was enough to put his finances in the clear. But now...

Across the street, Sheriff Calhoun Caldwell came out of the General Store with a lady on his arm. He spoke a few words to her, then bowed and left, heading toward the jail.

Sheriff Caldwell was a lean-hipped man of maybe twenty-eight. His one gun was strapped low on his lean leg. He wore his sombrero tilted back on his head, and walked with an easy, light step, like a man sure of himself.

But Fortesque Brace didn't have much use for lawmen. What worried him now, was that the lady the sheriff had just left was Dixie Lynn, the leading lady of his show.

He'd expected his three day stand in San Miguel to put the show in the clear. He hadn't paid the troupe in more'n two months now. He was that close to broke. In Salamos, a fight had started in the audience, and when they'd finished, the Opera House had been a shambles. Since the local sheriff had owned the place, Fortesque Brace had lodged in jail until the damage had been made good.

The incident explained how come Fortesque was operating on a shoe-

string, and also his current automatic distrust of young Cal Caldwell and the law. Besides, he couldn't afford to lose Dixie Lynn to a good-looking young sheriff who was tired of eating boarding house grub.

Fortesque had come out with the troupe three years ago to bring culture to the West. Originally, he had recited Shakespeare with J. W. Foster, then owner of the show. But Foster had departed for the East rather suddenly, after a performance which half the cowhands along the border had come to see. The audience had not been satisfied with the performance and were quite vociferous about admitting it, and Foster had checked out on a fast horse never to be heard from again.

Fortesque Brace had taken over then. He'd changed the show, featuring the Bard of Stratford less and the girls more. Although he still recited Hamlet's soliloquy to the occasional accompaniment of .45 slugs through the roof, the audiences as a whole were easy to please.

But he remembered vividly J. W. Foster's sudden swift departure and the howling mob of cowhands after him. Foster had produced a show these westerners hadn't thought worth the long ride to see. He wondered ruefully what would happen if his show didn't even go on.

With a good house for three nights here in San Miguel, he'd figured to have enough to get the troupe to Remos. He couldn't stall paying them any longer. Last week, all except Dixie Lynn had threatened to quit unless he paid their back wages from this San Miguel performance.

He wished Jawbone Reilley were here, instead of in Remos advertising for the next show. Jawbone could usually think up something to get them out of a tight spot.

BRACE MULLED it over for half an hour. Finally, he pushed his fat body out of the chair and headed for the jail. He didn't think the sheriff could help, but there was a chance Fin Baxter didn't have Judge Slocum behind him like he claimed. If Baxter was bluffing, the sheriff was the man to see.

He cut past Fin Baxter's saloon, and went down a back street until he came to the jail. He moved slowly, quietly, to keep from exerting himself in the increasing heat. The hot sun reflecting from the single story adobe jail made him blink uncomfortably. He stepped into the cool interior and, from a room to the left, heard the voices of Sheriff Caldwell and Fin Baxter.

"I've got money with that rider," Baxter was saying sarcastically, "and it happened to be too hot a day for you to go out and guard it. I don't like that, Caldwell."

"How'd you know that rider was coming at noon today?" Caldwell snapped. "That money transfer was supposed to be secret."

Brace heard Baxter's hoarse laugh. "So it is today. Well, you better get some men out to meet that rider—"

"Wait a minute!" Caldwell boomed in anger. "That was supposed to be a secret shipment. I don't know how you got wind of it, but we still ain't going to advertise its arrival. First thing you know, every rag-tail outlaw in the country will be sniffing at the bank."

"I demand you take the necessary precautions."

"Demand!" thundered Caldwell. "I was elected by the people of this county! Now, you get out of my jail before I throw you out! Or I'll lock you up for interfering with a law officer in the course of duty!"

There was a spluttering from Fin

Baxter. "Judge Slocum'll hear of this—"

"I'll do the sheriffing in this county! No broken down critter that calls himself a judge can change that! Now git!"

Fin Baxter came out of the door in a hurry. Fortesque Brace was puzzled, because for an instant he thought he saw the trace of a grin on the man's thin lips. When Baxter saw him, he glared for a moment, then stalked past out the door into the street.

BRACE STEPPED inside to find Cal Caldwell fuming mad. The young sheriff paced like a caged animal. Even his short black hair seemed to be bristling. He looked at Brace suspiciously for a moment, wondering how much of the conversation the fat showman had overheard.

"Hear there's been talk of closin' my show with an injunction," Brace started.

"I haven't heard anything," the sheriff snapped, still glowering.

"Thought you'd be interested in knowin' Fin Baxter thought he could fix it up with Judge Slocum—for five hundred dollars."

Caldwell spun around quickly. His fists clenched and unclenched, making hard knots in his arms. "Fin Baxter trying to shake you down, huh?" Then, his jaws clamped tight together. "Reckon there ain't anything I can do about it. If Judge Slocum issues a writ, I'll have to serve it. It's the law."

"But how about the five hundred?" Brace asked. "That ain't the law."

Caldwell dropped into his beat-up chair. He shook his head despondently. "Fin Baxter's the only coyote in this county I can't flush out. And that's because Judge Slocum lets Fin's men go whenever I bring one of them before him. Reckon Baxter's got something on the old Judge... Lord knows what."

Brace nodded. This was how he guessed it would be. But he figured the young sheriff was honest. "Supposing you saw me give the money to Fin Baxter. Wouldn't that be evidence Judge Slocum couldn't overlook?"

The sheriff rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "It'd be your word against Fin's, either way you look at it. If the Judge took your word, it'd impugn his own integrity to have you claim the money was to prevent an injunction. I think he'd rather accept any explanation Fin Baxter could dig up, no matter how cockeyed."

Brace walked toward the door. "But why only five hundred? I'd think that was chicken feed to Fin Baxter."

The sheriff shook his head. "Maybe Fin's the kind of man no amount is too small to stoop for."

"Know any reason why Fin might need five hundred?"

"Fin's got a lot of deals on. Don't reckon five hundred'd make much difference one way or another to Fin Baxter, except for greed."

"Don't know," Brace said thoughtfully. "Maybe Fin Baxter ain't so well heeled as he'd like everybody to think. There's something phoney about that jasper..."

FORTESQUE BRACE left the jail and headed back to the Opera House. His talk with the sheriff had produced nothing. It looked like he'd have to dig up the five hundred from someplace—or see his show break up. The take from the ticket sales so far wasn't enough to pay either the performers or buy Fin Baxter off.

Dixie Lynn was waiting for him

in front of the Opera House. She was young, maybe twenty-two. Her auburn hair hung in loose waves behind her ears. Her eyes were round and black, and her nose was snubbed at the end. She wore an ordinary calico dress that on her looked as if it had come from Paris. Her folks had been show people. In the old days, when he was thinner and younger, Fortesque Brace had played roles opposite her mother.

Now, there was a softness in her eyes that Brace hadn't seen before. A faint flush had crept under the tan of her face, and Brace guessed the young sheriff had something to do with that.

She said, "Come inside. There's something I want to tell you."

Brace followed her in knowing in advance what she was going to tell him. Together, they sat in chairs at the back of the theater. It was cool in here and there was a faint smell of dust and old plush.

"It's finally happened, Fort," she confided. "I'm quitting the troupe. I'm getting married."

He tried to act surprised. "You can't quit, Dixie," he protested. "You couldn't quit the troupe even if you wanted to. You've got grease paint in your blood—"

"No," she interrupted "It's the real thing. Myrna can take my place tonight and—"

"Tonight!" Brace exploded. "Why, this crowd'll tear the theater down if Dixie Lynn don't appear. Remember what happened in Salamos? You can't let me down like this, Dixie."

He felt her weaken for a moment. Then, "I promised Cal I wouldn't."

"Badge toters!" Brace exclaimed. "They've caused me nothin' but trouble. Why, as the sheriff's wife, you'll more'n likely be servin' meals to me in jail—if I'm lucky enough to escape with only a jail sentence."

"But—"

"Stick with the show for the three nights here," Brace pleaded. "Then, if you want to get married..."

Dixie relented a little. "But only if Cal gives his permission."

"He'll give his permission," Brace threatened, "or—or—"

Dixie got up to go. "You've been good to me, Fort. I—well—you understand how it is."

Brace nodded, and she turned to go. He watched her pass into the lobby, then into the street. He sank back into the chair again, wondering what he could do, how he could best cope with this string of bad luck.

First, that business in Salamos that nearly bankrupted him; then, Fin Baxter with his shakedown, threatening to bust them completely; and now, Dixie wanting to quit and marry a tin-horn sheriff.

The inside of the Opera House was cool and dark and still. He tipped back in his chair, trying to think of something. His eyelids were heavy. Just before he dozed off, he thought he heard shots, but they seemed so far away, so remote. He'd snooze for an hour, he decided, and then maybe something would come to him...

WHEN Fortesque awoke, it was nearly one o'clock by his heavy gold watch. He stretched and yawned, got up and stretched again. The empty Opera House reminded him of the show that night. He'd have to dig up five hundred dollars from someplace before seven o'clock. And he'd have to have another talk with Dixie. Maybe he could get her to see that all that handsome badge-toter really wanted was a cook.

Then, he got a bright idea. Maybe the bank would lend him five hundred dollars against the following

day's receipts. He stood there in the aisle thinking about it. He might be able to squeeze through with a five hundred dollar advance. He scratched his heavy chin and wondered if the bank would consider him a good risk. He guessed maybe not, traveling showman and what-not. But he figured he'd better try. He couldn't see any other out.

He let himself out the back stage door into the alley and headed up to the bank two doors from Fin Baxter's saloon.

He'd nearly reached the street when he heard the yell, and then a shot thundered out! Dust spurted in front of his feet. Before he could move, another gun roared. He felt the bullet fan his cheek and bury itself in the building next to him.

Moving fast for his bulk, he ducked in the narrow space between two buildings and headed for the main street. He didn't wait to find out what they were shooting at him about. These punchers shot first and asked questions later.

The street had seemed to come alive with yelling. Brace stuck his head out. Someone saw him and gave a hoarse yell. A gun came up and suddenly jerked, and splinters flew from the building two inches from Brace's head.

He ducked back between the buildings. He was about to peer out again when a voice behind him snapped: "Stretch, Fatso! One move, and I'll fill yuh with holes!" and he felt a gun jabbed into the small of his back. A dozen men came running and pushing between the two buildings, guns drawn and ready.

"What's the idea—" Brace started to protest.

"Shut up, you murdering snake!" a puncher said.

Fin Baxter came up then, both pearl-handled guns drawn, and looking important. "We don't need no law court for this buzzard," Fin roared. "Let's string him up here and now!"

More people were gathering between the two buildings. "Maybe you'll tell me what's wrong," Brace pleaded above the angry muttering.

"Listen to him!" Baxter said. "Pretending he don't know—"

Someone shot out a fist and it caught Brace on the mouth. He shook his head, tasting blood.

Fin Baxter shoved his face next to Brace's. "Let's see if he's still got the money," he shouted, and thrust a hand into Brace's pocket and pulled out a roll of bills.

"That's from ticket sales," Brace protested. But his voice was lost in the angry roar of the crowd. He just had time to snatch his money back from Baxter.

Baxter said, "Jim Hogan was my best friend! Let's string this rotten coyote up! "He raised a pearl handled pistol and started to bring it down on Brace's head.

But fear had left the fat showman now. And anger was getting the best of him. He roared like a bull, shaking loose the punchers that had grabbed him. He got Fin Baxter's silk shirt and, with a mighty wrench, ripped it from his back.

HE PICKED Baxter up bodily and crashed him down on the others that were crowding around. The melee pushed back and forth in the narrow space between the two buildings. There were too many men in too close quarters to risk shooting. Brace was like a steer gone beserk. He bashed and cracked skulls, pushing the crowd by sheer force down the narrow space toward the opening of the passage. They spilled out into the

street all at once. Brace ducked just in time to miss another gun barrel aimed at hog-legging him.

Then, he was jerked backward and felt himself going down. He heard the roar of a sixgun in his ear. He was amazed to find the others falling back, too, their eyes on someone behind him.

Brace got to his feet, and looked over his shoulder. The sheriff stood there, a smoking six in his fist. Brace guessed the man had jerked him back, fired into the air to stop the fight.

"This man's my prisoner," the sheriff snapped at the crowd. "I'll gun the first man who tries to interfere with the law."

"Start walking," Caldwell ordered Brace. "Toward the jail." As the big showman shoved off, the sheriff backed away from the crowd, gun still leveled. His lips were white, taut against his teeth. They turned the corner and the sheriff spun on his heel. They reached the adobe jail on the run.

Inside, Caldwell slammed the door and shot the bolt. "I don't reckon they'll do anything more till they get likkered up," he said.

Brace touched his scalp tentatively. His hand came away sticky with blood. "I'm much obliged to you," he said. "I'll just get outa sight till they cool down."

Caldwell shoved his sixgun into Brace's ribs. "You ain't going anywhere," he snapped "I didn't risk my neck for nothing. You're under arrest."

"Arrest! For what?"

"For murder," Caldwell said. "For killing Jim Hogan and robbing the bank at noon today. Fin Baxter said he saw you at the bank, just before the shooting."

The showman stared at the sheriff in amazed disbelief. "I don't even carry a gun, or own one," he said.

"Where were you for the past two hours?"

Fortesque Brace shuffled his feet. "I been asleep in the Opera House," he admitted sheepishly.

Caldwell slammed the gun deeper into Brace's heavy side and nodded toward a cell. Brace went in and the key grated in the lock.

"You'll think up a better story in there," the lawman said and left him.

BRACE WENT over to the iron cot and sat down. The events of the past few minutes had confused him thoroughly. He'd been minding his own business when a mob jumped him; now, here he was in jail accused of murder and bank robbing. The whole thing just didn't make sense.

He got up and paced his cell, trying to figure what was behind the whole mystery. Then, he heard voices in the outer office, and Dixie Lynn was at his cell door with Caldwell behind her.

"Oh, Fort. Why'd you do it? The troupe would've waited for their money." There were tears in her eyes. "Even if Fin Baxter did want money, we'd have made out somehow."

Brace took her hands through the door. "After all these years, even you won't believe me."

"But it's so plain. You needed money, and then, when Fin Baxter demanded that deposit—"

"Deposit!" echoed Brace.

"Fin's saying around town that you heard him and the sheriff talking about the money transfer. And he says he saw you from his upstairs office window... "

A hard, fierce light came into the old man's eyes. The whole thing was starting to hang together. But it all hung on the word of one man—Fin

Baxter! He patted Dixie on the arm. "Go back to the hotel and make sure the troupe's ready for tonight," he said. "I'll think of something."

NOW, BRACE faced his position squarely. He didn't like what he saw. Everyone knew he needed money. He himself had told the sheriff that Fin Baxter had put the squeeze on him for five hundred, although Fin's story now was that it was to be merely a deposit while the show was in town.

Then, there were the townsfolks. Enough men had seen that money during the fight to be convinced it was from the bank. His being an outsider, a travelling man, would heighten the suspicion against him.

Brace guessed that right now, Baxter was passing out free drinks at his saloon, trying to work up a lynching party. Baxter had been hell-bent on stringing him up before the sheriff jerked him out of the fight.

But why? he asked himself. He paced his cell for two hours, trying to figure it all out. Baxter'd said he was in his office above the saloon when the bank was robbed. Probably had witnesses to prove it, too.

He went to the cell window and peered out. Up the street, on the corner, he could see Fin Baxter's saloon. There seemed to be a crowd gathering there. Two doors away from the bank.

Then, suddenly, Brace had it. He rattled on the cell door until it brought the sheriff. "Baxter's office is above his saloon?" Brace asked.

Caldwell nodded. "In the back. He uses the front for living."

"There's a private entrance?"

Again the Sheriff nodded. "A stairway in the saloon leads up. There's another stairway on the side. Doesn't quite come out on the street. Baxter says he's too much afraid of fire."

"An' you can get to the back of the bank without appearing on the street?"

"Why, I reckon you can," the sheriff said thoughtfully.

"Listen, muttonhead," Brace thundered. "It all adds up. Baxter put up that squawk about you sending out a guard for the money just to make sure he knew what time it was arriving."

"He must have figured pretty well anyway—maybe from Judge Slocum—so he put the pressure on me, knowing I'm nearly broke and would come to you about the shakedown. Then, you'd know I needed money, too."

"But Baxter was in his office," the sheriff started. "He couldn't—"

"T'hell he couldn't," Brace broke in. "He knew the rider'd come to the back of the bank. So he went down his side entrance. He gunned the messenger and Jim Hogan before they even got the money inside the bank. Then, in half a second, he's back up in his office—before folks even know there's been a robbery.

"He had a good chance of getting away with it, too, because it's noontime and everybody's indoors eating. But just to make sure, he says he saw me from his office window. And he figures he can get me shot or lynched before I can say anything—because I might have an alibi, too."

"What is your alibi?" the sheriff asked.

"That's just it!" Brace grinned sheepishly. "I ain't got one. I was sleepin' in the Opera House. I'd of been a dead duck if you hadn't pulled me away from that crowd."

"It's a fine theory," Caldwell said. "Only, there's no proof."

"There is proof," Brace insisted. "Fin Baxter had to work fast. And

that money's gotta be in Baxter's office above the saloon. He ain't had time to do anything else with it."

"What you want to do? Have a look through Baxter's office?" Caldwell smiled and shook his head. "No, you'll have to think up a better one than that."

BEFORE BRACE could argue further, the sheriff had gone back to the front office. The minutes now dragged like hours. Brace wondered about breaking jail. He tried the bars at the window, but they were set solidly in three feet of adobe. He paced his cell like a caged animal, wondering how he could convince Caldwell.

Then, he was looking out the window into the street when he saw his pass to liberty! Dixie Lynn was coming, heading for the jail!

He rattled on the cell door. "When Dixie comes, I've got to see her," he yelled at Caldwell.

Dixie came with a worried look on her face. Quickly, without wasting words, Brace outlined his suspicions. "I've got to get to Fin Baxter's office above his saloon before he gets time to move the money," he concluded.

"Are you sure?" the girl asked.

"Yes! You've gotta help me convince that sheriff."

The girl nodded with understanding. "I'll get Cal to take you over," she promised.

He heard the murmur of low talk coming from the office. He heard protests. He heard arguments. Then, in a few minutes, Caldwell came in with his keys. He had a worried look on his face, and Brace knew Dixie'd won.

"I'll be right behind you, Brace," the sheriff warned him. "Make a move to escape, and I'll fill you with lead."

The two let themselves out the back of the jail. In spite of the heat, they moved quickly, keeping behind buildings. They cut a wide arc around the center of town, and approached Fin Baxter's Silver Dollar from the direction of the bank.

So far, they hadn't been seen. But Brace knew they'd have to chance the office being empty. Inside the saloon, the heavy noise of voices told them the crowd was getting in an ugly mood.

Catlike, they reached the outer stairs. Brace went up first, followed by the deputy close on his heels, hand resting lightly on the butt of his sixgun.

Brace tried the door. It was locked! Without waiting, he slammed his heavy body forward, and the door splintered open.

They went in quickly. Still, their luck held. There hadn't been enough noise to attract attention from below. And the office was empty. It was a small room. A door opposite led to a hall and the inside stairway downstairs. The room was furnished with a roll-top desk and a safe and several chairs.

Fortesque Brace eyed the safe and his heart sank. Of course, Baxter would have a safe. And, of course, the money would be locked up. Shoulders sagging, Brace dropped into Baxter's swivel chair in front of the desk. This had been his only chance, and now it was all fading in front of his eyes.

THEN, SUDDENLY, both he and Caldwell pulled up! Quick footsteps were coming up the outside stairs!

Sheriff Caldwell flattened himself against the wall. Fortesque Brace half started to rise, then sat back

again, disheartened. What was the use?

A man burst into the room. "You've gone too far this time, Fin. I just heard about Jim Hogan — and — and—" The voice broke off suddenly when the newcomer realized it wasn't Fin Baxter sitting at the desk.

Brace had never seen the man before, but from his description, recognized him as Judge Slocum. Without waiting for the sheriff, Brace picked it up from there. He jumped out of the chair accusingly. "We've found the money," he bluffed. "An' you'll be charged with murder along with Fin Baxter!"

The little old man suddenly panicked. He started for the door, a hoarse yell on his lips. But Brace caught him. He spun the wizened little judge around and slammed him into a close chair.

The sheriff hadn't moved from his position by the door. The judge and Brace faced each other, desperation mirrored in their faces.

"Yuh've been standin' behind Fin Baxter's dirty tricks long enough," Brace snapped, "and we've caught yuh red-handed this time! You might as well make a clean breast of it!"

Brace towered over the man, his bulk menacing, hoping his bluff would work, knowing if the man didn't crack now, he'd never crack.

The judge looked up at Brace, then his eyes shifted to the sheriff and the drawn gun. An animal fear came into his beady eyes. Suddenly, his whole frame seemed to crumple, as if he'd been expecting this for a long time. His voice was low when he spoke, the voice of a defeated man: "I couldn't help it. I owed Fin money. He threatened to ruin me. He was speculating on land, and he got me in it, too. Said it was easy money. We both lost. Nearly everything we had was completely wiped out."

"So you figured to rob the bank rider," Brace supplied.

"I swear to God I didn't know he was figuring on robbing and killing that bank rider and Jim Hogan. Jim was my best friend. When I heard about Jim being killed, I come right down. I swear to God—"

He never finished. A gun thundered from the other door like the blast of doom. A horrified, surprised expression came over the judge's pasty face. He started to get up, then slumped even lower in the chair.

That split second seemed like an eternity to Fortesque. He threw himself backward as the gun thundered again. His hand fell on a chair. He saw the sheriff's gun come up. And in the doorway leading up from the saloon, Fin Baxter was earing back the hammers on his pearl-handled guns, swinging for a shot at the sheriff.

THEN—ALL hell broke loose in the room!

Brace threw the chair for all he was worth. He heard Baxter's gun roar, and he saw Caldwell throw himself aside at the same time. Fin Baxter dodged the chair, but it had sent his shot wild. Then, Caldwell's big six was belching smoke and flame and death. Fin Baxter jerked grotesquely with every slug that hit him. And as if in slow motion, his knees bucked and he pitched headlong. He was dead before he hit the floor.

Neither Sheriff Caldwell nor Brace spoke for a long moment. Then, the sheriff shoved his smoking gun back into his holster. "That chair you threw saved me a slug in the guts," he said. "Reckon you were right about Fin Baxter. I owe you an apology."

The showman was too stunned by

the suddenness of the fight to reply. The crowd from the saloon below were pouring into the room. They took in Judge Slocum slumped in the chair, dead; Fin Baxter lying on the floor.

The sheriff didn't bother with an explanation. He pushed his way forward, Brace behind him, heading for the inside stairs. They met Dixie Lynn coming up, pushing through the crowd. She grabbed Caldwell's arm with a sob of relief. "I heard the shots," she whispered. "Cal—I was—I was afraid—"

"It's all right, honey," Caldwell said. "We'll get out of here."

Then, the three of them were in the street, heading back toward the jail. Sheriff Caldwell said, "I'll be wanting two tickets for your show tonight, Mister Brace."

"Oh, no!" Brace protested. "Only one ticket. Dixie's gotta dance tonight."

"My future wife will not dance in public," Sheriff Caldwell was firm. "Not even if I have to close up your show."

Fortesque Brace remembered once again the hurried departure of J.W. Foster. Then, he saw the look in Dixie's eyes, and he knew there was no use arguing.

They walked a few steps in silence. Brace said, "I reckon Myrna c'n take Dixie's place. It won't be so good, but I could help out the evening doin' Romeo and Juliet instead of Hamlet. Might go over good in this town..."

Brace didn't see the two beside him look at each other and smile.

"Let's see," Fortesque Brace mumbled. Then, with a flourish:

"He jests at scars, that never felt a wound.

But soft! what light through yonder window breaks?..."

THE END

SADDLEHORN

★ **By Sandy Miller** ★

THE STORY of the development of the cowboy's saddle is an interesting one, and goes surprisingly far back in history. The cowboy's saddle is an outgrowth of the saddle the Spaniards used when they introduced the horse to America. Then it was changed and modified to suit the peculiar conditions and needs of the cowboy.

The major improvement in the saddle, the improvement brought out over decades of cowboy use, was the enlargement of the saddle-horn and the bolstering of the seat. The old Spaniards were content, as some Mexicans are today, to use a wooden seat. But a cowboy has to spend most of his time in the saddle. It is logical, then, that he should look for something to pad it with. He had to choose a material which could take the abuse and the rough weather to which it would be exposed. And leather has proven to be the right choice.

The saddlehorn, high and built up, serves two very important purposes. First, it protects the cowboy from physical injury. It makes him sit "low" in the saddle, securely gripping his seat. Secondly, it offers him a base to which he can fasten a rope if need be. In roping cattle and in the other similar chores, a sturdy anchor is needed for the rope. The saddlehorn answers this purpose.

Since the saddle was so important to the cowboy, it was only natural that he should decorate and ornament it. As a rule, however, he didn't carry this too far. It was left to the Mexicans, with their love of color and pageantry, to go all out when it came to ornamentation. Silver, gold, hand-carving—every form of luxurious decoration was used by the Mexican. This is still seen in the Southwest, where saddles are regarded as things of beauty and works of love.

The cowboy regarded his saddle in a peculiar light. He loved it above all his possessions, including his beloved sixgun. And, of course, he treated this prize exactly opposite. He left it in the corral to be kicked around by horses. He exposed it unnecessarily to the cold and rain and snow. He let it get scuffed up. And yet, he wouldn't part with it to save his life.

It Pays to Be a Mulehead

By Richard Brister

Yancy was just one stubborn hombre. But the Judge didn't know that...

YANCEY ADAMS flung a handful of cracked corn to his flock of Barred Plymouth Rocks. The fat hens clucked as they fought and scratched for the feed. Yancey, in his absorption, didn't know he had company until the thick, rasping voice of "Judge" Alex Barrington said, from behind and above him: "Afternoon, Adams."

Yancey turned, wiping corn fluff off one hand onto his faded jeans. The self-styled "judge" sat a fine bay mare with the lax slouch of a fat man. Two hard-faced jaspers were ranged behind him, both chewing tobacco and staring coolly at Yancey.

"Howdy," said Yancey, purposely omitting the "judge" part. He smiled, watching his stout neighbor's small mouth twist with irritation. "What's on your mind?"

Barrington thrust a short riding crop under the wide cinch strap of his saddle, and tugged at one outcropping ear. He stared down at Yancey with superior calm. "Business," he said. "I want to buy this place from you, Adams."

Yancey rocked back on his heels, and his bland blue eyes thinned a trifle. Ever since Barrington had moved into the big, many-gabled house that perched precariously on a shelf halfway up the sloping wall of the divide, the judge had studiously ignored Yancey, though they were within hollering distance of each other.

Yancey thought it was pretty funny the way the man was changing his tactics, all of a sudden. He stared at the pudgy-faced fat man. "Don't recall I ever said anything about sellin', Judge. Fact is, I ain't minded that way. I picked this place out mighty careful, an' —"

"There's others. One piece of ground's as good as another for chicken ranching, Adams."

Yancey fingered a stubble of blond beard and toed the ground. "Don't see eye to eye with you there," he objected. "First place, they's two sides to the poultry business. Raisin' chickens that lay good an'll make good fryers, is one. Findin' a ready market for your product's another. That's how come I bought me this piece o' ground here in the floor of the divide to begin with."

The judge said impatiently, "I'm afraid I don't follow—"

"Why," said Yancey, "I thought you was supposed to've bin a big business man, somewheres back east, afore you come out here to God's country, Judge. Surely, you can see the advantage of this location. This

Before Yancy realized what was happening, the other had swung his crop in a vicious arc against Yancy's head

here Dagger Divide is the only opening through the mountains toward the west from town, ain't it? That means every bit of Denver traffic's gotta take Dagger Road. I guess you and your boys seen my new sign out there by the roadside, didn't you?"

"We did," said the judge with a slight grimace. He seemed to be finding this whole discussion mildly distasteful. "I gather that you sell a lot of eggs to passersby on their way to and from town," he nodded at Yancey. "I can recognize a certain advantage in this situation, from your marketing standpoint. But you must have other—"

"Markets?" said Yancey. "Sure. Grandison Hotel buys a gross of eggs from me every week, on a standin' order. And a dozen or more fryers, over the weekends. Then, there's Ching Loo's Chophouse, an'—"

"All right, all right," interrupted the judge. "Spare us the details. I'll consider the advantage of this location in making my offer for the place, Adams."

Yancey put a piece of straw in his teeth and stared upward along it. "Don't recall as I said I'd be willin' to sell, Judge."

THE MIDDLE-AGED man with the small, jutting ears glanced quickly at the pair of hard-eyed riders flanking him. "I understand you put fifteen hundred into this place, Adams. It isn't worth it, considering how real estate's been falling off, but I'm willing to go you two thousand for it. Just the land, that is. You can knock down these shanties and haul the lumber away along with your chickens."

"Can I now?" Yancey was beginning to burn inside at the arrogant judge's high-handed tactics. "I still ain't said I was fixing to sell," he reminded.

The judge stared at him blandly. "I heard you had a wide streak of stubbornness in you, Adams. They're saying in town you never could learn to take orders from anybody, or even hold down a job, and that's how come you went into this business. I can be just as muleheaded as you. And I'm afraid the boys here won't take it kindly if you don't come to terms."

Yancey let his eyes run over the heavy guns strapped around the boys' waists. A warning bee in his head told him he'd be a fool to cross the judge further. But it was true, what the judge had just said. Yancey did have a wide stubborn streak in him.

He was a small, bandy-legged, towheaded sort, with a harmless air about him that just seemed to invite folks to try pushing him around. Yancey was like a spirited horse. He refused, downright, to be broken to harness on someone else's payroll. He'd worked for old Jus Peabody in the Grandison Hardware until he got a stake, and then he'd set up in the chicken business.

It was going pretty good, too. He'd worked like a demon, the year he'd been out here, inflamed by the image of pretty, red-headed Susan Peabody. He'd got to know the girl well while he worked in her father's place. If he made a go of the chicken ranch, it was not inconceivable that she would come around to his way of thinking...

The judge's offer of a five-hundred-dollar profit on the place was tempting. But Yancey had improved the land more than that since he'd taken it over. And there was a distinct advantage in the location, here

by the roadside, where all Denver traffic to and from Grandison was made forcibly aware of his product.

Thinking of that, put iron in Yancey's backbone. He said, "You seem to take a powerful interest in the place, Judge. How come?"

The judge waved a plump hand toward his big showplace up on the side of the divide. "When a man invests in a place like that, Adams, he sets himself a kind of a standard. He doesn't cotton to having chicken ranchers for neighbors, spoiling his view, and cluttering up the air he breathes with chicken odors."

YANCEY FELT his cheeks growing hot. His fists doubled up and he said, "I reckon that does it, Judge. S'pose you an' them wooden Indians of yourn just git goin'."

"Adams," choked out the judge, "I'm warning you, now. Don't get proddy with me. I—"

"You don't bother me none, Judge. You ain't so all-fired rich you can insult a man an' then buy off his pride. Not me, you can't, that's for certain. I'll learn you how to look down your fat nose at your neighbors. Now, turn that mare an' git, hear?"

"Boys!" said Barrington softly.

The two poker-faced riders spurred their mounts forward to flank the judge in the face of this challenge.

Yancey reached down for two handfuls of dust, flung his hands outward in the most casual of gestures. The dust spumed, cloudlike, before the eyes of the two startled horses. The frightened beasts reared, almost unseating the pair of cursing, rein-sawing riders.

Yancey, watching them with wooden concern to see if they'd go for their guns, did not see the sly movement of the judge's hand to the riding crop tucked under his cinch.

The judge's bay mare was a well-trained, placid beast. She stood firm and unruffled in the midst of the flurry of noise and motion. The judge swung the crop in a vicious small arc, its heavy end outward.

It thucked down solidly against Yancey's hatless head. He felt the sodden weight of it pushing him downward. His knees crumbled beneath him, and he sprawled in the dust. He choked, dragging a hand limply past his stunned eyes.

The judge was talking at him through a heavy blanket, or so it seemed: "Stubborn fool! I'm lowering my offer, Adams. I'll give you fifteen hundred. If you're smart, you'll jump at it."

"Guess I ain't smart," Yancey growled into enveloping darkness. "You're trespassin' on my property, Judge. Ride out."

"Every day from now on," rasped the thick voice, cloudy with anger, "my price goes down a hundred dollars, Adams. You better be thinking about that. And in case you mean to stay stubborn, and forget what I'm saying, the boys and I will be handing you a few little reminders... All right, let's ride, boys."

Yancey heard the receding clatter of hoofs on the baked-out floor of the divide. He shook his head groggily. Maybe he had been a fool for bucking the judge. The man had more money than anyone else in Grandison; he was a major stockholder in the local bank; and folks in town generally kow-towed to him.

The judge was used to having his way, one way or another, and had a reputation for ruthlessness in going after the things that he wanted.

"DOGGONE ME an' my stubborn streak," Yancey murmured. He was thinking of Susan Peabody, mainly. The girl would not understand the fierce sense of pride within Yancey that had forced him to stand up to the judge. If the judge broke him financially, as seemed likely now, Susan could hardly be expected to wait for Yancey to repair his fortunes. Those things took time, and here on the frontier, a girl was not to be blamed if she set her bonnet for the man that was handy.

"A few little reminders," the judge had said, as a parting shot. Plainly enough, Yancey thought bleakly, it was going to be an open battle now, between him and the judge. He wondered where the judge and his frozen-faced "boys" would strike first.

Oddly, he didn't consider for one moment going to the judge and conceding this uneven contest. It was high time somebody in Grandison stood up and talked turkey to "Judge" Alex Barrington, before the arrogant son got drunk on power and went clean out of hand.

Yancey figured it was time to give his stubborn streak a free rein. No man could come around insulting him and his place, and then force him to sell it!

His jaw stayed out at a stubborn slant during the next two hours, while he candled eggs and packed them in the big egg crate on the buckboard for the trip into town. This was the day he generally delivered to the Grandison Hotel and to Ching Loo's, and he worked in haste, fighting a dull headache from that bump on the head the judge had given him.

He pulled up at the back of the Grandison Hotel just before sundown. Fat, bald Stake Biddle stared out the kitchen window at him, then went to fetch Mr. Leeds, the proprietor.

The old man took a tarnation long time getting around to the point. "Y' see, Yancey, as long as the bank holds my mortgage on this place, and the judge holds a major block on stock in the bank, I pretty well have to honor any little request he makes of me. If he says I'm to start buyin' my eggs from the widow Green, why, I—"

"All right," Yancey told him. "I can see how that is. You can't help yourself, Mr. Leeds. I better run along down to Ching Loo's place before it gets dark. I—"

"I'm afraid there's no use in that, either," said the hotel man. "Ching's had orders, too. He came up here an hour ago to talk the situation over with me. The judge simply gave him flat orders to quit buying eggs from you. Ching's scared half out of his wits. You know how the judge always did scare him, poor fellow. He thinks of Alex as some kind of human god. If the judge told him to put his hand in his own cookstove, I think Ching would do it... What in sin's come up between you and the judge, Yancey?"

Yancey explained briefly.

"Always were an independent cuss, weren't you, son?" the hotel man nodded. "It's good to see someone stand up to the judge, finally. But I'm afraid you're gonna martyr yourself while you're at it, Yancey. He's too big for you. He's got the reins of this town in his hands, and—"

"And I've got my back up," ground out Yancey. "He's not drivin' me off my land."

HE STOPPED in at the Peabody Hardware, his old place of employment, and tried to explain his position to Susan and her father. The withered old man shook his bald head sadly at Yancey.

"Son, you're a fine, hard-workin' man, but I declare you got a powerful strain of muleheadedness in you. Why in sin couldn't you've took the judge's first offer, and satisfied yourself with a clean five hundred profit? Stands now, you're gonna lose purt' near ever'thing you worked so hard buildin' up. I swear, I never seen any match for you."

A customer walked in then, and the old man, against his will, was forced to leave his red-headed daughter alone with Yancey.

Yancey looked straight at the girl. "How do you stand on this thing, Susan?" His heart stopped while he waited for her to answer.

She said gravely, doubtfully, "Yancey, I—I don't know. If it was only me, I'd never mind waiting, no matter how long... But it's Pa. He says if I wait much longer, I'll end up stranded without any husband. I —I'm near twenty already, Yancey. A girl can't wait forever."

"I been making good money, Susan. If this thing hadn't come up between me and the judge—"

"But it has. And you can't stand up to the judge in this town, Yancey. If only you didn't have that mulish streak in—"

"Time somebody showed some gumption where the judge is concerned."

"I know. And I'm proud of you, Yancey. Really, I am. Only, I'm scared, Yancey. The mood papa's in, there's no saying what's going to happen. Papa says, if you're not in a position to put a ring on my finger before my next birthday comes—"

"Listen," growled Yancey darkly, "he can't do that to you, Susan. This ain't the Middle Ages." But even as he protested, he knew the old man could do that, if he cared to. There was no stopping a father who was acting in what he felt to be the best interests of his only daughter.

"All right," Yancey gritted. "Just gimme a little more time. The judge figures he's got me on the run, but I ain't even begun t'fight yet. I'll think of somethin'. You're gonna be proud of me, Susan."

"Oh, Yancey," she said, "I hope—"

The sickening, unmistakeable sound of an egg crate falling and smashing against the ground, drifted through the open door of the store, and caught the words in Susan's throat.

Yancey stood frozen an instant, then swore under his breath and dashed outside. His worst fears were realized when he saw the smashed crate, with its precious cargo, resting on its side in the gutter behind the buckboard.

THE JUDGE'S pair of gunslung wooden Indians were idling at the hitchrack, staring down at the wreckage with mock dismay on their sandy-hued faces.

The taller of the two glanced obliquely at Yancey. "It's a dog-gone shame, Adams. Me an' Shorty here was walkin' acrost the street, see? We come acrost the gutter back of yer wagon, an' whaddaya know but Shorty's vest catches against the corner of that there crate."

"Sure does seem like a cryin' shame, Al," cut in Shorty.

"A specially so," said Al, "when you consider there wasn't no need of it."

Yancey watched the insides of his smashed eggs form a muddy yellow river along the gutter. "Take off them gun belts awhile, boys," he suggested, "an' let's talk this thing out with our hands."

He was conscious of a growing crowd of onlookers. Grandison stood in awe of the judge, and hence of his two gunnies, but Yancey knew the town's sympathy lay with him. The crowd would see fair play, he knew, if the judge's pair accepted his challenge.

Al said, "Leave me have him, Shorty," and opened his mouth in a toothy grin, handing his gunbelt to his small sidekick. He came toward Yancey on bowed, widespread legs, shoulders bunched, massive arms out like two huge grappling hooks.

Yancey was outweighed by forty pounds. He saw the hopelessness of his situation, if he permitted Al to close with him. Accordingly, he suddenly lowered his head, goatlike, and rammed it hard against the larger man's stomach. Al grunted, swore bitterly in his throat, and tried to get his hammy fingers around Yancey's neck.

Yancey lifted his head with a snapping upthrust, and smashed the larger man's jutting chin. Al staggered backward, gingerly touching a jaw which somehow had got out of position. Yancey poured solid punches into the man's stomach, until he had him helpless, doubled over with pain.

Yancey took him by the britches and the back of the neck, and marched him unceremoniously toward the smashed egg crate. He was about to thrust the man's face into the mess of broken eggs when Shorty's voice ground out behind him: "This gun says no, Adams. Leave him go, d'ya hear? Now move. damn ya!"

YANCEY TURNED his head and looked down the glinting barrel of the sixgun the short man pointed at him. He heard the murmurs of the crowd, knew they were for him in this, but knew just as surely that nobody would raise a hand to help him against Judge Alex Barrington's boys in this town.

Yancey slowly lifted his hands.

Shorty said, "Now, climb aboard that rig and git outta sight, afore this finger o' mine gits any more itchy. I'd suggest you start carryin' a gun. Next time, I may not be so even-tempered... An' by the way, Judge says to tell you he's generally at home, if you want to see him."

Yancey walked toward the buckboard. He picked out the towering head of Sheriff Matt Cornish on the outer fringes of the shifting, down-headed crowd, and nodded toward the lawman. The sheriff's eyes suddenly lowered and swivelled away, reluctant to meet those of Yancey.

"You, too, eh?" thought Yancey. "The judge don't miss a trick, seems like. He's got this town sewed up in a blanket."

He caught the flash of Susan's red hair in the door of the hardware store as he mounted the box and picked up his reins. She met his glance with weary resignation, and he gave her a brave smile before he clucked to his horse.

Maybe he ought to take Shorty's cue, ought to drive straight out to the judge's place and close the deal for what he could get, without any more trouble. It was the logical thing, the sensible thing. Susan's father would approve of it, Yancey figured. So, no doubt, would Susan.

"Sure," Yancey rumbled, "the hull, durn, tootin' town thinks I'm plain crazy. Maybe I'm jest a stubborn fool, like some says, but I ain't backin' water to the judge now. Not after what's happened. A man's pride's worth a heap sight more'n money, to my way o' thinkin'!"

ROLLING DOWN the dirt lane that led to the knot of low frame buildings that made up his "ranch", he cast a sour eye upward, to where the judge's big house perched on the side of the divide. His jaw tightened at sight of the judge himself, standing on the wide porch and smiling down at him.

"You get a message from one of my boys?" the judge yelled through cupped hands.

Yancey pulled his harness horse to a halt. "You ain't railroadin' me off my land, Judge," he yelled back. "I can be a sight more stubborn than you. I had more practice."

High on the side of the hill above him, the fat man bunched his shoulders with anger. "You're a fool, Adams. Don't forget, my offering price goes down a hundred dollars tomorrow. I mean to clear you and those chickens out of my back yard, understand? What you've run into so far is just a taste of what's coming. If it's real trouble you want—"

"Seems to me," Yancey yelled back, "you're actin' all-fired anxious to see me off this land all of a sudden, Judge. It don't just make sense, somehow, for a man to take so much trouble just to shuck off an unwelcome neighbor." He watched the stout man's puffy red face. "Wouldn't have some other reason fer wantin' this land o' mine, would you?"

"Fifteen hundred's my offer, Adams. It'll be fourteen hundred tomorrow. You ready to do business with me? Or do you want more persuading?"

"I got a shotgun in the house," Yancey said darkly, and slapped the reins against the rump of the horse.

He did not hear the judge's reply above the creak of harness and the rattling of the old buckboard.

Yancey went about his chores, pausing every now and then to fling a cautious glance upward toward the judge's house. When the roosts were all clean, the noisy hens all bedded down for the night, Yancey had dinner, then played solitaire by the light of a coal oil lamp until bedtime.

He turned down the lamp, but did not go to bed. He sat quietly in the dark, staring at flickering shadow patterns on the wall of his cabin, fondling the smooth stock of the double-barreled shotgun across his knees.

The long night hours ticked agonizingly past. Several times, he wrenched himself back to wakefulness in the nick of time. It was not till the black hour before dawn, that his patient vigil was rewarded.

DOWN IN one of the crude wooden pens, a hen clucked nervously. For a moment, there was only that. Then, she was joined by her sister fowls in an unholy chorus of squabbling and squawking.

Yancey arose in the dark and moved lightly to the door of his cabin. He turned the latch, pulled the door ajar, then pried it open with one cautious foot. Moonlight spilled over the threshold, and a flickering brilliance that could only mean fire.

Yancey slipped his finger inside

the trigger guard of the shotgun, and went dashing outside. Down at the end of the long line of pens, a pencil of flame climbed eagerly toward the night sky. The hens inside were making an awesome clamor. Black smoke spiralled upward. Yancey saw a running figure move toward the next pen in the line, carrying a pitch-pine torch.

Yancey lifted the shotgun. "One more step an' I'll—"

"Freeze where you're at, Adams! Put down that shotgun!" The voice, gruff as gravel, unmistakeably that of the judge, came from a point some ten yards behind Yancey.

Yancey let his head swivel until he caught a flicking glimpse of the glinting sixgun the judge carried. It was pointed straight between his shoulder blades, and in the judge's hand, it didn't waver.

Yancey slowly lowered the shotgun.

"Drop it!" the judge snapped.

Yancey flicked it on safety, and let it fall to the ground with a clatter. "You mean to burn all them pens?" he asked, in a voice thick with rage.

The judge took a step toward him, holding the sixgun steadily on him. "Hold it, Al," he suddenly called to the man with the torch. And then, to Yancey: "I mean to burn as many as I have to. It's a new day. My price for the place is fourteen hundred now. You ready to sell, or do we make some more fires?"

"You can't get away with this, Judge," Yancey grated. "By damn—"

He pivoted suddenly toward the fat man, bunching his shoulders. The judge moved with an agility amazing in a man of his size. He brought the heavy barrel of the sixgun crashing down atop Yancey's head. Yancey toppled blindly to the dirt and lay in a thick cloud, listening to the judge's brittle voice grating, "Light up that next house, Al."

NOTHING COULD have brought Yancey back to acute awareness quicker than that barked order. The next house contained five-hundred two-day old chicks, and Yancey felt a sick, lurching rage smoulder within him.

He suddenly lost all sense of personal danger. He rolled, catlike, over the ground, and grasped the startled judge by the feet. He brought him toppling down, knocked the gun out of the man's pudgy hand with a sudden blow. It fell into the dirt. He picked it up and clubbed the judge with it.

He heard a voice yell, off to one side, "Watch it, Al! Dang fool's stole a jump on the judge and latched onto his hawg-laig."

It was Shorty. Yancey turned and saw the little man standing in the flickering light of the burning building. Shorty was bringing his gun up as Yancey swung toward him. It lanced flame at Yancey. He heard the slug whine past him, and he triggered with the judge's six-shooter.

Shorty staggered back toward the burning building. There was a hole in his shirt. He was coughing, spitting blood, all the while trying to lift his gun. He tripped over a watering pan and lost his balance, pitching back into the blazing building. He screamed horribly for several seconds, then a heavy beam dropped on him, and he was silent.

The taller gunman, meanwhile, had dropped his pitch-pine torch. For an instant, he stood like a statue, his mouth hanging down limply as he

watched the gruesome fate overhauling his partner. Then, he swore violently at Yancey, and snapped his talonlike hands down toward his sixguns.

"That's it, Judge!" he flung out through clenched teeth. "Give him both barrels!"

Yancey heard a wheezing sound of effort behind him, and knew now that the judge had taken cards in the game again. He had a picture of the judge lifting that heavy shotgun to plant two loads of buckshot into his back. But Yancey concentrated on Al. He triggered once, saw he had missed, and felt a lancing pain drive at his chest as the tall man's gun tonged flame at him.

He was driven back toward the judge, toward that venomous shotgun. He still ignored the judge, triggering at Al. He saw his slug flick dust off the gunman's left lapel. Al twisted on one buckling leg and pitched to the ground like a bag of grain.

Yancey flung himself to one side, just as the judge finally got a shot out of that shotgun.

Yancey felt a few beebees worry their way through his Levis and ingrain themselves in the meaty part of his leg. He slammed a shot at the judge's fat face, at point blank range. The judge's bloblike nose seemed to disappear all of a sudden. He rolled down into the dust like a slaughtered pig...

THE SURVEYORS for the railroad dropped in at Yancey's Chicken Ranch two weeks later. They found Yancey propped up in bed, being nursed by a very pretty redhead. The girl didn't think he ought to be entertaining company, in his weakened condition. Yancey insisted on seeing the men from the railroad.

"All right," he shrugged. "So I'm a mulehead. Now, let's see what they want, Susan."

They wanted to buy Yancey's Chicken Ranch. "Railroad's planning to start a line between Grandison and Denver. There's only one approach to this town, an' that's through the divide, here. Layin' our cards out on the table, we can't begin to lay track till we're sure of this stretch of land, Adams. Naturally, we're prepared to make a reasonable offer."

Yancey grinned. "Ain't this all kind of sudden?"

"We've been planning this for six months, Adams. We've taken some pains to keep our plans secret, but the news seemed to have leaked out all along the line. We've had some trouble with sharpers buying up land along our proposed route and trying to gouge us."

"Uh-huh," said Yancey, and grinned up at Susan. "I reckon that'll explain an offer I had on this place. Got myself bunged up like this makin' a certain party realize he couldn't shove me off'n my land. Happens I'm a mite stubborn... What was you fellas thinkin' of payin'?"

The representatives of the railroad looked at the stubborn slant of Yancey's jawline, then looked hard at each other. "Well," drawled their spokesman, "seein' you've put yourself out so, and figuring the railroad's plans may've had something to do with your trouble, and you bein'—like you say—fond of this piece of land....shall we say, seven thousand?"

"I don't hear too good on this side," said Yancey, cupping a hand to his ear. "What was you saying?"

"Ten thousand?" said the agent for the railroad.

"I heard you fine that time," said Yancey.

"I reckon," Yancey grinned up at Susan when the railroad men left, "you can start layin' plans to get married, Susan. If you don't mind a man with a stubborn streak, that is."

"Why," said Susan, "I wouldn't have you any other way for the world. Not after what just happened."

"Kiss me, gal," ordered Yancey. "I'm feelin' mighty muleheaded."

THE END

INDIAN PONY

★ By E. Bruce Yaches ★

THE WELL-TRAINED Indian pony was an excellent fighting horse. Not only was he fast, but he could be controlled by knee movements alone, so that the rider had both hands free to handle his weapons, or for other purposes. The warrior could lay on the side of his horse, supported by one leg, and be almost completely protected from the enemy by his horse, while shooting beneath the neck of the horse. Thus did the Indians ride as they circled an emigrant train or freighting wagons. If the enemy were mounted and attempted to outrun the attacking Indians, so much the better from the redskins' standpoint, for their ponies were much fleeter than the horses of the white men. The Indian warriors were trained also in carrying away their injured and dead comrades without stopping. While riding at a fast rate, they would reach down, pick up the man with one hand, and drag him to safety.

The Indian pony also gave a superior performance on the buffalo hunt. As a good cow pony will follow one certain steer indicated by the cowboy through all sorts of dodges and dashes for freedom, so did the trained buffalo pony stick to one buffalo until it had been killed, then go on to another, while all the time both of the Indian's hands were free to manipulate the weapon which did the killing, whether rifle, lance, or bow and arrow.

The Indians set great store by their ponies, and it was important to their standing in the tribe that they have as many and as good horses as possible. In spite of the value of the horse to them, they were not kind masters. They gave very little thought to providing fodder for the animals during the winter months, letting the horses find their food by pawing through the snow. They spent no time or effort in making ailing horses well, but were interested in only the strongest specimens. After all, horses were plentiful, and they could always replenish their supply from the herds of wild mustangs; or better yet, by stealing a few from some neighboring tribe.

DRUMBEAT!

★ By Merritt Linn ★

ONE OF THE most melodramatic sights in the world was fairly commonplace at many of the Western forts and military posts. This was the practice of "cashiering" an officer, or drumming him out of the service.

For negligence, for cowardice, for desertion and similar crimes, Army officers who garrisoned the far flung Western posts were punished by the dramatic method of disgrace. First, the entire post was arranged in ranks, infantry and cavalry. Then, every civilian who could cram in, joined the throng. Stiffly drawn up and erect, the soldiers waited for the guilty one in their full dress uniforms. The officer who was to be punished was generally led from the guardhouse by two privates commanded by a sergeant. The guilty officer was also in full-dress uniform down to epaulettes and formal sword.

The commanding officer would step up before the victim who stood at attention. He would read off the disposition of the military court which had convicted the man. Then, the adjutant would give the command, and the muffled roll of drums would begin. Thunderously, it would sweep over the field while the Commanding officer stepped up to the guilty officer and ripped off every semblance of insignia, buttons, epaulettes, gold braid. Trouser stripes and medals were torn off. Finally, the commanding officer would take the victim's sword from its scabbard and break it across his knee, flinging away the two parts. He would then order the troopers to "escort the prisoner to the gates" or to the stockade.

During all this time, the audience was being impressed by the horror of the affair. In a way, such a disgrace far exceeded physical punishment. Strong men broke down and cried when they underwent such a splendidly dignified and terrifying experience. Indians and other onlookers were carried away by the power of the majestic ceremony and the terribly gloomy beat of the muffled drums.

THE DUST OF CENTURIES

★ By A. W. O. Lowry ★

A MAN named Ned Frost, in January, 1909, following his dogs in the pursuit of a mountain lion, found himself in a frightening predicament. The solution to his problem came from thick layers of dust, which had been accumulating for hundreds of years.

The hounds were getting close to the beast, when it suddenly disappeared, and Frost caught up to his dogs halted in front of a great opening in the rock. That's where the beast has gone, he thought, and plunged in without hesitation, the dogs crowding about him. It was black as night in there, but he was interested in his pursuit, and he pulled some matches from his pocket, lighting them one after another as he went forward.

The dogs did not charge boldly ahead, but clung to his heels, whimpering slightly. Suddenly it dawned on Frost that he was in no mere cave, or cleft in the rock, but in a full-fledged cavern. He immediately lost interest in the whereabouts of the mountain lion, and decided to get out of there fast. A strange cavern was no place to travel alone, with only a few matches to light his way.

He started to retrace his steps, and soon realized with certainty, and with panic, that he did not know from which direction he had come. His dogs groveled at his feet and whined in fear, which did nothing to ease his state of mind. In the pitch darkness, he reached into his pockets and drew out the matches that he had left. There were only four!

He stood for a time debating his chances, trying to calm his nerves, speaking softly now and then to the restless dogs. He remembered several letters in his pocket, and took them out and tore them into strips which he twisted into makeshift torches.

There was nothing to be gained by standing still any longer, so he carefully struck one of the precious matches, applied the flame to a strip of paper, and started walking. Then, he noticed that the floor of the cavern was covered with a thick, soft dust. In this dust, which had been gathering there through centuries of solitude, his boots made tracks as plain as a trail through snow.

Hope returned with a rush, and the man moved swiftly along the path of his incoming footprints. Through one vaulted chamber after another he hastened, lighting each new piece of paper from the preceding one. He had used up all of his paper, and was down to his last match, when he saw a streak of light ahead, and knew that he was saved. With gratitude and relief, he finally emerged from the hole in the rock which he had entered so heedlessly.

In this dramatic fashion, Ned Frost discovered Shoshone Cavern, in Wyoming. It was named after the Shoshone Indians, who have given their name to many places in the West.

FOREST RANGER CATCHES CRIMINAL

★ By Wes Turner ★

JACK (RED) WILSON, forest ranger in isolated northern Oregon, hadn't seen a stranger in two months, when the heavily bearded man who looked like a miner or a logger came leading a packhorse up the trail to Red's shack. The shack was located a few hundred feet from the watch-tower, which arose high into the air above the surrounding spruce.

Red accepted the man at his face value and readily agreed to put him up for the night. In those days, the Forestry Service was not yet equipped with radio, and what Red didn't know was that the stranger was "Ace" Burrows, wanted in Seattle for two killings in connection with a bank robbery which had failed.

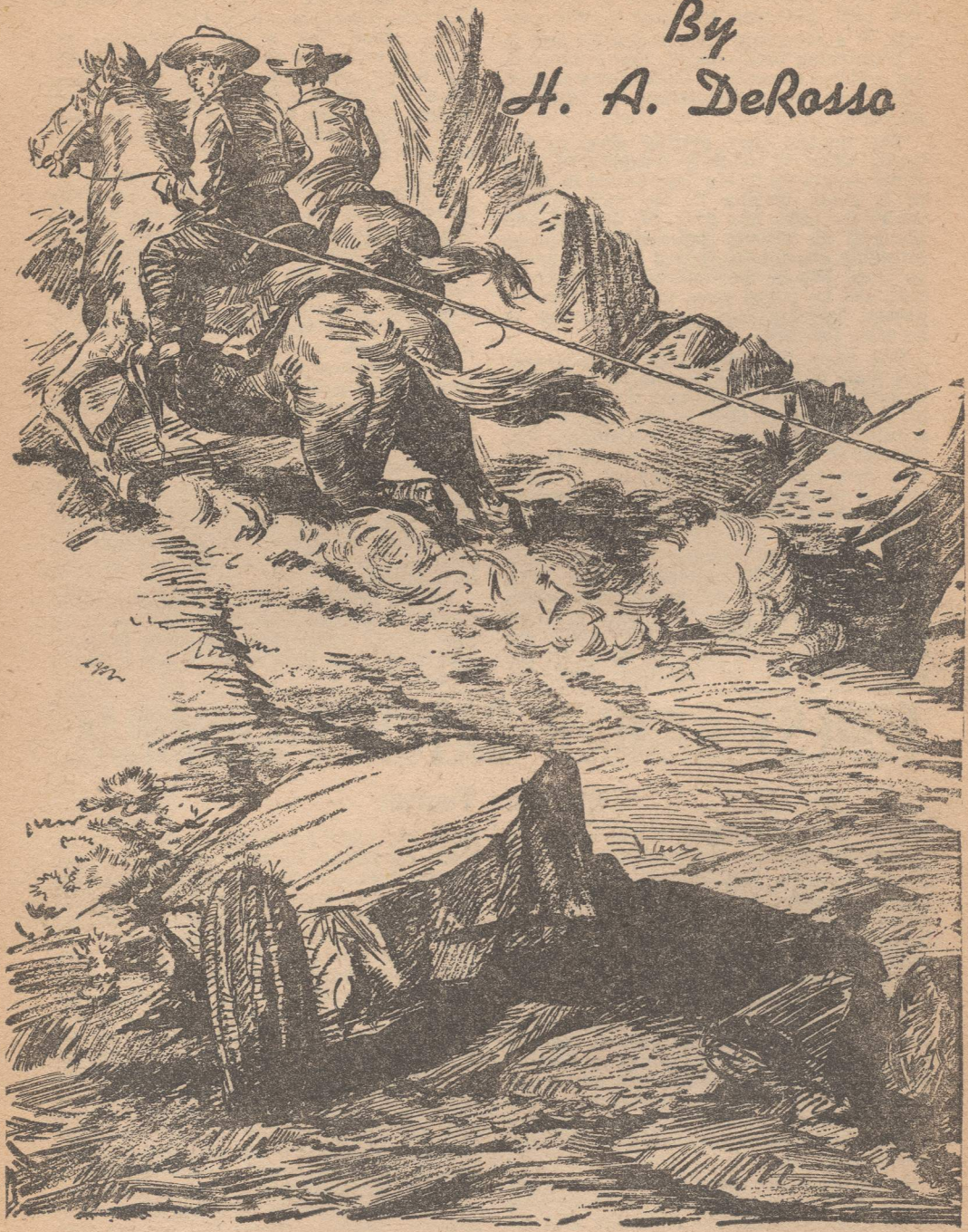
In an endeavor to be friendly to his guest, Red made the nearly fatal mistake of talking too much, by mentioning that he had a rather large sum of money hidden in the shack.

That night about eleven o'clock, Wilson made his nightly trip up to the tower to check for smoke. By sheer chance, his eyes happened to light on his cabin, and to his astonishment, even in the feeble light of the moon, he could see the stranger calmly leading away both Red's horse and his own pack horse. He knew it would take Red a few minutes to get down, and by that time he figured he'd be well on his way with Wilson's money.

But he reckoned without guns. Red always kept a Winchester up in the tower. He let the man clear the cabin so that he and the horses were clearly outlined in the open space before the forest. Quietly, Red put the gun to his shoulder and took aim. He ripped off a warning shot into the ground just in front of the murderer. Startled, the man jumped on Red's horse and started away in a brief burst of speed. But he figured without Red's eye. Red snapped out another shot, and the man rolled from the horse, neatly drilled through the head.

ONE KISS . . . ONE GRAVE

By H. A. DeRosso



Sometimes a girl has to avenge the honor of her family. But these were desperate men, and Adrienne wasn't sure which one was to blame

THE MAN pinned his cold, gray eyes on Greenwood. He lifted a gloved hand to brush at his long, white mustache and to tug at the silvered goatee, something ominously portentous in the deliberateness of the gesture, and a brief feeling of apprehension caught at Tom Greenwood.

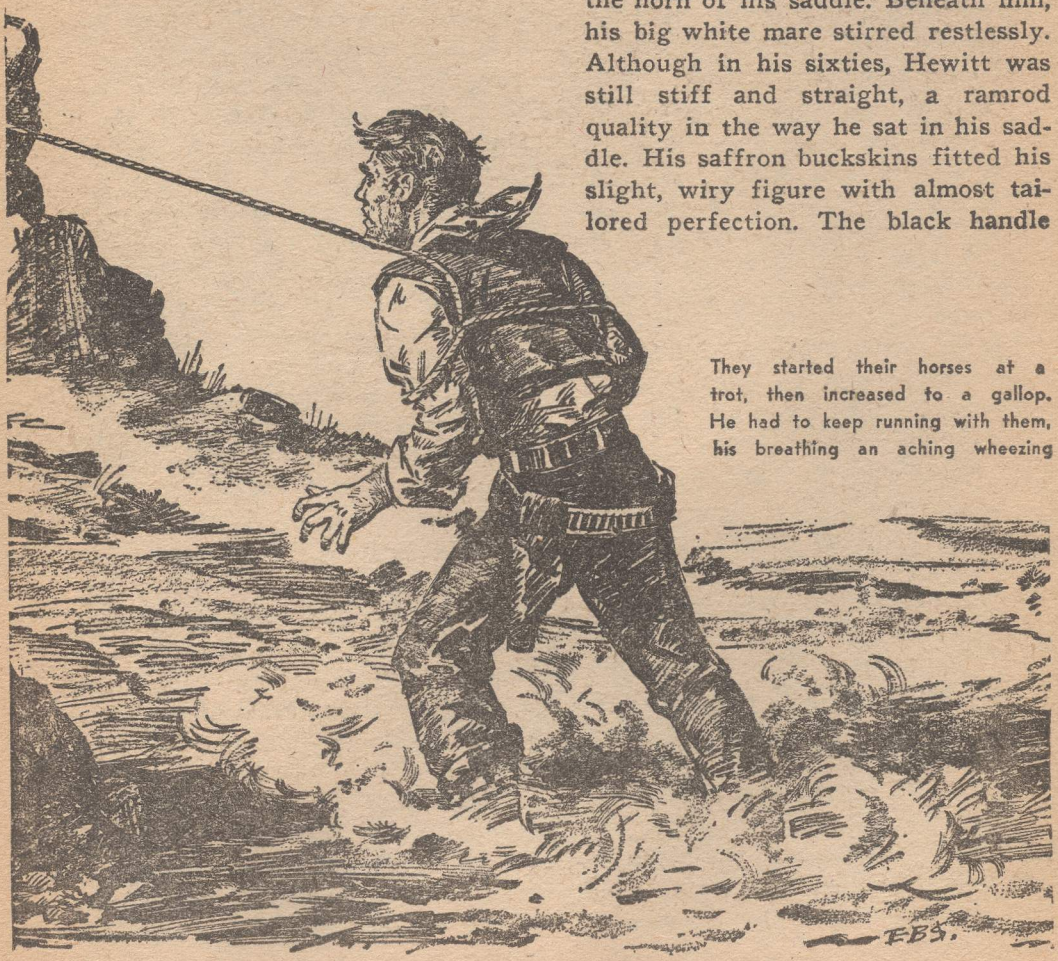
"So you're a C.A. man."

"Yeh," said Greenwood caustically, tugging futilely at the rope which bound his wrists behind his back. "And I'm six foot one and I weigh one eighty and I've got two teeth missing and a mole on my rump."

"You're a funny one, aren't you?" Hear that, boys? He's funny. Why don't you laugh?"

"Leave me at him, Mr. Hewitt," said the big, florid rider standing behind Greenwood. "I'll show him how funny he is."

Hewitt tapped gloved fingers on the horn of his saddle. Beneath him, his big white mare stirred restlessly. Although in his sixties, Hewitt was still stiff and straight, a ramrod quality in the way he sat in his saddle. His saffron buckskins fitted his slight, wiry figure with almost tailored perfection. The black handle



They started their horses at a trot, then increased to a gallop. He had to keep running with them, his breathing an aching wheezing

of a Remington .44-40 jutted at his right hip.

His cold eyes weighed Greenwood. "We'll see about that, Red. We'll see."

Tom Greenwood tugged again at his bonds and, behind him, big Red McBane laughed derisively. Anger flared across Greenwood's mind, filling him with an instant, wild recklessness, but he bit down on his lower lip, forcing the ire to the back of his brain, and concentrated his attention on the group around him.

The five of them besides Red McBane sat their horses in stolid, malignant silence, their hostile eyes fixed on Greenwood. All their horses carried the Branded H brand.

Tom stood on the rocky ground. Junipers and pines dotted the land, and behind him lifted the sullen crests of the Jabez Range. A slight, indifferent wind rustled the junipers and stirred the blades of the grama grass, sighing a mocking refrain in his ears.

Hewitt stirred slightly in his saddle and averted his glance briefly. "What did his papers say his name was?" he asked one of his riders.

"Greenwood. Tom Greenwood."

"Ah, yes." The cold glance reverted back to the bound man. "Who sent for you, Greenwood?"

"A member of the Cattlemen's Association."

Hewitt's lips tightened. The white mustache bristled. "I already admitted you were a funny boy. No need to keep on trying to prove it. Who was it sent for you? Wendell Mead?"

THE ANGER was flaring in Greenwood again. His helplessness filled him with a roiling frustration. Hot words burned the tip of his tongue, but he swallowed them reluctantly and tried to keep his voice even. "He pays his dues. He's entitled to the services of the Association. He's been losing cows, and since that's what I draw my wages for, I was sent here to investigate Mead's losses."

"Have you seen Mead?" asked Hewitt.

Greenwood glanced around the ring of riders hemming him in. "I was on my way, until you boys detained me."

"It's just as well," said Hewitt. "I can tell you just what Mead would have said. He'd have told you that Bradded H is doing the rustling. He'd have said Old Man Hewitt swings the widest and hungriest loop in these mountains. He'd have said that's how Old Man Hewitt built Bradded H. Mead's just been here three years, but he already thinks he should run the whole she-bang in the Jabez Range."

"I don't care what Mead says," Greenwood retorted. "My job is to track down the rustlers. I don't answer to Mead for that. I answer to the Association, and the C.A. is bigger than any one man."

Hewitt leaned forward in the saddle, gray eyes glittering. "Even bigger than me? Is that what you meant to say, Greenwood? Well, let me tell you this: No measly, two-bit, conniving Association is pushing me around."

The C.A. man sighed wearily. "The Association pushes no one around, Hewitt. It just simply tries to protect the interests of its members. Can I help it if you don't belong?"

"Association be damned!" Hewitt shouted, his face purpling. He pounded a gloved fist on his saddlehorn. "I can take care of my interests. I always have. I was the first man to run cattle in these mountains. I've taken care of rustlers before, and I'll take care of them again. I'll get those dirty sons that have been

running off Bradded H beef, and when I do, you'll see them swinging from the pines all over the mountains. Damn the Association! Damn the law! I'm my own law in these mountains!"

We both want the same things, Hewitt," Greenwood said tiredly. "We're both after the rustlers. Whether you belong to the Association or not, whether or not you approve of it, makes no difference. I'm still working for the same thing you are. Why are you so set against me?"

Hewitt's gloved fingers stroked his goatee. His mouth twisted in a cold, jeering smile. "As if you didn't know," his voice was sarcastic. "But I'll tell you, anyway. Wendell Mead wants a C.A. man in these mountains, not to catch the rustlers, but to frame the whole she-bang on me. He wants Bradded H. He wants every inch of ground he can lay his hands on. If he can break Bradded H, then it's his. You won't be working to catch any rustlers, Greenwood. You'll be working to run a frame on me. Now, do you understand why I don't like you?"

"You've got it all wrong, Hewitt," protested Greenwood.

"I've done enough talking." Hewitt gestured to his riders.

"I've got the law on my side," Greenwood shouted. "I've got the Association behind me. You'll never get away with it, Hewitt!"

BEHIND him, Red McBane laughed evilly. A lariat snaked out, settled down over Greenwood's shoulders and tightened, biting into his arms. He tried to fight it, but the rope remained taut. The rider who had tossed the loop had the end of the rope dallied around his saddlehorn.

McBane laughed again. He swung up into the kak on his big buckskin. "How fast can you run, Greenwood?" he called jeeringly.

"I'll remember this," Tom Greenwood yelled, the anger pounding behind his eyes. "I'll remember every one of you yellow sons."

"Will you?" teased McBane. "Does a dead man remember anything, Mister C.A. ?"

An instant iciness settled in Greenwood's heart. He looked again at the jeering, hostile faces, and the sudden knowledge hit him that for him there was little hope.

They started their horses, at a slight trot now, and he had to run after them, the tight lariat imprisoning him. His bound arms hampered him, and the rocky ground and his high heels threatened to trip him.

He had to keep on his feet. Once he stumbled and fell, that would be the end of it. They wouldn't halt their horses. They wouldn't let him get to his feet again. They'd dig in their spurs and race their horses, dragging him along the rocky ground.

"He runs good, doesn't he, fellas?" came McBane's taunting voice. "Maybe we should've matched him with a quarter horse. Haw-haw."

The pace of the horses quickened. Sweat smothered Greenwood's face. His breath began to labor out of his lungs. The dust raised by the running horses enveloped him in a thick, choking cloud. His thighs began to protest with pain. His toe struck a jutting rock, hurtling him forward, wrenching a hoarse cry out of him. For a cold, clawing moment, he thought he was going to fall, but he kept on his feet and went running along.

"Is this fast enough for you, Greenwood?" McBane's voice mocked him. "Or would you like a little more speed? A C.A. man should be able

to run faster than this shouldn't he, fellas?"

The pace quickened still more. Greenwood's breathing was a retching, aching wheezing. His thighs were leaden heavy. His lungs were an agonizing heaving in his chest. The thick, churning dust choked him, blinded him. And then his toe struck another rock, and the frightening thought swept him— Here I go.

He hit the ground on his shoulder. A loud, vicious whoop hit his ears. Numbly, hopelessly, he wondered if that would be the last sound he'd hear. The ground bumped against him, knocking the breath out of him. Dirt got in his mouth, fouling his throat. He felt a sharp, stinging pain in his back as a sharp rock gashed him, and above all this the sudden thunder of galloping hoofs.

THROUGH it all, came another sound, a sharp, flat sound, and suddenly he'd stopped moving. The dust was thick around him. He couldn't see. It seemed that the horses were milling about. The sound came again—the flat, snarling voice of a gun.

Greenwood struggled up on his knees. The dust cloud was clearing, revealing the Bradded H riders in a tight little group. The massive shoulders of Red McBane showed and his huge, bared head, and, looking to the ground, Greenwood saw McBane's Stetson lying there, a bullet hole in the flat crown.

The red-headed man was cursing in a thick, choleric tone. The gun snarled again, and McBane gave a loud, startled shout. His hand rose suddenly to touch the lobe of his ear, and then the voice came angling in to Greenwood, sounding very soft and deadly.

"The next one will be right smack in the middle of that pretty face of yours, Red, if you don't shut your filthy mouth!"

McBane's voice choked on an oath. The knuckles of his hand holding the reins showed a translucent white.

Greenwood had lurched up on his feet. He turned his head and there he saw her, sitting on her pinto, the .41 Colt Lightning pistol in her hand covering the Bradded H men.

"All right," she said thinly, gesturing with the .41. "Get!"

Hewitt edged his white mare around, facing the girl. The goatee quivered with rage. He shook his fist at the girl. "We'll get you yet," he shouted. "We'll get the goods on you and Tully and that crazy Shoshone, and when we do, we're stringing all three of you from a pine. You hear that, Adrienne Fox? All three of you!"

The girl gave a short, jibing laugh. "Get!" she repeated.

Hewitt yanked the mare's head around angrily, and jabbed with the spurs until the horse screamed. He went racing madly down the mountainside, his riders behind him.

THE GIRL was watching them, laughing in a husky, throaty way. Suddenly, she seemed to remember Tom and she slid from the saddle, walking swiftly over to where he sat on a rock, breathing heavily.

"Boy, are you helpless," she exclaimed, starting to work on the ropes binding him. "How did the C.A. ever hire you?"

Greenwood bit his lips, but made no reply. The ropes loosened, and then his cramped arms were free. He began massaging his stinging wrists and arms.

"Well, thanks," he said at last. "A little while longer and I'd have been a goner."

"Oh, I don't think so," she replied

easily, seating herself on a rock opposite from him. "They wouldn't have killed you, not intentionally, I don't think. They just wanted to rough you up real good, so you'd pick up and quit the mountains." She chuckled. "Old Man Hewitt isn't as tough as he bellers to be."

The circulation had worked back into his wrists and hands, and some of the soreness had ebbed. Greenwood turned his attention to his rescuer.

She was tall with dark, blue-black hair and brown eyes. Her mouth was wide, and a cleft split her chin. Her cream-colored, flat-crowned Stetson was cocked jauntily on one side of her head, while the black and white checkered shirt revealed the rise of her breasts. She was wearing tight-fitting blue levis tucked into the top of her fancy-stitched Cheyenne boots. The pearl handle of her .41 glittered at her side.

"Are you through staring?" came her cool query.

A flush swept over Greenwood's face, followed by a quick anger at it. She seemed so cool and impersonal, and so pretty, that all he felt inside was confusion and a disgust at his inability to find something to say.

He looked down at himself. His shirt was in tatters, the left sleeve ripped off. His bared arm was covered with bruises and scratches and trickling blood from the gash in his shoulder.

He rose stiffly to his feet. "Well, I guess I better get another shirt from my pack. My bay is back there a ways. I think they left my gun there, too. Are you coming with me?"

WENDELL MEAD was small and neat and precise. He stood about five foot four, and couldn't have weighed in over one thirty five. His handsome face was marked by a neat, well-trimmed, hairline mustache, flashing black eyes and a delicately chiseled nose.

His hands were small, almost like a woman's, the nails cleaned and manicured, and he had a dainty but eloquent way of gesturing with them while he spoke. The yellow silk scarf he was wearing around his neck contrasted brilliantly with his black silk shirt. He kept slapping the whip in his left hand against his thigh as he spoke.

"I'm sorry to hear about your run-in with Old Man Hewitt, Greenwood," Mead was saying as they walked across the ranch yard. "From what you've said, he's out to make it tough for you. You'd do well to be extremely cautious from now on. Hewitt's a tough old codger, and I don't believe he'd stop at anything."

"Hewitt was quite indignant over his losses to the rustlers," Greenwood told Mead. "He sure seemed smoked up about it."

"Naturally," Mead laughed softly and waved a pale hand in a delicate gesture. He indicated a corral toward which they were heading.

"Before I make any accusations, Greenwood," Mead went on, "before I even discuss it, I want to show you something. Then, you can draw your conclusions from there."

A cow and a calf were in the corral. Mead nodded his head at them, "As you can see, Greenwood, the cow carries the Pothook brand. My brand. The calf has a Bradded H. Of course, it's a big calf, about ready for weaning almost any day, but it's still the cow's calf or she wouldn't let it feed from her. Now, do you begin to see, Greenwood?"

The calf had moved around so that Greenwood could read the brand

on its flank. He pursed his lips thoughtfully. "That seems a rather crude way of doing it," he said. "Hewitt struck me as being smarter than that."

Mead uttered his soft, smooth laugh again. "He's just getting overconfident. He's been getting away with it so easily that he's becoming quite bold and open about it. Did he give you that bellering speech of his about being his own law and running the mountains his way?" Mead chuckled and shook his head. "Hewitt's quite a man, quite a man."

Tom was studying the brand on the calf's flank. The marking seemed fresh, possibly two or three days old.

"I'm in a rather awkward position Greenwood," Mead continued. "You see, I'm new to the Jabez country. I bought the Pothook about three years ago. It was quite rundown and just about worthless, but I've built it up. Hewitt, having been the first one to run cattle here, has always fancied himself as a sort of over-lord for the whole country. I wouldn't kowtow to him, and that kind of got his hackles up."

"I gathered he didn't exactly approve of you," said Greenwood smiling a little.

MEAD LAUGHED gaily. "That's putting it mildly." His face sobered, became quite grave. "Now, Greenwood, I don't like to talk behind another man's back, although I don't see why it should bother me since Hewitt does so much talking about me. But still, I don't like it." He paused, biting his lips a moment, then went on: "You know how these old-timers are. They never were very particular whose calf they ran their brand on. They all swung wide loops. It was quite the accepted thing, in fact. Most of the big cattlemen built up their outfits that way. Some of them never changed their ways."

He gave a short, embarrassed laugh. "Now, I don't like to make such accusations, Greenwood, but on the face of everything, I can't see how I could do differently. The way I see it, if Hewitt were really innocent, he wouldn't protest so long and vociferously. Why would he want to run you out of the mountains if he wasn't hooked up with the rustling some way? He stands to gain by your work if he's really innocent and is also losing cows. Doesn't that sound right, Greenwood?"

Greenwood scratched his chin. "You've got a point there," he admitted. He frowned thoughtfully. "Hewitt mentioned something about somebody named Tully and some Shoshone Indian. Who are they?"

Mead chuckled deprecatingly. "Hewitt has to accuse somebody in an effort to direct your attention from him. Wes Tully has a shack in the mountains. He's a wolfer. He's a good man at his job, too. I've had him do work for me. Shoshone's a white man who works with Tully. Shoshone used to be a trapper and a buffalo hunter. He's a little touched and thinks he's fighting Indians most of the time, but he's harmless."

Mead waved a desultory hand. "They might butcher a beef now and then for food, but that's negligible. You'll probably run across the two of them in the mountains. I'm sure you'll agree with me that it's utterly preposterous to suspect them of anything more than occasionally killing a cow for their own use."

Tom could feel Mead's eyes on him, but when he looked up, the man was staring at the peaks of the Jabez.

"Well, Greenwood," asked Mead softly, "what do you make of it?"

Tom grinned wryly. "I really haven't given that any thought. I'll

make my investigation. If I uncover anything, I'll take action. So far, it's all been hearsay."

"That Pothook cow and Bradded H calf isn't hearsay," said Mead narrowly. "But you know your job, Greenwood. I won't presume to tell you what to do. The Jabez Range is full of canyons and hidden valleys where cows can be run off to and hidden. If you need any help, I can spare a couple of Pothook riders."

"Thanks, Mead, but I prefer to work alone. I've been weaned. I can take care of myself..."

GREENWOOD FOUND the spring in a small draw. His bay was weary and blowing a little, so Greenwood dismounted and lay on his belly and drank. The water was clear and cold and tasty. He raised himself up on his elbows, looking at his image reflected in the water. Red beard lined his cheeks and chin and rimmed his mouth. He had not shaved in the week he had been riding these mountains.

Something moved forward into the reflecting water and, seeing it, Greenwood rolled over, grabbing at his .44. But it was only the girl moving toward him, leading her pinto. A feeling of conscious embarrassment filled Greenwood, and he let the half-drawn Colt slide back in its holster and got to his feet.

"Hello there," she said coolly, leading pinto to the spring, letting it drink beside Greenwood's bay.

"Hello," he said softly, watching the tight fit of the levis about her hips as she walked. Something stirred in him, and he knew a slight irritation because he could not quite comprehend what it was.

"How's the investigation coming along?" she asked, walking up to him, stopping close enough so that he could smell the scent of apple blossoms about her.

"Tolerably."

She clasped her hands behind her back and looked up at him in a half-bold way. With her head thrown back like that, he could see the smooth, brown curve of her throat and the swell of her breasts, and the feeling intensified in him.

"What are you doing up in these mountains?" he asked suddenly. "You rode off the other day without telling me."

"I saw no reason for telling you then. I see no reason now. But if it will make you happy—well, I live here."

She spotted the doubt on Greenwood's face and laughed mockingly.

"You haven't been here long," said Greenwood. "I know that much about you."

"Why, Tom," she exclaimed, I didn't know you cared that much. I didn't dream you cared enough to ask about me. All right, so I've lived here about six months. What does that mean to you?"

"You've no reason to live here," he said slowly.

"Haven't I?"

"You've no reason to live here alone, but one."

HER LIPS tightened. A sudden anger paled her cheeks. She tapped the pearl handle of her .41. "I'm not exactly helpless, Greenwood," she said stiffly.

"You don't expect me to draw any other conclusion, do you?"

She looked at him closely. Her lips curved in a slight, contemplative smile. "Why should you bother to draw any conclusion at all? Why?"

It was there burning in him. The want thickened his voice, filled his throat with a cloying harshness. "I'll

show you why," he said hoarsely.

He grabbed her. He had thought that she would fight him, or perhaps even yield to him, but she stood there rigidly, passively, in his arms. Her lips were cold and unresponsive on his, and, after a while, he released her and stood looking down at her, a faint regret beginning to stir in him now that he realized how things stood with him.

"Was it fun?" her voice was stiff.

He turned away from her. "I'm—I'm sorry, Adrienne," he said humbly.

A strange, quizzical smile lay on her mouth. She walked slowly toward him. "Why be sorry? That's the kind of a girl you believe I am, isn't it? Isn't it?"

He stared at her. Somehow, the feeling got into him that there was more to her than her cool indifference. He couldn't quite understand what it was that made him think of it like that. Maybe something in the depths of her eyes, a faint, intangible, imperceptible sadness and hurt that was shadowed there.

He reached out, chucked her under the chin and smiled. "When my job is over, I'll want to take it easy for a few days. Maybe, then we can thrash this out. What do you say, Adrienne?"

She smiled in return. "All right, Tom," she said, swinging up into her kak. "Where do we go from here?"

"I'd like to meet this Wes Tully and his side-kick, Shoshone. Do you know where they live?"

A frown clouded her brow. She tugged the Stetson a bit lower over her eyes and shrugged. "Follow me..."

THE SHACK was made of pine logs. It stood in a small clearing on the mountainside, smoke drifting out of its chimney and laying its redolent odor about the shack. As Greenwood and Adrienne came out of the pines into the clearing, two men stepped out of the shack.

Adrienne halted her pinto and dropped to the ground. She motioned to Greenwood. He dismounted and stood beside her. She indicated the two men. "Wes Tully. Shoshone. This is Tom Greenwood. He's with the C.A. How are you, Wes?"

Tully was a thick, broad-shouldered man in his early thirties. A handsome recklessness lay in his wide face, in the flash of his white teeth and in the glitter of his blue eyes. Around his waist was buckled a shell belt with a holstered Colt .45.

"Just fine," he murmured, his bright eyes never leaving Greenwood's face. "Long time no see, Adrienne."

She laughed softly. "Just three-four days. Did you really miss me that much, Wes?"

There was something resentful, even hostile in Tully's glance. It filled Greenwood with an uneasy apprehension, and he averted his own stare, taking in Shoshone.

The man was dressed in soiled, stinking buckskins. A coonskin cap sat on his dirty gray hair. The small, yellowed eyes held an unclean glitter, and the crooked slit of mouth was curved in a vapid grin. Grease drippings littered his filthy gray whiskers. Around his neck, he wore a rope necklace from which three scalps dangled.

A feeling of revulsion swept Greenwood. He took his eyes away, only to have them pulled back, mesmerized by the repugnance of the sight.

Tully laughed huskily. "Those are real scalps, Greenwood. Aren't they, Shoshone?"

"Wes!" Adrienne's voice was sharp.

"Yep," said Shoshone pridefully. "Piutes. I got lots more. Would you like to see them?"

"Shut up, Shoshone," said Adrienne.

"I got them in the house, Greenwood," Shoshone payed no attention to her. "Got some real nice ones. Come on, I'll show them to you."

"Make him shut up, Wes." The girl's face was pale and sick.

Tully was chuckling. "You know Adrienne dosen't like you to talk like this, Shoshone."

"Why shouldn't I?" Shoshone pouted. "Piutes would've scalped me if they'd killed me. They'd have counted coup and taken my scalp and made medicine over it. Why shouldn't I do the same?"

"Answer him that, Adrienne," laughed Tully.

"Don't you want to see my scalps, Greenwood?" asked Shoshone.

A SULLEN anger was stirring in Tom. He turned hot eyes on Tully. "You sure like your fun, don't you?"

Tully's thick brown brows lifted. His lips pursed speculatively. "Oh?" he said softly. "You don't like it, Greenwood?"

"Won't you come, Greenwood?" Shoshone was insistent, his tone now one of hurt. "Won't you come and see my scalps?"

Adrienne said, "I saw Piute sign in the mountains today, Shoshone. Why don't you scout around?"

"Piutes?" whispered Shoshone hoarsely. The dirty fingers of his right hand closed about the Bowie shoved bare in his belt. "Piutes? Maybe I can get me another scalp. He-he-he. Piutes." He started moving away, walking soundlessly on the balls of his feet.

"Shoshone!" Tully barked. "Come back here! Did you hear what I said!"

Shoshone halted. "There's Piutes out there," he quavered, waving a dirty hand.

"There's nothing there," said Tully angrily. "Adrienne was just fooling you. There's no Piutes this far south."

"Piutes," whispered Shoshone, cocking his head, listening with a hand cupped over his ear. "Piutes."

"You stay here," said Tully. He threw an angry look at Adrienne. "Why did you have to start that?" he muttered under his breath.

"What did you start?" she retorted.

Tully ignored her. He turned his eyes on Greenwood and his lips curled. "Well, Greenwood, what did you expect to find here? Stolen Pothook beef?"

"Perhaps." Greenwood fought down the hot words that kept coming to his lips.

Tully's eyes flared. "Look here, Greenwood," he said harshly. "I'm not taking any pushing around, see? Just because I got a two-bit shack and a cracked old buffalo hunter working for me, is no sign that everybody should shove me around. I'm a wolfer. I make my living that way. I like to make my living that way. I ain't gonna stand for no snooping C.A. man come poking his nose in my affairs."

"Wes," Adrienne pleaded.

Greenwood took a deep breath, expelled it in a long, weary sigh. "Have I made any accusations, Tully?"

"I know you C.A. gents," said Tully. "You're all for the big fellas. They steal from each other, and when it comes time to pay the piper, they pick out some helpless little gent and frame the whole cavvy on him. Who sicced you on me?

Was it Old Man Hewitt? Or Wendell Mead?"

Shoshone had come back and was tugging at Tully's sleeve. "I tell you, I hear them out there. Piutes. I hear them."

"Go count your scalps," said Tully angrily, slapping Shoshone's hand away.

Greenwood had had his fill. He mounted the bay. "Sorry to see you take it like this, Tully," he said. "I won't strain your hospitality further. Coming, Adrienne?"

She looked at Tully, then at Greenwood, and shook her head. "I'm staying, Tom." she said.

Tully laughed loudly. The muscles along Greenwood's jaw bulged. His palm itched for the handle of his .44. Angrily, he jerked the bay's head around, touched him with the spurs.

Behind him came Shoshone's wheedling voice: "Can I go after them Piutes, Wes? Can't I get me another scalp...?"

SAN LEANDRO lay in a tiny valley in the Jabez Range. It was a poor excuse for a town. There were two saloons, a general store and a blacksmith shop. Four lonely structures dozing inanimately among the towering, sweet-smelling pines and spruces, listening endlessly to the mourning of the wind through the branches and needles.

Greenwood, riding in from the east down the winding draw, spotted the half dozen horses hitched in front of one of the saloons. Looking closer, he spotted the Bradded H brand on the animals and an instant, fretful prescience filled him.

He left his bay in front of the store. He made his purchases and when he came out, found the Bradded H riders ringed around his horse. He pretended to ignore them, tied his bundles to the cantle of his saddle, and was just about to mount when a voice deterred him.

"Leaving us so soon?" Red McBane stood there, thumbs hooked in his cartridge belt, burly chest thrown out, a mocking grin on his face. A vile, determined eagerness burned in his blue eyes. "Why don't you be sociable, Greenwood?" Why don't you hang around and chew the fat with us boys?"

Greenwood glanced around him. There were no smiles on the faces of the other Bradded H riders, no humor, only a cold, primal hostility.

"What's the matter?" taunted McBane. "Too bashful to talk?"

Tom's teeth clenched. The sullen anger was pounding steadily, insistently, behind his eyes. The image of his being dragged along the ground, the bumping of the earth against him, the pain and the bruises blazed in violent recollection before him.

"We certainly should be able to find something to talk about," said McBane. He winked extravagantly. "Women! Isn't that a good subject? Every man likes to discuss women. Haw—haw."

The portent of it struck Greenwood dully. His fists clenched, and he tried desperately to keep the madness out of his brain.

McBANE RAISED a hand and began rubbing his jaw. "Now, who could we talk about? Let me see. Hmm." His face lighted and he let out a loud guffaw. "I've got it. Adrienne Fox!"

"Yes, sir, Greenwood, I'm doing you a real favor. You might not think so, but I am. Did you know that Adrienne Fox is Tully's girl? Did you know that, or doesn't it make any difference to you? Good, good. That's the way to be, Green-

wood. The hell with who she belongs to. Get 'em when you can reach 'em, eh, Greenwood?"

Tom's fingers trembled so much, he had difficulty unbuckling his shell belt. Finally, he got if off and hung it over his saddlehorn. A raging fury blazed in his brain, thickening his voice. "I could kill you, McBane," he said hoarsely, "but there wouldn't be much satisfaction in that. I'd much rather use my fists on you."

"Yeh," McBane stripped off his cartridge belt. He tossed it to one of the Bradded H riders. "Yeh, I was hoping you'd see it like that."

He spat at Greenwood's feet. His huge arms spread out, his big hands half-clenched. "Give us room, fellas," he ordered.

He started circling slowly, arms half-raised, beady eyes fixed on Greenwood. A brutal grimace twisted his lips. He spat again, at Greenwood's face, and on the heel of it came rushing in, flailing arms clutching for Greenwood who ducked under them, ramming his shoulder off McBane's side, spinning the man half around. McBane made a futile grab at Greenwood, but succeeded in only knocking his hat off. A frustrated roar surged out of McBane.

Tom laughed derisively. "You ain't so fast on your feet, are you, Red?"

"Fast enough to catch you," was the growled retort, and McBane rushed in again, plunging feet kicking up spurts of dust, huge arms flailing. One of his ham-like hands caught Greenwood alongside his skull. Red pain exploded across the stricken man's eyes, and he felt himself falling. An exultant whoop from the Bradded H riders split Greenwood's ears.

He could not let McBane catch him on the ground. Swiftly, he rolled away from beneath the lunging, stamping boots of McBane. Dirt got in Greenwood's mouth. He spat out the grit and leaped to his feet. McBane came rushing again.

GREENWOOD buried his face behind a wide shoulder, used that to block one of McBane's furious swings. Greenwood drove in, straightening suddenly, bouncing his shoulder off McBane's jaw. The man gasped with hurt. Greenwood smashed a fist against McBane's stomach. The man recoiled, the breath whistling out of him, and he swiftly fell back.

McBane recovered, crouched, those claw-like hands spread again, watching Greenwood malevolently out of surprised eyes. Then, he began circling. Greenwood turned with him. McBane rushed, then stopped suddenly. Greenwood had already started to swerve away, and now he realized the error of it, for McBane lunged ahead again. His huge hands reached, clawed at Greenwood's shoulder. Desperately, Tom lurched away. McBane caught a handful of cloth, ripping the sleeve of the shirt.

Greenwood danced away, always facing McBane. The man spat at him again. "Stand up and fight," he growled. "Stand still, you yellow son."

"Come and get me," taunted Greenwood, wiping the sweat out of his eyes.

McBane's big chest heaved. Again he charged. As Greenwood started to swerve, McBane left his feet in a lunging dive. His huge arms were wide in a hungry embrace, and Greenwood shouted in alarm. He kicked up with a knee, crying out in pain as it ground against McBane's shoulder, but it did not halt

the man's drive. The next instant, his sweating bulk hit Greenwood in the middle, smashing him to the ground.

The breath rocked out of Greenwood's throat. He gasped retchingly, spitting dust and grit out of his mouth. McBane's fist struck at his face, and the pain of it was a searing haze across Greenwood's mind.

He tried to roll over, but McBane's weight was too great. He tried using his knees, but McBane ground an elbow into Greenwood's groin, filling him with a green, sick agony. Desperately, he reached out with both hands, grabbing McBane's hair and savagely hauled down and back.

McBANE'S HARSH cry was a fetid blast of breath in Greenwood's face. The man rolled away, tearing his scalp free, leaving two fistfuls of hair in Greenwood's hands. The pain blinded Greenwood. Dimly, he was aware that McBane had lurched to his feet. The shouts of the Bradded H men angled into Greenwood's mind through a red curtain of ache.

"Stomp him, Red, stomp him! You've got him down. Stomp the dirty son!"

Greenwood blinked the pain out of his eyes. He was just in time to see McBane's two huge boots come hurtling at his face. Greenwood's cry choked in his throat. With desperate quickness, he rolled halfover, twisting his head aside sharply. McBane's boots struck the ground an inch from Greenwood's cheek, spewing dust over his face.

Swiftly, Tom reached out, closing both arms around McBane's boots. The man reached down, smashing a fist off the side of Greenwood's head. Gritting his teeth to the pain, Tom pulled. A startled shout tore out of McBane. He swayed, lurched drunkenly, and went sprawling on his face.

Tom rushed to him on his hands and knees and as McBane's head lifted, smashed at it. McBane spat a snarling, wounded oath, and swung desperately up on his feet.

Greenwood rose with him and again struck. McBane's face was bleeding, crimson coloring his teeth and trickling down his cheeks. Greenwood was starting to sob with the fury that raged in him. He was not conscious of the words that poured in a mumbling, incoherent stream from his battered lips.

"Talk about her, will you? Fill your filthy mouth with her name, will you? I'll learn you, McBane. I'll learn you."

Tom's next blow sent McBane teetering up against the hitch rack. The man tried lifting his arms. He struggled to rise all the way erect. He was blinded by the blood in his eyes. His arms made pawing motions for Greenwood. Greenwood brushed them aside, struck another blow at McBane's jaw. McBane went down, an inert mass stretched out limply on the ground.

SOMEWHERE off in the dusk, a hooty owl gave out its plaintive, haunting call. Adrienne sat on the blanket beside Greenwood. Over them hung the haughty heights of the Jabez. Off in the shadows, he could see the dim outlines of his bay and her pinto, grazing side by side.

The guttering fire cast weird, smoky patterns against the night. Some of the firelight touched the girl's face, etching poignantly the vagrant sadness going and coming from her eyes.

She reached up a hand, cool fingers touching the scars on Green-

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wood's face. "Why did you do it, Tommy?" her warm, husky voice asked. "It really didn't matter what Red McBane said about me."

He took her hand in his, kissed her palm. Gently, she extracted her fingers. Her eyes averted.

"He's not the only one," she said, her voice barely audible. "Everybody talks about me. If you're going to fight every man who says something about me, you'll have to lick every last man in the mountains."

"Then I'll lick them," said Greenwood.

She made a sobbing sound. He took her by the shoulders, turned her face to him. "Look at me, Adrienne," he said, his voice a little thick. Her eyes opened, regarded him queryingly. "Why don't you get out of it, Adrienne?"

"Out of what, Tommy?"

He made an exasperated gesture. "You know what. You've got to break with Tully."

He saw her eyes widen a little. What filled them, he could not know. Perhaps it was fear, or worry, or a wary speculation.

He went on hastily: "Don't get me wrong, Adrienne. I'm not jealous. It—it's just my job. I've been on it two weeks now. I've just started to get some leads. It doesn't look good for you, Adrienne. Get out, won't you, while there's still time?"

SHE PLACED her hands on his arms, her fingers digging into his flesh. "How much do you know?"

"I've got no proof—yet," he told her. "You've got to break with Tully."

She turned her glance aside. "What if I can't break with him?"

"You can. I know you can," he said fiercely. "You're not that kind."

"What kind, Tommy?" she asked softly.

"You know what I mean."

"The kind that Red McBane means? How do you know I'm not that kind?"

He took her hands in his. They were very cold to his touch. "I know it, that's all," he said simply. "I don't know anything about you, who you are, or where you're from. But I still know you better than any one else does. I—I just can't see you and Tully. What is there to it? Who are you really, Adrienne? What are you doing in these mountains? Why can't you break with Tully?"

A vague, little smile curved her mouth. "Poor Tommy," she murmured. She raised her lips and touched his cheek. "You can't believe anything bad about me, can you?"

"Adrienne," he said harshly, closing his fingers tightly about her wrists until she winced with pain. "When I close in, I can't play favorites. Don't you see? I don't care what you think about me, how you feel about me. I just don't want you there when I move in."

A strange graveness entered her eyes, a cold hardness that seemed entirely alien there. "I just can't get out, Tommy," she whispered. "Believe me, I just can't. It means too much to me. Don't even try to understand, Tommy. Just get it in your head that I—I can't get out..."

GREENWOOD had seen the waterfall before. It lay in a small, round basin covered with thick green grass and ringed with towering pines growing on the slopes. The cataract roared down from a high escarpment, splashing into a deep pool that was very placid

What Is Indelicacy in a Book? Or—

WHO IS OBSCENE? as a great defender of books in our courts asks more pungently in the title of a recent book of his.

America suffers of a vast variety of censorships—state, federal, local—

But the most insidious of all censors we have found is the average American bookdealer himself.

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along its edges. The water flowed out of the basin, worming its way crookedly down from the mountains.

The water was clear and cold, and Greenwood left the bay with its muzzle in the stream, while he dismounted and stretched his legs. A tired gauntness had come over him in the two weeks. The whiskers on his face were beginning to curl. They itched like hell where his throat rubbed against the neck of his shirt, and he lifted a hand there and scratched while his eyes roved over the sparkling display of the falling water.

Something more than the majesty of the sight held his gaze. He had experienced that faint, disturbing feeling before when he had eyed the cataract. Something in the glowing shimmering of the water, the hint of darkness behind the falling sheet that somehow wasn't darkness.

As he stared, a latent, palpable excitement began moving in him. With his heart quickening its beat, Greenwood walked forward, studying the falling waters closely. The spray from the cataract sprinkled over him. He wiped the drops from his face and edged in closer, and when he came up against the foot of the escarpment, he saw how it was.

He cursed himself for not having comprehended it before. Behind the dropping sheet of water, lay a high, narrow crevice, forming a tunnel through the escarpment. The waterfall concealed the entrance. Ducking his head, Greenwood rushed through the pounding waters, coming out, gasping and wet, in the tunnel.

The passage was not long. He could see daylight at the other end, and he started along the rough, rocky floor. A heady excitation beat in him as he spied the cow dung on the floor, and almost gagged at the overpowering stench of the narrow confines in which he was walking.

Then he was out of it, breathing deeply of the clean, cool air of the mountains. A long, narrow valley stretched before him. The grass grew thick and luxuriant along the valley floor and up the hillsides. Pines and tamaracks and balsams covered the slopes, and grazing all along the valley were countless white-faces.

The suddenness and unexpectedness of it left Greenwood momentarily stunned. He was not at all aware of the presence behind him until a nervous titter hit his ears.

HE WHIRLED, hand slapping at his gun handle, and then his widening eyes caught the black, yawning menace of the gun barrel pointing at him. Reluctantly, Greenwood released his grip on the .44, letting it slide back into its holster, his eyes mesmerized by the threat of the rifle barrel in Shoshone's hands.

The crazy Indian fighter stood there lightly, tensely, on his moccasined feet. "Drop your gunbelt, Greenwood," he ordered.

Tom reached out a hand. "Look, Shoshone," he said, "couldn't we talk this over?"

A tense, careful rationality glowed for an instant in Shoshone's yellow eyes. His dirty fingers tightened about the Henry. "I said, drop your gunbelt."

The feral quality of it struck a chill in Tom's spine. Slowly, he unbuckled the shell belt, let it drop to the ground. Shoshone motioned with the Henry.

"Over there," he indicated some rocks jutting out of a hillside.

Greenwood walked over to the boulders, seated himself gingerly on one of them. Shoshone followed

slowly, cautiously. He squatted down on the grass about ten feet from Greenwood, his Henry never wavering from his prisoner's belly. The narrow, bearded slit of a mouth curved in a malignant grin, and the eyes lost their momentary lucidity.

"What now, Shoshone?" asked Greenwood dryly. "Do we make medicine?"

"We wait."

"Wait for what?"

"Wes Tully," said Shoshone. He sniffed loudly, wrinkling half of his bearded face. He spat, some of the spittle stopping on his whiskers.

"How long do we wait for Tully?"

Shoshone giggled again, the flare in the yellowed eyes ebbed a little. "He'll be back most any time. Him and Baggott and the boss. I could kill you now, but I think Wes wants to ask you some questions. But after he's through, maybe then he'll let me kill you. Maybe he'll even let me scalp you. I'd like to do that."

The iciness laced the back of Greenwood's neck. Numbly, he watched the insane wildness play in the depths of Shoshone's glittering eyes. He looked at the three scalps dangling from around Shoshone's neck, and fought down the nausea which threatened to overcome him.

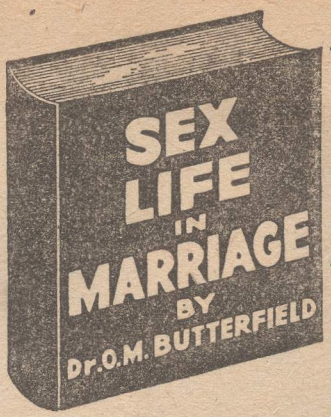
He kept his voice cool and slightly scoffing: "Did you really take those scalps, Shoshone?"

"Yep," the old hunter's mouth straightened proudly. "Piutes."

"I don't believe it."

"Eh?" The glaring eyes became ugly with rage. "What did you say?"

"I said, I don't believe you took those scalps. You're just running a bluff. You just get a big kick out of watching people get sick when you tell them about your scalps. I bet



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you never scalped an Indian in all your life."

"I've scalped plenty," shouted Shoshone, the cords standing out thickly in his neck. "Every scalp I took, I got. I can show them to you. I've got lots of them. Mostly Piutes. I hate Piutes. I got some Havasupai, too."

"Show them to me."

SUDDENLY, the angry tenseness left Shoshone. He settled back, his eyes crafty. "Trying to trick me, hey? You're just trying to fool me into showing you my scalps?"

"All right," said Greenwood, "I'll believe you. But what does that prove?" His lips curved in contempt. "Piutes and Havasupais. They're not warriors. A little kid in three-cornered pants could scalp a Havasupai anytime. How many Apache scalps do you have, Shoshone? Now, there are warriors for you. Apaches! How many of them did you scalp?"

Shoshone spat. "What do you know about Injuns?" he shrilled, the spittle trickling down into his whiskers. "I know plenty. Me, Shoshone, I know. I lived with them. I hunted and went to war with the Shoshones. I married two Shoshone squaws. Me, I did that! The Shoshones taught me how to take scalps. How to count coup and make medicine. I scalped plenty Piutes. Did you ever take a Piute scalp? How do you know if they can fight or not?"

Greenwood's voice dripped with studied contempt. "I've heard about the Piutes. They never attack unless it's a sure thing."

The rifle trembled with rage in Shoshone's dirty hands. His words came out in a shrill, stuttering, unintelligible scream made up of English and some Indian tongue. Though he couldn't comprehend the meaning, the sound drove a quick, terrible fear through Greenwood.

He edged forward a little on his rock. "What would you do if a Piute was stalking you, Shoshone?" he asked when the man's incoherent diatribe ceased.

Shoshone's eyes narrowed to blazing slits. His face lifted up slightly in an attitude of listening. His head cocked to one side.

"I saw Piute sign in the mountains, Shoshone," Greenwood said quietly, his heart thumping inside him. "Adrienne saw it, too. Remember?"

"Piutes!" the demented man whispered hoarsely. His mouth slacked open.

The blood began to pound in Greenwood's temple. An apprehensive tenseness gripped him. He kept his eyes riveted on the rifle in Shoshone's hands. "After all those scalps you've taken, the Piutes would like to square with you, wouldn't they, Shoshone? What if there was a Piute behind you right now?"

"Piutes!" Shoshone said harshly, eyes abruptly widening, the glitter sharp and unholy in them now.

Greenwood gathered himself. The breath was hot and choking in his throat. "Behind you, Shoshone. Piutes!"

The man's head whipped around, the Henry wavering with the motion. Greenwood launched himself. Shoshone's head turned back, and he threw up the rifle.

The weapon blared, but Greenwood's hand had deflected the barrel. The force of his rush carried him sprawling over Shoshone. Though old, the man was fast and wiry and slippery. Using elbows and knees, he wriggled out of Tom's

grasp. The rifle rose in Shoshone's hands, came swinging in a swishing arc toward Greenwood's head.

HE THREW himself forward, butting his head into Shoshone's middle, hearing the vicious whisper of the rifle past his head. Shoshone's breath exploded in a great, ragged, wheezing gasp. He drew back his arms to swing the rifle again. His mouth was twisted in a maniacal grimace, his eyes flamed frenziedly. Grabbing at the Henry, Greenwood caught the weapon with both hands.

Shoshone screamed in a wild, frustrated rage. His head ducked, his teeth biting for Greenwood's wrists. With a violent wrench, Greenwood smashed his wrists up into the man's face.

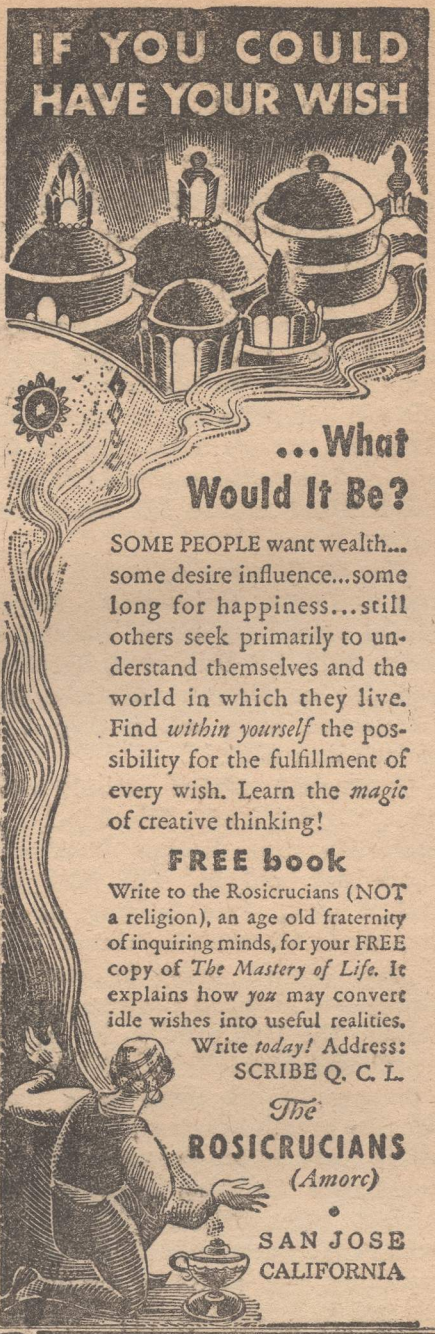
They both held on, unyieldingly, to the Henry rolling wildly over the grass. Suddenly, Greenwood rammed up against a boulder, striking it sharply with his shoulder blades. The pain momentarily paralyzed him. With a tremendous wrench, Shoshone ripped the rifle free.

But before he could whip it up to his shoulder, Greenwood had leaped to his feet and lunged toward him. The Henry flew from Shoshone's grasp, smashing with a loud, jarring crash on a boulder.

With a shrill, angry scream, Shoshone's dirty fingers jerked the Bowie out from his belt, and holding the knife before him, he started slowly for Greenwood.

Greenwood's empty hands clenched in sudden, helpless anger. He began retreating, eyes never leaving the sharp point of the Bowie. Shoshone cackled. He kept coming, eyes luminously crafty, his stepping sinuous and utterly soundless.

Greenwood kept retreating, the



grass whispering under his boots. Suddenly he stopped, dropped to one knee, hands touching the grass. The maneuver confounded Shoshone. He came ahead two more hesitant steps, stopping there not five feet from Greenwood. Some of the glare died in Shoshone's eyes. A puzzled bafflement entered them.

Greenwood's fingers dug at the grass. He loosened a small tuft of sod. With a loud, shattering cry, he leaped swiftly to his feet, flinging the dirt and grass in Shoshone's face. The man screamed in surprise and anger. The knife wavered. A dirty hand lifted toward his eyes. Tom sprang forward.

The knife came up again, but it was too late. Greenwood's fingers closed crushingly around Shoshone's wrist. With his free hand, Shoshone pounded at Greenwood's face, but Greenwood hung on, forcing Shoshone's arm back.

Greenwood twisted sharply sideways, digging a knee into Shoshone's back. He kept forcing Shoshone's hand back and in. The man was arched over, eyes bulging, breath racking in his straining throat. With a last, sudden burst of strength, Greenwood snapped the arm inward, driving the Bowie up to its hilt in Shoshone's back...

Greenwood sat there on a boulder, the breath heaving achingly out of his tortured lungs, sweat coursing down over his face, eyes carefully averted from Shoshone's twisted, dead body. Perhaps because his own breathing was so loud, Greenwood did not hear the sound behind him. He heard nothing until the voice came angling in to him, cool and measured and insolently caustic.

"You really are a hog for punishment, aren't you, Greenwood?"

And there was Wes Tully, a smug, indolent smile on his lips, the long-barreled Colt .45 gripped in his hand. There was Wendell Mead, small and precise and very correct in dress and stance, an enigmatic quirk curving his mouth. There was a tall, thin, hook-nosed fellow with a Winchester held ready in his hands.

All these Tom quickly passed up. It was the sight of the fourth one that caught at him, wrenching at his heart in a hurt, tormenting way, filling him with a dull, cloying pain that came out in his voice. "Adrienne!"

HE LAY on the dirt floor of a shack, bound hand and foot. A few stars showed through the interstices of the trees and a lone, tiny moonbeam angled down through the branches and in through the window. Now and then, either Tully or Mead would come in, examine his bonds carefully, then leave without a word.

The sound came angling in through the pain filling his mind. Abruptly, he rolled over on his back, listening. Someone had entered the room. The thumping of his heart ebbed hopelessly. It was probably either Mead or Tully checking up again. Then, that other thing trickled through to his consciousness. The faint scent of apple blossoms. He strained against his bonds.

"Adrienne!" he whispered hoarsely.

She placed her fingers on his mouth tenderly. Then, she took them away and he felt her lips there, warm and trembling, and her arms went around him in a quick, fervent embrace.

Abruptly, she released him and began working at the knots binding him, lips whispering in his ear. "They're asleep. We must be quiet and hurry it as much as we can. I've got your gun here, and I've cached your bay not far off."

"You're coming with me, aren't you?"

She rubbed her cheek momentarily against the beard stubble on his. "Of course, my darling. Of course."

Then, the ropes loosened and his cramped arms and legs were free. He rose stiffly and buckled on the belt which Adrienne had handed him. He fingered the .44, eyes hot and brooding on the door.

"If they're sleeping, I can take them now," he said slowly.

"No, Tommy," Adrienne dug her fingers into his arms. "No. Not yet. Let me explain to you. There isn't time here and now, but I'll explain. Believe me, Tommy. Come with me."

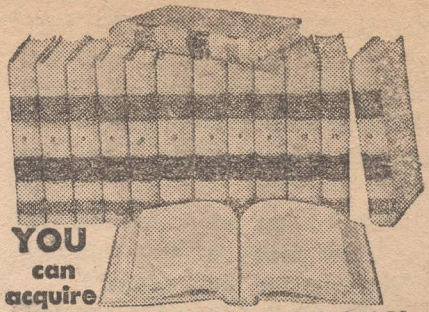
AFTER THEY had their horses and had moved across the valley, Adrienne told Greenwood there was no other way out except through the tunnel behind the waterfall.

"Wes Tully is guarding it right now. They always have a man there. That's why Shoshone got the drop on you. Wendell Mead was supposed to guard you, but he fell asleep. I've been one of them so long, they trust me completely. Mead will be furious when he finds you gone."

Dawn was breaking in the east, laying a pale, luminous streak above the mountain crests. It would not be long before daylight. Adrienne was leading the way on her pinto, working up the side of the valley, and following a wooded ridge up toward the entrance to the valley.

By the time they had reached the huge, jagged escarpment, the sun was rising over the peaks, letting its warm, blinding light glitter on the dew in the valley. Adrienne reined the pinto into a grove of stunted nut pines and dismounted. She sat down on the grass with Greenwood beside her.

"Adrienne," he began earnestly,



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"what is this all about? Why didn't you let me take Wendell Mead back there? If there's no other way out of here, what do we do now? Won't they trail us up here? Why shouldn't I have taken Mead when I had the chance?"

She clasped her hands around her knees. "How much of this rustling have you figured out, Tom?"

"That Mead is in it. He ran off some of his own stock just as a blind to cover his operations. What I can't understand, is why he asked the Association to send a man here, when he was the head of the rustlers?"

"Why shouldn't he?" asked the girl. "Can't you guess what he had in mind for you? Mead has bigger plans than just rustling a few cows. He wants control of the whole Jabez Range. His biggest obstacle is Old Man Hewitt's Bradded H. Once Mead gets his hands on Bradded H, the smaller spreads will be pushovers for him."

"But where do I fit in?"

SHE TURNED her face toward him, studying him with a soft, gentle look in her brown eyes. "Mead knows how Hewitt hates the Association. It was quite apparent to Hewitt that Mead was trying to frame the rustling on Bradded H. When Mead had you brought in, Hewitt was convinced you came to help frame Bradded H. Which is why Hewitt tried to scare you off.

"Doesn't it seem strange to you, Tommy, the extremes to which Bradded H, and especially Red McBane, have gone to build up bad blood between the two of you? What if you were to be found dead on Bradded H land with one of Old Man Hewitt's gloves beside your body? What odds would you give me that Old Man Hewitt hanged for your murder?"

It was starting to clear in Greenwood's mind, the whole vicious pattern of it. His lips compressed in smoldering anger. "So that's how it is. Where does Red McBane fit in?"

"Red McBane is Mead's spy. That's the way Mead works. He pulled the same trick three years ago in Elk Hill, Wyoming. He's very clever and close-mouthed. Even though he trusts me, I didn't learn about McBane until last night. I learned lots about McBane last night."

Her eyes seemed to be staring right through Greenwood. "Mead sent Lew Baggott to fetch McBane. Red has you marked down as his clay pigeon after that beating you gave him. Red was to bring something of Hewitt's with him. Then, he was to take you to Bradded H and kill you. McBane should be getting here any time now."

"I see," said Greenwood thinly. "Mead plans ambitiously." He turned his eyes on the girl. "Where do you come in, Adrienne?"

Her face looked old and tired. Her eyes seemed haunted by a weird, compelling purpose. "I guess you've got the explanation coming, Tommy. It won't be a pretty one. Before I tell you, I want you to know that I love you, Tommy... But it really doesn't matter. Nothing matters any more."

Suddenly, she jumped up and walked off. Tom caught up to her at the lip of a rocky promontory from where they could look down on the entrance to the valley. They could see Wes Tully and Wendell Mead down there and two horsemen, one of them mounted on a big, shining buckskin. Red McBane.

"Well, he came," said Adrienne. She started back toward her horse.

"Adrienne," Greenwood called after her. "What were you going to tell me?"

SHE DIDN'T say anything until she was back to the horses. She tightened the cinch of her saddle, then faced him, taking the lapels of his shirt collar in her hands.

"I'm from Elk Hill," she said quietly, intensely. "My real name is Adrienne Beaumont. I had a sister, Francie. We were all alone, just the two of us. Our folks died when we were very young. When you've got no one but yourselves, Tommy, you get very close to each other. Francie and I were like that."

A grim, throaty huskiness entered her tone. "I was the scholarly one of the family. So I went away to school, and Francie stayed home, working, saving money to see me through."

A catch came into her voice. "Then she met this man, and fell in love with him. She believed everything he told her, all his promises, all his lies. Francie wasn't very bright, I suppose, but before she knew it, she'd gone too far." She lifted haunted eyes up to Greenwood's face. "There are pills that make you sleep, Tommy. When you take too many of them—"

Her voice broke. She turned around and put her face down on the seat of her saddle. When she spoke again, a cold viciousness was in her voice.

"People don't like to talk about things like that, especially to a girl. I couldn't find out who it was. I only knew that Wes Tully was the man's chum. That's all I had to go on. So I began looking for Tully. I found him six months ago."

She buried her face again. "I've acted like a cheap dance-hall chippie. I've shamed myself. But I finally found out who the man was who was responsible for my sister's death. Last night I learned his name."

"Who?" asked Greenwood hoarsely.

"Red McBane!"

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Words framed themselves in Greenwood's mind, trembled on the tip of his tongue, but he could not get them spoken. A sudden, deep compassion stirred within him. He put his hands tenderly on the girl's arms. "What are you going to do?" he asked gently.

He felt her stiffen. The slim shoulders squared beneath the black and white flannel shirt. "Do?" she asked in a gelid tone. The fingers of her right hand closed about the pearl handle of her .41. "There's no man in the family. What do you expect me to do?"

SHE BROKE away from him. She vaulted up into her saddle. Greenwood caught a glimpse of her stern, drawn face, the deadly purpose glaring in her eyes. She jabbed spurs at the pinto's flanks, jabbed again as the horse jumped off into an instant run, speeding through the nut pines.

"Adrienne!" Greenwood shouted after her.

But she was already out of sight among the stunted trees, leaving behind her only the thunderous urgency of her hurry. Greenwood ran over to his bay. The animal was jittery, skittering around, knocking Greenwood's foot out of the stirrup. Tom cursed vividly. Grabbing the saddlehorn, he vaulted up into the kak.

He reined the bay around, touched the spurs home, sending the horse racing through the nut pines. Branches slapped at his thighs, scratched his boots, left bleeding cuts on his hands. He spurred the bay harder out of the grove of nut pines. The steep slope down to the valley floor lay below him. Far down the hill, Greenwood could see Adrienne racing madly on her pinto, the animal agilely dodging boulders and clumps of brush. He sent the big bay after her in a wild pursuit.

Down below, the four men seemed intent on the course of the onrushing pinto, oblivious to Greenwood coming down the higher part of the slope. Adrienne was almost there. The sun flashed brilliantly off the blued surface of her .41 as she drew and brandished the weapon.

The sound of her voice reached Greenwood's ears faintly above the pounding of the bay's hoofs. "Red McBane!" she shouted. "Do you remember Francie Beaumont from Elk Hill? I'm Adrienne Beaumont. Do you remember my sister, Red?"

McBane spurred his buckskin out from the group of men. His huge head thrust up in a startled, stunned way. He gave a distended look at the gun in Adrienne's hand, and then McBane's huge, red-haired paw stabbed for his stag-handled .45.

Greenwood watched with horror as the .45 rose in McBane's hand.

THE TWO guns seemed to buck and snarl simultaneously. McBane instantly threw back his head, a hurt, strangled cry tearing out of his throat. A sudden, frantic lunge of the buckskin dislodged him from his kak, and McBane went sprawling loosely on his face.

Greenwood whipped frenzied, anxious eyes toward the girl. The pinto was racing past the group of three transfixed men. Adrienne sat limply in the saddle, head bowed forward on her chest and, as Greenwood watched panic-stricken, she slid slowly out of the saddle.

"Adrienne!" he shouted hoarsely. "Adrienne!"

The sound of his voice snapped the others out of their petrified study. Wes Tully was the first to react, his long-barreled .45 whipping up. Greenwood's .44 roared and bucked in his hand. Tully jerked

back spasmodically as the heavy slug tore into him. He went slamming back against Wendell Mead, both of them going to the ground in a tangled heap.

The man named Lew Baggott was trying to rein his panicky chestnut in and to fire his Winchester at the same time. Greenwood sent the bay smashing into the chestnut. The bay went to its fore knees from the recoil. The chestnut, hit from the flank, went sprawling on its back, pinning Baggott underneath. A hoarse terrified scream blasted out of Baggott's throat, and the eleven hundred pounds of kicking, squirming, squealing horseflesh crashed down on him, and his cry cut off abruptly.

The bay lurched back on its feet. Wendell Mead had extricated himself from beneath the dead body of Wes Tully. An ornate, silver-inlaid .38 flashed dazzlingly in his hand. Greenwood fired, but the bay lunged at the same time, and the bullet shrieked up at the ragged walls of the towering escarpment.

Mead's face distorted in a savage, maniacal grimace. The .38 blasted. Greenwood felt the slug whisk at his hair. With an iron, unyielding hand, he reined the bay's head up and back, pinning the fighting animal momentarily motionless. The .44 he laid across the top of the bay's head in line with Mead's chest, and pulled the trigger. Mead went slamming down on his face. He moaned and jerked a few times on the ground, then was still.

Greenwood leaped out of the saddle. Tears blinded him. He ran drunkenly toward where Adrienne lay limp and still on the ground. He turned her over on her back. Blood covered half of her face from the wound on her forehead. Through the tear-mist, Greenwood saw something else. The slow, measured pulsing at

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her temple. She was still alive.

The cry came out of him in a choking, thankful way. "Adrienne...!"

HE REVIVED her, washed the blood from her face, and bathed and bandaged the wound. It was an ugly crease across the upper part of her skull, but she would be all right. She sat passively while Greenwood worked on her. Her eyes seemed numb and lifeless.

When Greenwood was through, he surveyed the carnage. "Well," his voice was tired and grim, "this should satisfy Old Man Hewitt and the Association."

He glanced apprehensively at the girl who was staring dumbly at the ground. He touched her shoulder. "Let's get out of here."

"Leave me alone," she said in a low, dead tone.

She started to walk away, but he grabbed her shoulders and turned her around. She averted her face. He took her chin in his hand and tried to twist her face up to meet his but she would not let him.

"Leave me be," she said harshly. "You don't want me any more. You know what I am. You don't want anybody like me. Let me go."

Comprehension came to Greenwood then. For a moment, he knew a stunned, stirring sympathy. He grasped her arms in tight, deterring fingers. "Listen to me, Adrienne," he said softly. "I licked McBane once for what he said about you. I was ready to lick anybody who said anything about you. I'm still ready to do that."

"Oh, no, no," she turned her face away. "I'm no good for you. Find yourself a nice girl. There's lots of them for you, Tom. Pick one of them. I'm not the kind for you."

"Listen, Adrienne," he said firmly. "Don't you remember once what I said to you? Even before I knew anything about you, I said I believed in you, didn't I? I said then it didn't matter what any one said about you, that I'd never believe any of it. I'll always feel that way about you, darling.

"I've got a little ranch up north a ways. I want to settle down there and raise cows and...and kids. I'm tired of drifting around, of getting shot at, of being beat up for the measly wages the Association pays. I want a home, Adrienne. I want you to make it for me. I don't want any nice girls, Adrienne. I only want you."

Slowly, her face lifted up toward him without any urging on his part.

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Her eyes met his, shyly at first, then with a gentle boldness. A slow smile tugged at her lips. Her eyes began to blink rapidly, and suddenly she buried her face in his shirt.

"Oh, Tommy, Tommy," her muffled voice came. "I think I'm going to bawl..."

THE END

GUNS vs DRILLS

★ **By June Lurie** ★

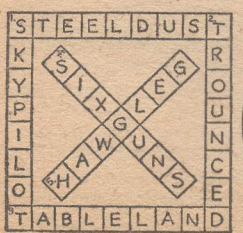
THE COMMONEST sound to be heard in the Old West, outside the shivery buzzing of the rattlesnake, was the unhealthy roar of gunfire—sixguns, rifles, carbines.

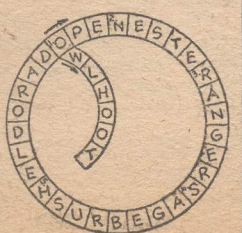
But from 1910 and on, even more common was the shuff-shuff of the oil field steam engine, driving the great drills which reached into the vitals of the earth and removed that "black liquid gold". This was no less romantic than the idea of the cowhand riding range—and it was a lot more important to the country as a whole. The sound of the western oil driller later was marked by the use of the gas engine which replaced steam. Then came the new methods of prospecting for oil, and the seismographs and their dynamite explosions used for locating oil became very common.

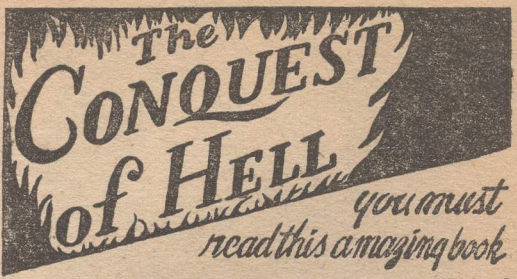
But all the while the West was being searched for the nation's life blood, the sound of gunfire went right along. The bitter fighting between cattlemen and oil men didn't stop with legal notices or with words. Cowmen patrolled their lands with armed men to prevent the riggers from trying a spot. Many and bitter were the battles that raged over drilling rights. And the major settlement of them revolved around the proper use of a sixshooter.

Eventually, of course, the sight of so much money was too much for the die hard cattlemen, and they gave in to the temptation of the liquid wealth over the four-footed wealth. And, thus, the oil man supplanted the cowboy as the most colorful and romantic figure of the West.

Answers to EDITOR'S HOLIDAY, page 85:







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AGOG WITH A GAG

★ By Clark Kelly ★

SO YOU haven't even told your best friend you started erecting a barricade in your back yard the night Orson Wells' men from Mars came down to earth and staked out their claims in New Jersey?

Feel not the fool, but harken back to 1862 in the land of the Comstock Lode and, brother, you'll find plenty of company!

"No comparison," you say?

Well, maybe and maybe not. True, they didn't have a radio replete with the dynamic Mr. Wells to set them agog. But they did have a newspaper, and on that newspaper they had one Dan de Quille who wrote what he called "quaints". They were about as "quaint" as Orson's men from Mars!

The rest of the world had newspapers, too. They copied these "quaints" in all seriousness and good faith, even as you started that digging when things got hot in New Jersey.

Mr. Wells stirred up a minor ruckus in the U.S.A.; Mr. De Quille, running a small newspaper in a frontier mining town, created an international "incident".

If the garb of the men from Mars intrigued you, you're right in a class with THE LONDON TIMES. De Quille dressed an inventor in a helmet rigged up with an amonia tank destined to evaporate and keep him cool, and then sent him across the Forty Mile Desert during a heat wave of 117 degrees. But, due to a defect in the mechanism, that unfortunate gentleman of Dan's imagination froze to death before he could remove his headgear. They found him there, seated on a boulder, covered with ice from head to foot. Frozen solid to the scorching desert sands!

In a two-column leader, THE LONDON TIMES hoped for the early perfection of the American invention, and urged Her Majesty's government to investigate and make the helmet a part of the equipment of every Tommy who must serve in the British tropics. Imagine how the TIMES must have felt when they came to their senses and realized that Dan was "just pretending!"

There's no need to see a psychiatrist because you thought those rocket ships from Mars really existed, and still wonder! You have company. Good company. From Boston.

DAN CREATED a fabulous windmill. A perpetual motion pump powered by the Washoe range's zephyr and built upon the pinnacle of Sun Mountain. It could be

built anywhere, and powered by any old zephyr. It would free the earth of all danger of subterranean floods. The biggest problem in mining was solved in one fell swoop by De Quille's imagination.

Wells solved the problem of navigating through space. De Quille, perpetual motion. Maybe you weren't so dumb when the program knocked you for a loop. It could be solved, couldn't it?

That's what a Boston engineering journal thought when it computed and *published* the exact horsepower generated by Dan's perpetual motion machine. And other learned journals copied the computation!

Finally, if you still feel like giving yourself a swift kick in the derriere for having even listened to the Invasion from Mars, consider the plight of those scholars who tripped to Virginia City to see the "petrified man".

This time, it was Mark Twain, also working on the Territorial Enterprise, who set the world agog with a gag.

America's best loved humorist wrote a little tale about the discovery of a new and mysterious "Petrified Man" who met his mate with a wink and that time honored gesture of scorn.

"...The body was in a sitting posture and leaning against a huge mass of croppings; the attitude was pensive, the right thumb resting against the side of the nose; the left thumb partially supporting the chin, the forefinger pressing the inner corner of the left eye drawing it partly open; the right eye closed, and the fingers of the right hand spread apart...!"

REMARKABLE MARSHAL

★ By G. Watt ★

OTHER PEACE officers often got their men; but Marshal Dave Cook of Denver guaranteed it. Soon after he was elected, he tacked up in his office a notice which said that if he were notified within twenty-four hours of the theft of stock, he would find the rustlers, or pay for the stolen animals himself. That was quite a bargain for any man to make. Rustling was all too common in those days—it was 1867—for the ranges were vast and unfenced, and it was a fairly simple matter for thieves, working at night, to take their choice of the finest animals in a herd and drive them far away by sunrise.

There was one particular capture which made Cook's reputation as one of the finest peace officers of his day. It took him several days of expert tracking and shrewd detective work, but as usual he caught the thieves he was pursuing.

A rancher brought a herd of fine horses

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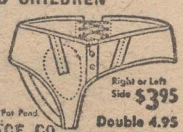

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to Denver, and left them overnight at a corral on the outskirts of town. Next morning, the horses were gone. The rancher was much put out at the loss, for the animals were valuable, and he felt little hope that they could be recovered. Nevertheless, he notified the marshal of the theft.

"I reckon I can find them for you," said Cook, casually. And he went to work on the case. First, he wandered around town, asking questions, looking in on the saloons.

He discovered that a couple of the town's toughest gamblers, George Britt and William Hilligoff, had disappeared. It looked like they were up to some mischief, and chances were it was the theft of the horses. Cook, and a deputy named Rhodes, started off to find out.

In those days, all travelers over the range could get their meals at any ranch they passed, and in this way the officers soon struck the trail of the men they were hunting. But by the time they had gotten as far as Boulder, Colorado, they lost the trail. After a couple of days searching, Cook returned to Denver, leaving the deputy in Boulder.

He had no sooner arrived at his office when he received word from the Bijou Basin Detective Association that two nervous-acting men, whose baggage included a number of branding irons, were heading east. Cook figured these were his men, and was soon on his way. This time, instead of traveling on horseback, he decided to go by stagecoach, an unpleasant prospect, for the weather was cold and it was necessary to keep a constant watch for hostile Indians.

HE HAD traveled almost to the Kansas line before he felt certain he was on the right track. Then, he changed from his uniform into a stage-driver's clothes, and sat up beside the driver, the better to watch for clues of the men he was trailing.

The stage had just passed through Fort Wallace when it came upon a group of laborers carrying picks and shovels. Cook's sharp eyes noticed that the boots of most of the men were covered with the fine red sand of that country. But two of the men had no such coloration on their shoes, indicating that they had only recently joined the gang.

The marshal decided to investigate further. "Stop the coach," he told the driver. "We'll get down and look at the gearing, as though something has gone wrong." The man did as directed, and Cook, on the surface only a shabby coachman's assistant, had his chance to look over the two men he suspected.

In an instant, he was sure. Suddenly, he whirled upon the two unsuspecting thieves, his drawn pistols aimed with fatal intent. "Hands up!" shouted Cook. Hilligoff and Britt obeyed without hesitation.

Cook disarmed and handcuffed his prisoners, and returned with them to Fort Wallace. But his work was not yet over, for they were still a long way from home. He had to guard them constantly while waiting for a return coach to Denver, and then watch over them for the four more days it took to get back to Denver. He had been on the go for a good ten days with scarcely any rest, and it is said that he slept for twenty-four hours straight after he saw his prisoners safely in the jail at Denver.

At the trial, it was brought out that Hilligoff and Britt had been very slick thieves indeed, and had been at the bottom of most of the robberies which had been plaguing the area for some time. In their trunks were found the equipment for various disguises: Indian war paint, false beards and wigs of various kinds, besides a wide variety of clothing. The marshal's feat in apprehending these rascals was widely acclaimed; and cattle rustlers and horse thieves were afterward mighty cautious when they were in Cook's territory.

"HELP YOURSELF"

★ By Everett Kane ★

WESTERN hospitality is justly famed. The reputation comes from the old days when a man was almost always willing to share his meager repast with a stranger. Share and share alike was common frontier practice. The tradition still persists on the chuck wagon. You can always get a square meal there if you're down on your luck.

They tell the incident of the stranger who was journeying by stagecoach. He was the only passenger, and was inexperienced in the ways of western travel. The stagecoach finally pulled up at one of the stock stations where the horses were changed. Naturally, the stock-tender invited the drivers and the lone passenger to share a meal with him.

"Be glad to," was the stranger's reply to the invitation, expecting a huge gustatory repast with all the trimmings.

They sat down to the table and the stock-tender cut off a huge slab of fat pork. "Let's have your plate," he told the stranger.

"Thanks," answered the novice, "but I never eat pork.

"O.K." replied the stock-tender. "Help yourself to the mustard."

There simply wasn't anything else but pork and mustard to eat, and the stock-tender had offered his best.

This story went down the line, and soon became a common retort everywhere. The minute anyone refused to partake of a particular item of food, or evinced distaste over anything, the automatic reply was," "Help yourself to the mustard!"

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BLACK BART

★ By Lester Chaney ★

FOUR THINGS made Black Bart unique among stage and train robbers of the early West: He worked alone, with dummies arranged to look like confederates; he dressed in an outlandish and clownish fashion; he never killed anybody, in fact he carried an unloaded gun; and he often handed a victim of his robbery a piece of paper with some scrawled verses on it, and his signature, "Black Bart".

The fellow must have enjoyed his work. Not only did he dramatize himself with his costume and poetry and carefully planned ambushes, but his lone act was highly successful for seven years and a total of twenty-eight robberies. Perhaps at the last he had a premonition; at least, he must have realized that such luck could not continue, for he let the unexpected appearance of a youngster frighten him away from the scene of his last robbery, and in his haste he left a clue which proved to be his undoing.

Black Bart was a handsome, soft-spoken man, courteous to women, and well educated. For his robberies, he wore a linen duster, and over it a burlap bag wrapped about him like the blanket of an Indian. On his head, he wore a high, cone shaped hat. It was as though he burlesqued the part of a bandit, and no doubt he secretly laughed at the ease with which he could terrify people and help himself to their possessions. Perhaps he figured that his peculiar appearance would startle his victims, and give him an extra second's advantage in establishing the upper hand in the situation.

He chose the spot for each robbery with great care, and then set up his decoy. A little distance from the road, where it could be plainly seen from the halted stagecoach, he arranged a screen about three feet high, masked with branches. Behind this, he stuck sticks into the ground, and on top of each stick, just visible over the top of the ambush, he placed a hat. Just below each hat protruded what appeared to be a rifle barrel, but in reality was a broomstick painted black. In the excitement and confusion of a holdup, none of the people in the stagecoach ever seemed to doubt that Black Bart was backed up by half a dozen men pointing loaded guns. It is probable that the outlaw's own guns were unloaded, for he was never known to shoot one of them. No doubt, this fact added to his own pride in the work at hand.

WITH THE stage set for a holdup, the bandit climbed to the top of a nearby tree or cliff to inspect the approaching vehicle through his fieldglasses

from as far away as possible. If things did not look favorable, he had time to remove his dummies and himself from sight until another time.

But if everything seemed all right, Black Bart prepared to play his favorite role, that of the poet highwayman. He waited around a curve, where he and his "confederates" could not be seen until the coach was directly upon him. Then, he stepped into the road in front of the horses, his gun leveled at the driver's head, and shouted "Halt!" As the driver jammed on the brake and pulled the reins to stop the stage, everyone looked at the comical figure in the road with perplexity, as if wondering what kind of a joke this was.

Now, Black Bart directed attention to his six "friends" in the bushes, cautioning them not to shoot yet. Then he got down to business. Passengers and driver were lined up and systematically parted from their valuables, after which the mail bags and strong box were rifled of important contents. Then the robber sent them on their way, first reminding them that his "men" over yonder were good shots; and not forgetting to hand one of the victims a slip of paper which, when opened, would disclose one of the famous verses and the signature of the criminal.

As the years passed, the stage routes began to give way to the railroads, Black Bart discovered that his bizarre methods worked as well in holding up trains as they had done with stagecoaches. He flagged the train, then forced the engineer and fireman at the point of his unloaded gun to uncouple the engine and move it down the track. By then, trainmen and passengers would be pouring out of the cars to see what was going on. At this point, the bandit spoke loudly to the hats and broomsticks which "covered" him, drawing attention to them. No one wanted to risk the fire of that gang of "gunmen," and so Black Bart once more acquired all the loot he could carry.

BUT ONE day he lost his nerve, strangely enough, for he had always maintained the utmost poise and coolness. His last holdup was proceeding routinely enough, when a young boy carrying a rifle approached the scene along a mountain trail. The robber started as he suddenly noticed the curious lad, and he seemed unnerved. Perhaps it was the sight of the boy's rifle which frightened him. At any rate, the bandit turned and fled, and was immediately lost to sight in the woods of the mountainside.

The dumbfounded people left behind stared uneasily at the ambush. At that moment, a gust of wind blew a hat off one of the sticks, exposing the clever trick of the dummy guard. And on the ground lay a detachable white cuff, which the robber had lost in his hurry to get away. On it was a laundry mark, from a San Francisco laundry.

A watch was set on this laundry, and

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in a few weeks the bandit showed up there and was arrested. He had lived in San Francisco unsuspected for many years, under the name of Charles E. Bolton. He pleaded guilty, and seemed to relish explaining to the court how he had operated, and the fact that he had often discussed his crimes with the very officers who were looking for him.

Since he had never killed anyone, he spent only four years in prison. And it is rumored that when he was freed, Wells-Fargo Co. paid him well not to rob any more of their express boxes. As far as is known, he led an honest life thereafter.

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★ **By Cal Webb** ★

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Seating was rough despite the padding, and the coaches rarely held more than six or eight passengers even remotely comfortable. Yet, they remained in use for a long time. Occasionally, the coach would be loaded with twelve or fifteen passengers. Such a ride was sheer horror, but with transportation as primitive as it was, this was better than nothing.

We marvel today at how the heavy hickory undercarriage could take the terrific beating it invariably got. It wasn't too uncommon to lose a wheel or to have a steel tire part from the rim. Repairs were of course made right on the spot with the passengers assisting.

Prospective mothers were rarely allowed to travel by stage, nor did they wish to. On the rare occasions when this was necessary, however, more than one squalling American made his initial entry into this world in the middle of the prairie with a solicitous stage-driver doing duty as a midwife.

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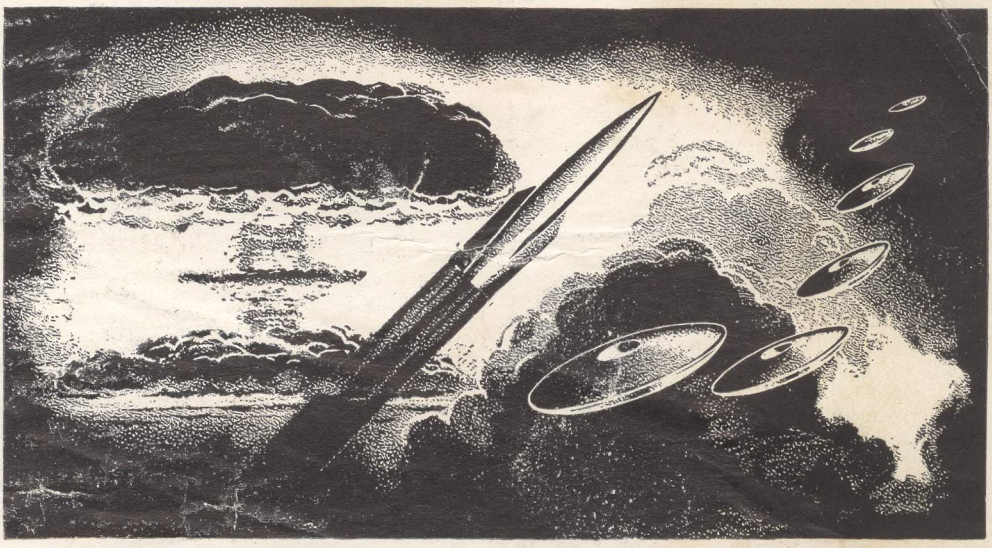

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