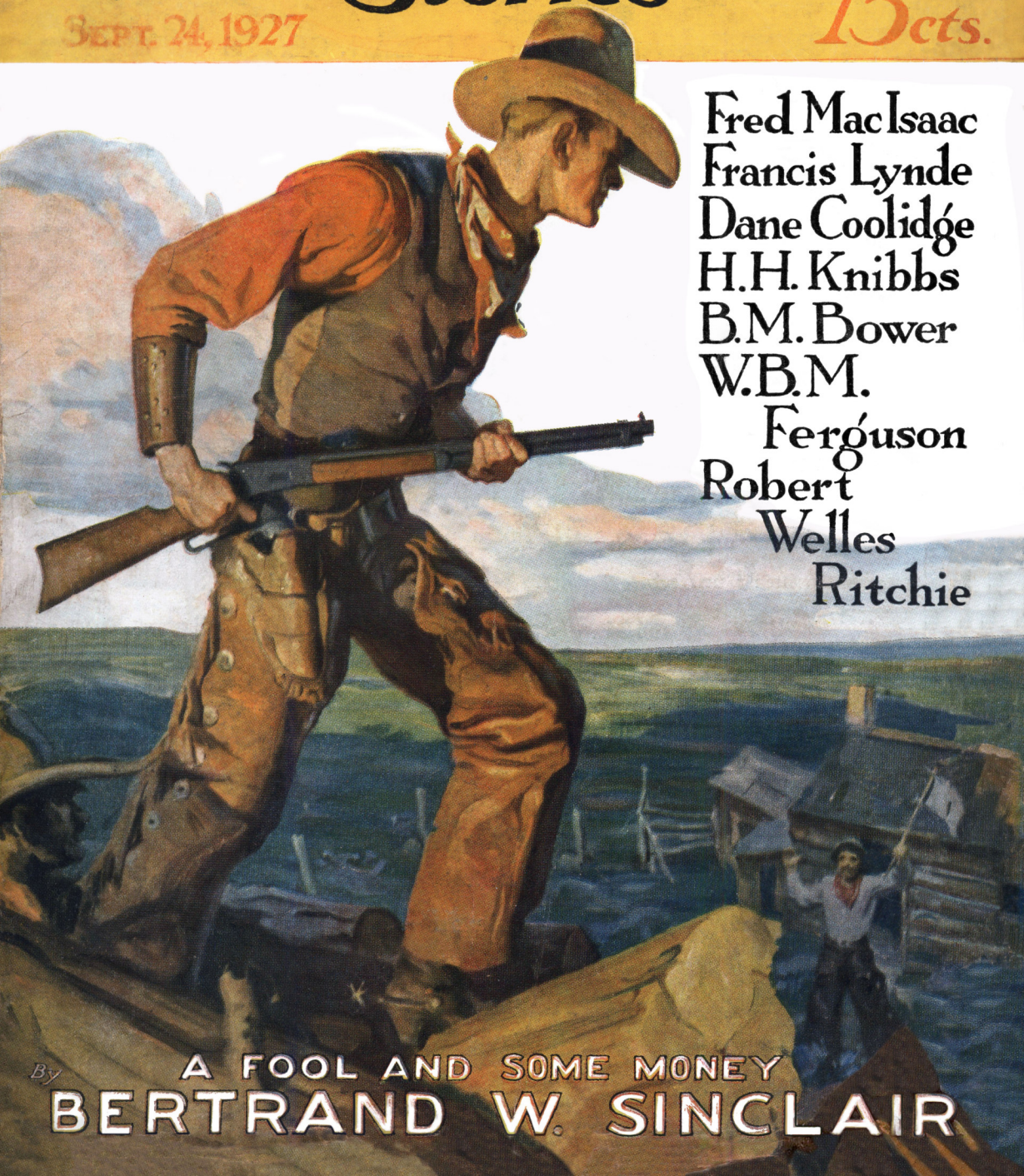
FIRST CHOICE OF A MILLION READERS

WEEKLY

The Popular Stories

SEPT. 24, 1927

15cts.



Fred MacIsaac
Francis Lynde
Dane Coolidge
H.H. Knibbs
B.M. Bower
W.B.M. Ferguson
Robert Welles Ritchie

A FOOL AND SOME MONEY

By BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

In the next issue of THE POPULAR STORIES, October 1st, you will find a superb novel by A. M. Chisholm. It is called "A Silver Mine and a Widow." You'll revel in it. A new serial by Dane Coolidge will start in that issue, too. "Gun Smoke." The best Mr. Coolidge has ever done. Order your copy ahead of time.

Volume LXXXV Number 5

WEEKLY
The Popular Stories

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office.

CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 24, 1927

Weekly publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary.

Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1909, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $7.50. Foreign, $8.50.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.
All manuscripts must be addressed to the Editors.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $6.00 SINGLE COPY, 15 CENTS

A Fool and Some

By the author of "In the Bad Lands," "Out of the Blue," Etc.

The old adage that a fool and his money are soon parted foot buys a ranch and struggles, with the aid of his

CHAPTER I.

THE LONE WOLF.

THE Goosebill stands like a mole on the fair face of Montana, halfway between the Marias River and Fort Benton. Nature humped her tired shoulders impatiently when that part of the world was in the making, and the hump remained permanently in the midst of a general flatness. It arrested the eye in a region where creeks, coulees, and hollows were eaten out of the vast levels as an engraver's acid eats into the copper plate. A fair landmark in clear weather, the Goosebill, breaking the sky line with its singular outline, visible thirty miles in every direction.

A wild tangle of brushy ravines on the west side had more than once sheltered enterprising cattle thieves until the range men dealt with them *ex juris*. It still sheltered range stock. And since a winter range for cattle is always haunted by wolves, the very cabin which had once quartered a group of determined rustlers in a hollow by a spring well screened by brush now housed an equally determined young man of unquestionable honesty, who hunted, trapped and slew the gray buffalo wolf for his own profit and the welfare of the range.

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Money

is gone into more deeply in this novel, wherein a tender-sturdy partner, to prove that he is not a fool after all.

Charlie Shaw hadn't taken up wolfing with any philanthropic motive. He was a tall, sinewy, able youth when he came into Montana with one of the first trail herds from the south not so long before. Half a decade changed many things on the American frontier. The tempo of those times was almost modern in its rapidity. Charlie had done a good deal of rolling, and having scattered his moss lightly, found himself that fall minus a job because of a jocular disposition which went unappreciated by the range boss of the Seventy Seven. That incident contained a germ of drama in itself, the first in a long period of semimonotony. It was only important as it gave Charlie added stature among his fellows. But his difference with Elmer Duffy certainly deprived him of a job. Lacking better opportunity, he turned to wolfing, since a man must live, until spring brought green grass and another round-up.

Charlie had spent a lonely but fairly profitable winter. He was hardy, persistent, keen eyed. He had played hob with the wolves. Every scalp was worth ten dollars to him. There was rather more to Charlie's undertaking than merely passing the time and keeping himself in food and tobacco until spring.

He had, so to speak, come face to face with himself, in a chilly October, and he didn't like the picture. He was twenty-six years of age. If the range gave degrees, Charlie could have written master of cows, horses, and a good many men after his name. He had done postgraduate work all the way from the Rio Grande to the Canadian Northwest. He stood five feet eleven in his socks. He was no Adonis, but he did have pleasant blue eyes, tawny hair with a wave in it, and a cherubic smile, which had deceived unthinking persons here and there. He could ride anything that looked like a horse. He could do anything with a fifty-foot reata that had ever been done with such a rope. From the time he left Texas until this winter's day when he was looking out from the door of his cabin behind the Goosebill, Charlie had worked his way up the trail when Panhandle herds took six months between Texas and Montana, had been two years on the pay roll of one cow outfit, nearly four years with another, one year in his last employment—and he had had to run his face for a grub supply in Fort Benton when he started wolfing in the fall. Got his grub on credit—which was perfectly good in Fort Benton for groceries, whisky, or whatever he desired—and took possession of an abandoned log cabin for a winter home.

Charlie liked neither solitude nor poverty. He had plenty of the first. It gave him time to consider the second, and how it might in the future be avoided.

He stood outside the door, staring at the Goosebill, dim in the waxing force of a March blizzard. He had just finished tacking a fresh wolf pelt on the outer wall to dry. For many weeks he had pursued wolves with the same untiring patience with which a placer miner hunts pay dirt—and for much the same reason. Instead of comfortable, idle days in a big, cheerful bunk house, with congenial company, and regular wages for simply being on hand, he lived the dawn hours and the dusk abroad with a rifle—and his own cooking for pastime.

"No way to live," Charlie muttered with disgust. "When this storm blows out I'll take a little pasear to Fort Benton. Got to break out of solitary confinement once in a while."

He looked at the fresh wolf pelts tacked on the log wall. He had a dozen more prime ones stretched and dried and hung within. Between bounty and fur prices, he could cash over two hundred dollars. He could pay his debt and have money left. And he would clear another couple of hundred by mid-April, if he were lucky at locating lairs.

So he whistled as he stirred up coals in the rough fireplace and fried the eternal bacon and warmed up the equally eternal but serviceable beans. Charlie was very adept at a number of things, but as a cook he had no aspirations. He fed himself and let it go at that, without any frills. And just as dusk fell in a driving swirl of fine snow, with Boreas chanting full lunged his own seasonal death song, Charlie, brooding by the fire, heard the thump of horses' feet and the creak and jingle of saddle gear outside his door for the first time in weeks.

CHAPTER II.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.

HE hardly believed it, but he rose and undid the latch. His ears hadn't fooled him. The form of a man stood in the whitish murk of the night, behind him a saddled horse and one with a pack.

"Hello, there," Charlie greeted. "This is a hell of a night to be out in the world. Come on in."

"I surely will," the stranger an-

swered heartily. "Perhaps you have a place of some kind I can put my horses. Between snow and dark, I hardly know where I am, nor how I got here. Didn't see either fence or stable. Was just going it blind and came slap on your light."

Charlie took the lantern that stood on his table.

"This way," said he. "It ain't no livery barn, but it's better than the pasture for lathered horses. There's a little last year's hay."

Back in the cabin the stranger shed a short fur coat, his cap, and a pair of very new chaps, thrust his feet to the fire, and rolled himself a cigarette.

"I shouldn't be surprised," Charlie said, "if you could eat, eh. It's a long way between ranches."

"I can," the fellow admitted. "I could eat the off hind leg of a government mule, since you remind me. I didn't carry anything in my pack. I will next time I travel this country in winter."

"You won't get no Delmonico spread." Charlie rose and set on the coffee pot. "But I got bacon an' beans an' sour-dough bread."

"Sweetest song I've heard since I left the TL Ranch this morning," the other smiled. "You feed me those items and I'll reciprocate with tenderloin smothered in onions first time I see you where there's a café."

Charlie laughed and set out the food. They talked. Smoke from joint cigarettes eddied about the blackened ridgepoles of the old cabin. The wind rattled decrepit windows, blew streaks of snow like sifted flour under the door.

"This flat country is tricky when you don't know it," the man said over his second cup of coffee. "I should have some one along that knows the lay of the land. I suppose you know it like a book?"

"I ought to," Charlie answered. "For seven years I've rode round-up, run wild horses, hunted wolves over every square rod within a hundred miles of here."

"You know the Seventy Seven and the Maltese Cross then?" the other asked.

"I come into the country before either of 'em," Charlie told him. "You mentioned the TL. I came up from Texas with old man Parke—first herd to locate north of the Missouri. Pretty soon I'll be able to pass for an old-timer."

"You've had plenty of experience?" It was a comment as much as a question.

"Yeah. Plenty. If I could cash in on my experience for what it was worth," Charlie said flippantly, "I could buy me a cow outfit and have money left."

"And if I were to buy a cow outfit, which is what I'm thinking of doing," the man said reflectively, "probably by the time I had acquired the necessary experience, I'd have the experience and somebody else might have my money."

Charlie looked at him with frank curiosity.

"So long as you know that, you're pretty safe," he remarked. "Generally it's the feller that thinks he knows it all, when he don't know nothin', that loses out in the cow business—or any other business, I reckon."

"A man *can* lose money in the cattle business?"

"Can he?" Charlie grinned. "I'd tell a man, if he gets off on the wrong foot. Sometimes he can't help it. Old Parke drove three herds, near eight thousand head, to the Marias. One winter cleaned him to less than six hundred. Course that was darned bad luck. Not so much a question of judgment. You got to gamble on weather. I've known men that started in the cow business on a shoe string and made a hundred thousand dollars in ten years.

And I've seen men put a hundred thousand into cattle and go broke in half that time. It all depends."

"You've sort of taken notice of things, haven't you?" the man mused. "You know the game."

"I was raised at it," Charlie stated simply. "It's all I do know."

"And I exp ct you've been successful."

"For other people," Charlie drawled. "Cattlemen make money. Cow-punchers make wages. I'm a cow-puncher."

"Still, a cow-puncher can save his wages and put his money into cattle and become a cattleman, can't he?" the stranger suggested.

"Sure. If he takes that kind of notion," Charlie admitted. "One does, here an' there. Most of 'em don't care a whoop. Come day, go day, God send Sunday. I never thought about it myself much—not till recent."

"Do you sort of consider changing your ways, then? Take on the last part of Horace Greeley's advice to young men?"

Charlie grinned. He knew what the fellow meant.

"Well, I have growed up with the country an' I didn't have to come West to do it because I was born West," he said reflectively. "I don't know. I never thought much ahead till this winter. This is the first time I've been off some cow outfit's pay roll more'n two weeks since I was eighteen. I shot a winter's stake in a big poker game last fall. Then I lost my job. I had to borrow money. I've been wolfin' all winter to pay my debts an' have a few pesos left over. An' a wolfer sure earns his money. It's kinda struck me that I'm about due to quit throwin' money I work for to the birds, even if I do like the tune they sing."

"Reaching years of discretion," the man laughed. "I've been making the rounds of these ranches on the Marias. I wonder if you aren't the man 'Rock' Holloway told me about. Does your name happen to be Shaw?"

Charlie nodded.

"My name's Brock—Terry Brock. I've got a proposition to make you, but it'll keep till morning," the man said. "I'm too sleepy to talk business. Riding in that cold and wind has just about got me. My tummy's full of your grub. If you can give me a shakedown, in two jerks of a dead lamb's tail I'll be asleep. Probably snoring. Heave a boot at me if I do."

Two single bunks occupied separate corners of the cabin. Brock's pack disgorged blankets. A layer of brush and dry grass made a serviceable mattress. Charlie piled pine knots, gleaned from a distant ridge, into the fireplace, and they turned in. He lay for a long time, wondering what sort of proposition this stranger out of a stormy night could have to make to him. Might be just hot air. Charlie Shaw was no cynic, but he had met men who talked big, who had big ideas, and whose talk and ideas lacked substance. Offhand he warmed to Terry Brock. He was little more than Charlie's age, certainly not over thirty. He wasn't a range man, neither in speech, action nor manner.

Before daybreak, Charlie had the fireplace glowing. When the bright blaze made a bed of coals, he fried flapjacks in a pan. They sat drinking a last cup of coffee when dawn thrust a grayness through the windows, shortly followed by brilliant sun shafts stabbing the frosty air. The Goosebill sparkled like a great sugar loaf.

In this penetrating light Charlie could see his visitor far better than by the gleam of a smoky lantern. Brock was a fair man, shorter and thicker bodied than Charlie Shaw, ruddy where Charlie's fair skin was weather brown. He wore good clothes. His entire outfit was good quality, and brand-new. Charlie wondered why a

pilgrim like this was riding about the Marias and the Goosebill in stormy winter weather. And, as if his curiosity carried over into the other's mind, Brock set down his cup and looked at Charlie Shaw.

"Suppose," said he, "you had some money and wanted to make good use of it—to make it grow into more—how would you go about it?"

"Gosh, that's a funny question to ask me," Charlie observed. "Every man to his own trade, I reckon, is the answer."

"You mean you'd go into the cow business?"

"Sure," Charlie declared. "I'd know what I was doing then."

"There's money in the cow business?"

"Just what you could notice."

"Well, that wasn't exactly what I meant," Brock said thoughtfully. "I know there is, myself. But I've had the impression conveyed to me in Fort Benton and elsewhere that Montana is pretty well stocked, and a man would be foolish to start a new outfit."

Charlie snorted derisively.

"You must 'a' been listening to a bunch of them coffee coolers that lay around the Grand Union in Benton," said he. "Whoever told you that either didn't know beans, or wanted to give you the wrong steer. Hell, there's oceans of room yet, north of the Missouri! Every new cow outfit that lays hold of a range means shuttin' off the sheep that are beginnin' to creep in—gosh darn 'em! I don't like sheep, even if I do wear woolen socks. You'd have a dickens of a time findin' a cow outfit in northern Montana willin' to sell out because they are gettin' crowded."

"I see. Do you know a range where a man could put, say, ten thousand head of cattle, and make it go?"

"Yes. And I wouldn't have to ride a million miles to find such," Charlie declared. "Gimme the cattle an' money to handle 'em an' I'd darned soon find a range."

"I can do that," Brock said deliberately. "I think I will."

"Eh?" Charlie stared.

Brock leaned forward.

"I'm going into the cattle business. I came out here with that intention. I have some money and I want to use it. It strikes me as a clean and pleasant business, only I don't know enough about the practical end of it," Brock said crisply. "Therefore, the logical thing is to get hold of a man who does know enough to make it a success while I'm getting hold of the technique myself. Strikes me you fill the bill."

"How do you know?" Charlie asked bluntly. "You never laid eyes on me before."

"You're a practical cowman, aren't you?" Brock inquired.

"Yes."

"If you were running an outfit of your own you're satisfied you could deliver the goods, aren't you?"

"Got no doubts about that whatever." Charlie grinned. "It's simple—when you know the ropes."

"If you were running an outfit for a man it would be to your own interest to make a success of it just as much as if it were your own, wouldn't it?"

"Naturally," Charlie replied. "All range bosses is like that—or they wouldn't be range bosses. Only, I've never had charge of a cow outfit—except temporary."

"Well, are you open to take on a job like that for me, and see it through? I'm willing to give you a hundred and fifty a month as wages, which I'm told is about the average for a range boss. And I'll declare you in on five per cent of the net profits over a five-year period."

"Did you say you aimed to put in

eight or ten thousand head?" Charlie asked.

Brock nodded.

Charlie did a little mental arithmetic. Then he whistled incredulously.

"A proposition like that," he said, "sounds most too good to be true."

"Nevertheless it is made to you as a plain business matter," Brock retorted. "Want to take it up?"

"Hell, yes! Pronto, before you change your mind!" Charlie exploded. "When do we start?"

"As soon as cattle can be bought, a crew got together, a ranch and range located."

"My gosh, man!" Charlie exclaimed. "I don't know what put the notion into your head to start a cow outfit an' hire me to run it; but I do say I can fill the bill. I never did suffer from modesty. I'm ripe for such an undertakin'. It sounds like a dream to me."

"It may seem like a nightmare in spots before you're through," Brock said tersely. "I may as well tell you there's a chance it won't be smooth as silk. There might—I don't say there will—be people interested in seeing that I don't get away with what I undertake."

"There frequently is," Charlie agreed. "But I can guarantee that if I run your outfit nobody will take anything from you only what they're entitled to. I ain't throwin' bouquets at myself, you understand—but when it comes to most angles of the cow business I've been through the mill. What I don't know I can pick up as fast as the other feller."

"Then it's a deal," Brock said. "Let's get down to brass tacks. I want you to pick as good a range as can be located. I want you to organize an able-bodied crew of riders, and I want to buy cattle. I want to do the thing right."

"Expense, I suppose, no object," Charlie said jocularly.

"Don't make any mistake," Brock replied earnestly. "I don't want to organize a wild-West show. It's a business—and it's got to pay. I'm not picking on you blind, as it happens. I've been at the Seventy Seven and the Maltese Cross. I've known Rock Holloway since a long time back. I talked this over with him. I heard about you in other directions. You've got a reputation, Shaw. See that you live up to it."

"I'm a natural-born josher," Charlie grinned. "You'll have to get used to that. It don't hurt me none for work. I can get riders. I know darned near every cow hand north of the Big Muddy. I have a ranch location in mind. We got all northern Montana for range. She ain't really a quarter stocked yet. I'm pretty darned sure you couldn't buy cattle on the north side. They're all buyin' more, every spring. But old Al Kerr, in the Judith Basin, might let go a few thousand. I heard last fall he was gettin' top-heavy with cattle. Anyway, this undertakin' will require some plannin'. Best thing for us to do is head into Fort Benton. I got to cash in my wolf pelts. The fort is cowman's headquarters for north Montana. We can get organized there."

Half an hour later they were joggin' south, two tiny black objects on a field of dazzling white. And Charlie Shaw, though still in his heart a trifle incredulous at his luck, had the feeling that here was a tide taken at the flood.

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING DISCLOSURE.

"WHERE'S the big chief, the grand mogul of the Wineglass outfit?" Rock Holloway rested his gloved hands on his saddle horn and gazed at Charlie Shaw. They had met on a ridge two miles south of the new ranch that Charlie had located for Brock.

That young man grinned widely at his friend and replied:

"You now gaze upon him."

"Oh, I know you're the whole works and proud as a pup with a beef bone," Rock retorted in kind. "But I was asking about the owner."

"According to the brand registry an' the bank account in Fort Benton," Charlie replied, "I'm him."

"Quit kidding," Rock admonished. "Time you grew up since you're range boss of a regular cow outfit. Is Terry around?"

"I'm not kiddin'," Charlie stated. "An' I don't know where Terry Brock is. I ought to, seems to me. But he don't appear to think so. I haven't laid eyes on him since we brought the last herd over the river. I'm not shootin' hot air, Rock. My shoulders is bent double under a weight of responsibility. Brock puts the whole works in my name, tells me to go to it, an' vanishes. I don't know whether he's just tryin' me out, whether I'm dealin' with a philanthropic millionaire which throws around chunks like a hundred thousand odd dollars like it was nothing at all, or just a darned lunatic. What do you know about this hombre, anyhow, Rock. It was on your say-so he made me this proposition."

"Well, I sent him to the right party, didn't I?" Rock demanded.

"Yes—but——" Charlie threw out his hands. "He's either a trustin' innocent, or he's got somethin' up his sleeve. 'Tain't hardly natural for a man to pick a stranger like me an' throw off all wraps this way. Who is he? Where does he come from? Why this aimless sort of way he does business?"

"Search me—about the last," Rock promptly answered. "Has he made any damn fool breaks in a business way?"

"Well, darn him, he leaves everything to me!" Charlie complained. "Technically, I own the darned outfit. He don't even leave me know where he is so I can consult him."

"In other words, he's giving you an absolutely free hand," Rock drawled. "What's wrong with that? When did you begin to shrink because you had to make your own decisions?"

"I don't," Charlie protested. "Gosh darn it! he couldn't tell me anythin', an' likely I wouldn't let him if he could. But it's his show. An' it looks like he's forgot it. Or else somethin's happened him. He said he knew you. What do you know about him?"

"As a matter of fact, Charlie, I don't know a great deal more about Terry Brock than you do," Rock replied. "I hadn't seen or heard of him for years, until he blew into the ranch last winter. He didn't particularly unburden his soul to me—except that he wanted to start up in the cow business, and since he was green, did I know of a smart cowman that he could trust to the limit. He sort of hinted he'd like me to take it on. But you know that between me and Nona we have a pretty good show of our own. So I sicked him onto you."

"Let's ride along to the ranch an' get somethin' to eat," Charlie suggested. "Go on about Brock. He sure interests me."

They shook up their horses and went loping west toward the shallow valley of a creek that took rise in a soak-spring area on Lonesome Prairie and flowed south to the Marias River.

"No, Charlie," Rock repeated, "I don't know so very much about Terry Brock. When my father got ambitious for me to have a real education he sent me to college in Massachusetts. I didn't finish, but that's neither here nor there. But that's how I met Terry Brock. He came in as a freshie when I was in my third year. Seniors don't flock with the frosh as a rule, but I

happened to do Terry a good turn by accident. We got quite friendly. He had money—at least his folks had—because he was always flush. I remember his sister and a cousin coming up to college once to see him and they were real class. After I left, we wrote for a while. He married right after he graduated. I was in Texas then, making myself useful around cows. From that time on I never heard of Terry Brock until he rode into the ranch last March. Somehow or other he knew where to find me. He talked cattle till he was black in the face. He offered to buy me out, put in more stock, and let me run the thing on my own terms. As I said, I sicked him onto you. That's all I know."

"Don't wise *me* up none," Charlie replied. "But it's all right. If he's satisfied to leave me have full swing I'll do my best for him. It's a cinch, of course. We got a darned good bunch of stock cattle, and a location. But it's a funny thing for a man to do, just the same. Darned if I'd pick a man up loose on the range like he did me, put him in a position where he could steal my eye teeth if he wanted, and then disappear."

They rode to the lip of the depression down which Plentywater flowed, a small, clear stream in a treeless hollow. Rock pulled up to stare at the ranch.

"By gosh, you're setting the earth afire, aren't you," he conceded. "Good-looking buildings. Good land along that bottom. Looks like a ranch. I wondered why you didn't locate on the Marias, or go on north to Milk River. But this shows up like a good spot. Funny how a few improvements alter a place. I've rode over this often without thinking of it as a location."

"Country's new yet. You can still pick some peaches." Charlie grinned. "You bet I'll make it a ranch. Look. Away up above us this draw narrows in. Above and below the house there's over a thousand acres of rich bottom land. Some of it's natural meadow. We'll get enough wild hay this year to carry us over winter. I figure on putting a dirt dam in the neck up there. Figure she'll hold enough surface water to irrigate the whole works. Grow hay enough there to feed us through a hard winter—if one of them dingbusters ever hits us. This ain't the banana belt. I aim to play safe. If Mister Terry Brock follows my lead he'll be runnin' cows here when some of these hell-roarin', take-a-chance-on-bad-weather owners is gatherin' up their own remains. I'll make this outfit go with a whoop—if I get a chance."

"You got all the chance there is," Rock observed. "A minute ago you were sort of hinting you had a little too much leeway."

"Oh, well, I didn't exactly mean it that way," Charlie returned. "Come on, let's have the cook throw us some fodder."

They dismounted at the door of a new stable. Rock looked appreciatively at the fruit of Charlie's stewardship. It was brand-new, framed, shingled, painted. When Rock and Charlie Shaw came to northern Montana, sawed lumber didn't exist north of the Yellowstone.

"Why didn't you build a frame house, too?" Rock asked when they walked toward a sprawling bunk house and messroom, with a wing for the quarters of owner and range boss. This was of ten-inch pine logs, peeled, notched and dovetailed.

"I like a house solid," Charlie said. "I was raised in log houses. Brock, he said logs suited him. And a fireplace. Said we had to have a fireplace. So we got these pine timbers hauled in from the Sweet Grass. An' we can toast our toes in comfort when the blizzards howl."

"What I ambled over this way for, really," Rock said when they had eaten and were talking over cigarettes, "was to see if I couldn't make some arrangement to throw in with you on round-up, this fall and thereafter. I haven't got enough cattle yet to justify a wagon and a full crew on the range. Same time, I'd like to have a little more say-so about how my stock is handled on my own range than I can have simply by sending reps with the Maltese Cross and other outfits. You have to muster a full crew with your wagon. Yet, you hardly need a full crew for the seven or eight thousand cattle you've put in. Suppose I put, say, six riders with your outfit, and we plan the range work to suit us both? How do you think that would strike you?"

"You certainly can," Charlie agreed promptly. "Funny, I was wonderin' just the other day if you'd be agreeable to such a proposition. Save both outfits money. And I got to make this pay right from the jump-off. I won't be satisfied if I don't."

"You will," Rock told him. "You can't help it."

A little later, as he was about to ride away, he took a last look over buildings, corrals, men busy at various tasks, and the white chuck-wagon tent fluttering on the creek below. The wrangler had bunched the remuda, bells jangling, hoofs grinding up fine dust. Riders were catching fresh horses.

"You got a peach of a layout, Charlie," he declared. "You picked a better location than I reckoned it. With Brock's money and your sense, if you pull together, in ten years you ought to have one of the biggest and best cow outfits north of the Missouri."

"In ten years," Charlie muttered as he watched Rock ride south down the Plentywater, "I won't be worryin'. Gosh darn it, why should I worry now? Everything's goin' good. Anythin' outside this is *his* funeral."

What Charlie Shaw meant by that cryptic remark in a resentful tone was partly due to a brief note which he took out of his pocket to peruse afresh.

Go ahead according to your own judgment
Will get back by and by. T. B.

Charlie grumbled.

"I like to run a outfit, but, by gosh, Terry Brock strikes me as a darned uncertain proposition. I like to be able to give him some idea what I'm doin' an' why. He couldn't make himself no scarcer than if he was on the dodge."

Brock had been gone over a month. He had been with the outfit when they trailed the third and last herd in from the Judith. When they had crossed the Missouri at Fort Benton with those cattle, Brock simply disappeared. He didn't say he was going. He went. Charlie missed him, worried a little. But he did not hold up his herd. He had learned that any man in an executive position must delegate authority. He had a man picked for segundo. He put "Bud" Cole in charge of the trail outfit and sent it on. Then he cooled his heels for three days in the Grand Union Hotel, impatient, a little worried. On the third day he got this note through the mail. Whereupon he snorted and rode on to catch his outfit.

Since that day, silence. It worried him more than he cared to admit. Not that he wanted or needed an owner at his elbow. Far from it. Personally, it pleased him better to use his own untrammeled judgment.

But if Charlie had regarded Terry Brock merely as an employer and owner it would have been a joke. Considered from the cattleman's angle, he was too green to burn. When Charlie considered Terry Brock and his money falling into the hands of some men he knew, he could easily imagine a scien-

tifically plucked tenderfoot. And the net result of Brock's implicit faith in him, the man's blind trust in his handling of important matters, burdened Charlie with a feeling of responsibility for the man himself, over and above his material interests. He hadn't bargained for that. It was silly. Charlie's practical soul informed him that he had his hands full, building a ranch from the foundation, looking after eight thousand cattle, planning ahead as a range man must, without worrying whether the owner was properly tucked in bed at night.

In Charlie's experience, cattle owners gave their range bosses a free hand and ample powers, but they kept in touch, and never let go the invisible reins of control. Brock, however, probably knew what he was doing, Charlie reflected. He was an educated man, a powerful man physically, and clever in his own way. But Charlie decided that he was certainly erratic when it came to money and business —so very erratic that Charlie wondered how Terry Brock ever contrived to hold in his own right enough money to buy eight thousand cattle and equip a ranch.

But he had it. There were the cattle, bought and paid for. The ranch was in the making. There was enough cash on deposit in the Choteau County Bank to carry the Wineglass until they shipped beef that fall. When Brock had been gone a couple of weeks without word of his whereabouts or his return, Charlie prudently began to wonder how far the check book he carried would take him. So he inquired. Mr. Terence Brock had deposited ten thousand dollars to the credit of Mr. Charles H. Shaw the very day he vanished.

"Maybe he's one of these wise gazabos that's concerned with results only, an' shrinks from the horrible details," Charlie said to himself. "He said it was up to me; but I never thought he was goin' to pile it all on me an' then vamose. Well, I'll get him results, all right. I just naturally got to. But I'd like to augur with him once in a while. Gosh darn him, you'd think he was hidin' out from somethin' or somebody!"

That, it transpired, was precisely what Mr. Terence Brock was doing.

Rock Holloway had long disappeared below the southern horizon. Charlie had been occupying himself more or less about petty affairs. The afternoon had worn toward the thin edge of evening. He was roosting on the porch, cogitating on how soon he had better take a sweep over the range and brand what calves were born since the cattle were turned loose. A rig appeared on the brow of the hill looking down on Plentywater, rolled into the creek bottom, and drew up before the house. A livery driver from Fort Benton held the reins. Beside him sat a lawyer whom Charlie knew and heartily disliked—one Arthur J. Harrock. Two women occupied the rear seat of this double-spring wagon. One was young, one middle aged, both well dressed in what Charlie knew were exceedingly expensive garments. The younger woman had more than her share of good looks, and she eyed Charlie, the house, and the general ensemble with frank scrutiny. The elder gazed upon him with a haughty indifference that almost amounted to scorn—which amused Charlie Shaw a trifle. He decided instantly that they were mother and daughter, and he wondered what on earth such people wanted at the Wineglass, and shrewdly guessed that it had something to do with Terry.

He rose at once to offer the strangers within the gates such hospitality as range custom dictated, marking then that two riders were dropping over the bank on the rig's track. Charlie knew

the mounted men even at a distance—deputies from the sheriff's office.

Harrock saw fit to address Charlie before he had time to say anything. His manner wasn't cordial. It was hardly possible for Harrock to be cordial. He had the cross-examining habit and manner even in private conversation—what Charlie Shaw and his fellows termed "the-big-I-an'-little-you" style. Harrock wasn't popular, nor in his profession particularly prosperous. He was sharp enough in law but too void of the humanities to get far in cattle-country practice.

"Is Mr. Brock about?" he asked.

"Mr. Brock's away," Charlie answered.

"I understand that you are in charge here?"

"For once your understandin' ain't deceived you," Charlie remarked. "But maybe you'd all like to get down an' rest for a spell an' have something to eat. Hello there, you county pirates. Got a warrant for me?"

"Wish I had," Bob Sullivan flung back at him. "I never had the pleasure of throwin' a range boss in the calaboose yet. Did you say your cook was still on the job, Charlie?"

"Sure. Get down an' put away your horses an' sample his work," Charlie invited.

"Them's welcome words," the deputy grinned as he rode past. "We're more than willin' to eat, us deputies. That's one of the best things we do after ten hours in the saddle. You sure Brock ain't around?"

"I said so, didn't I?" Charlie returned impatiently. "I ain't in the habit of sayin' things backward. What do you want with him?"

"Tell you while we eat," Sullivan said over his shoulder. "Or maybe he'll wise you up."

This with a jerk of his head toward Harrock, who was helping the two women out of the wagon. Charlie felt uneasy premonitions stir within him; but courtesy came before curiosity. He sent the driver to the stable to put up his team; he showed the women into his own room to wash the trail dust off and primp after the fashion which Charlie knew women practiced. When the door closed on him he turned to Mr. Arthur Harrock, LL.D., and asked:

"What you want with Terry Brock?"

"Mr. Brock," Harrock replied with considerable asperity in his tone, since he had as low an opinion of Charlie Shaw as Charlie had of him, "is legally non compos mentis. We are here to apprehend and return him to custody, to resume possession of his property on behalf of his family so that their lawful interests may be adequately safeguarded."

"Talk United States to me," Charlie said coldly.

Mr. Harrock abandoned his impressive verbiage for clarity.

"He's insane," he declared. "Sullivan has a warrant for his arrest. He's an escaped lunatic. Where is he?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SAGE.

CHARLIE did some tall thinking as as he lay in borrowed blankets under round-up canvas while the two women occupied his comfortable room at the house. He was annoyed and incredulous and suspicious. He rose at dawn with these feelings still rampant. Breakfast over, he watched the livery rig breast the slope of Plentywater to the Fort Benton trail. Before it vanished over the rim he called to him one Bud Cole, a lathlike person with a freckled, homely face that masked a reckless courage and uncommon shrewdness behind a seemingly vacuous smile.

"I'll be gone for a spell, Bud," said

he. "You're in charge till I come back. If any strangers come inquirin', you don't know nothin' about nobody. Sabe? If I'm gone over a week—I don't reckon to be, but I might—you send these ranch laborers to town with an order apiece on the Benton Mercantile for their money. Then start round-up. Brand what calves you find. Work in about a thirty-mile circle of the ranch. There shouldn't be much stuff beyond that."

"I got you," Bud answered.

Charlie had kept him posted on what ranch work was in progress. Bud was as competent on the range as Charlie himself. So that was that. Charlie forged south on a good horse, and he rode fast, straight for the TL on the Marias, craving sagacious counsel. He prayed that Rock Holloway was at home.

And Rock fortunately was. Charlie dropped into the sheltered valley at mid-forenoon. The river rippled in its pebbly bed like liquid silver. Meadow larks caroled to him from swaying sagebrush and green-fringed willows on the bank. But he splashed through the river, unmindful of beauty in a spot which he seldom passed without admiring, and a minute or two later dismounted in the Holloway yard.

"Bless your heart, you cover territory like an Indian scout!" Rock Holloway greeted. "What's sitting hard on your innocent soul this lovely summer morning, 'Blondy?' "

"Lay off the funny stuff," Charlie growled. "Do I advertise calamity on my physog that a way?"

"Don't know about calamity," Rock said. "My experience of you is that when you face calamity you grin like a wolf. But you're wearing the well-known corrugated brow of care."

"I got a license." Charlie sighed. "Lissen careful, old-timer. A rig blew in from Benton after you left yesterday. That Art Harrock is along with two females. The young one claims to be Terry Brock's wife. The old one is her mother. Her own estimate of herself is she's at least a duchess. There's likewise two deputies from Tom Coats' office.

"Now, they claim Brock is a lunatic. They say he's been confined in a asylum down East, owin' to his havin' delusions about bein' persecuted, which leads him to raise Cain with his family an' pretty near kill a man, besides beatin' hell outa his wife. They say he got better an' was held in a private sanitarium for a while, an' finally gets so restored he takes charge of his own affairs.

"They claim he's crazy all the time, but foxy. He turns everything he has quietly into cash, an' blows into the unknown, leavin' his wife an' daughter strapped. His last act was to commit an unprovoked assault on two people, among which is a brother-in-law. After which he disappears. This is about eight or nine months ago. That's Brock's personal history, accordin' to them."

"Well?" Rock paused on the interrogation.

"It ain't 'well,' " Charlie answered irritably. "Would you, from what you seen of Terry Brock this spring, say he was a crazy man?"

"No," Rock replied. "Would you? You've seen a whole lot more of him than I have."

"If he's a lunatic, we all are," Charlie retorted. "However, these people claim he ain't a responsible person. They got a warrant out for him on the ground that he's dangerous to be at large. Also—which is where I come in—that he ain't competent to handle his own affairs; so they've got themselves appointed to administer his affairs in person and in toto, as that mouthy Harrock put it."

Rock whistled.

"I see," he commented. "They step

in and throw you out on your ear and run the Wineglass to suit themselves. They're after control of Brock's property. Well, eight thousand cattle and a good ranch is worth controlling, I suppose. That's about the idea, isn't it?"

"In a nutshell," Charlie declared.

"They haven't got Brock?"

"No."

"You don't know where he is?"

"If I did I'd be augurin' with him instead of you," Charlie said pointedly. "I come to you because you're smarter'n I am when it comes to mix-ups like this. But Terry's the interested party."

"Of course, you're not interested," Rock scoffed.

"Hell, yes! Of course I am," Charlie admitted. "I like runnin' a cow outfit. First time I ever had a chance at a big show. I know I can make her go with a whoop. I have, up to date. I don't want to be chiseled out of my own chances. An' I don't want Terry Brock to be chiseled out of anything that's his. That's where I stand."

"You think it is a chiseling proposition?" Rock asked.

"That bunch didn't impress me favorably ay-tall," Charlie said decidedly. "Nor their story. Nor their attorney. Nor their eagerness to get their hooks on an outfit that, so far as I know, or they showed me to the contrary, is Brock's lawful property. I aim to protect his interests like they was my own —which they are. How'm I goin' to do it?"

"You say they've taken legal steps. Did they demand possession? Have they got possession?" Rock asked.

"They demanded about everything in sight," Charlie told him. "At least, Harrock did for 'em. He claimed they had legal authority, but he didn't produce no documents I could recognize. He demanded that I turn everything over to 'em, render an account of all transactions to date, an' turn the balance in bank over to him on behalf of Mrs. Brock as guardian. She has a claim for maintenance. But the only real eyeful I got was a court order from some place in Massachusetts, indorsed by Judge Dudley in Benton, authorizin' the apprehension of Terence Brock on the ground of mental derangement. That's got nothin' to do with his property."

"What did you tell 'em?" Rock inquired.

"Told 'em to go to the devil!" Charlie exploded. "I went further. I told 'em I owned the Wineglass—lock, stock an' barrel. The brand is recorded in my name. I made all the land filin's. The bank roll is mine. I sign the checks. I asked 'em how they was going to take anything away from *me? I* wasn't givin' nothin' away to sorrowful females an' shyster lawyers. Of course they know, same as everybody in the country knows, the Wineglass is Terry Brock's. His money paid for it. But I took that stand because I didn't know what else to do."

"Good headwork," Rock commented. "What did our friend Harrock say to that?"

"Oh, he got sarcastic. Said it was a provable fact that I was merely Brock's agent in any transaction. Said he would at once take legal steps to have me peeled to the bone. I believe he said somethin' about me committin' a felony in makin' such a claim. That he'd have me indicted for conspiracy to defraud the just claimants. He was pretty windy."

"Got to prove a conspiracy. Got to prove fraud," Rock declared. "He may be able to ball you up if he makes out a good case in court—provided this lunacy business has any grounds. Naturally, you want to fight 'em."

"I got to!" Charlie rasped. "Until Brock himself turns up. I'd be a fine bonehead, wouldn't I, to let a bunch

of strangers clamp their hooks on a outfit a man puts me in charge of? Course I'll stand 'em off, long as I got a leg to stand on."

"Well, I tell you," Rock said; "come up to the house. I got some high-priced brains up there which might be useful to you. Uncle Bill Sayre happens to be here. His advice is likely to be a heap sounder than mine."

"Good!" Charlie exclaimed. "He's about the wisest old owl there is. Gosh, that's luck."

Uncle Bill Sayre—an elderly Texan who operated a bank in Fort Worth, and sundry other enterprises in various localities, remembered Charlie Shaw perfectly, although he had not seen him for a matter of four years. Uncle Bill had a soft spot in his heart for Charlie Shaw and Rock Holloway. Between them they had broken up a gang which had put into execution a very efficient method of looting the Maltese Cross—a whopping big cow outfit on the lower Marias, for which Uncle Bill was administrator under a dead man's will. He had seen Charlie Shaw hauled home from a rustlers' fight in the Sweet Grass Hills with a very slim chance to live, and watched him cheat death in a Fort Benton hospital by the proverbial eyelash. So, without knowing anything about Terry Brock, Uncle Bill listened with keen interest to Charlie's tale.

"Without knowin' a thing about what's back of this, son," he gave his opinion at last, "I'd be inclined fo' to think these heah folks are pressin' matters with mo' of an eye to what's in it, than fo' their relative's welfare. I sho do. Now, yo' aim, Charlie, is simply to protect this man's property till he shows up to do fo' himself, eh?"

"Exactly." Charlie nodded.

"You got a ace in the hole," Uncle Bill remarked, "havin' yo' own registered brand on the stock. Seems like yo' man Brock must have figured on somethin' breakin' this a way. Fo' a man judged insane that's most too clevah. Is there any written agreement between you coverin' this matter of ownership?"

"Our personal understandin'," Charlie said. "Hell, ain't that good enough between white men?"

"Mistuh Brock sho trusted you, son," Sayre drawled. "And I'd say he done a good stroke of business doin' so. Technically, you own this Wineglass outfit. They'd have to go back of the actual fact an' discover the intention behind such an arrangement. Which is sometimes difficult in law. But that's what yo' lawyer, Harrock, will sho seek to establish. My advice is to beat him to the cou'ts. Possession is nine points of the law. If they eveh get possession, you'd have a job to oust 'em. So retain possession, an' head off their attempts to molest you. Get the sma'test attorney you know. Have him apply for a temporary injunction prohibitin' these people from interferin with yo' lawful business of operatin' this heah Wineglass cow outfit. You have a good chance of gittin' such an injunction made permanent, unless they can show sound cause why they, instead of you, are better fitted to take cha'ge of Mistuh Brock's property an' affairs."

"Amen," Charlie breathed in relief at something tangible. "Who is the smartest lawyer in Fort Benton either of you knows?"

"Billy Arnold," Rock suggested.

Uncle Bill nodded. Arnold handled Maltese Cross business, Charlie knew. Arnold was young, aggressive, clever, and liked by everybody.

"Thanks, both of you." Charlie grinned. "Now you stake me to a fresh horse, Rock, an' I'll do a Paul Revere to Benton. I can beat that livery team hours—an' beat Harrock to the courthouse. Here we go in a cloud of dust!"

CHAPTER V.

THE STRANGER.

THREE days later, Charlie returned to the Wineglass. Warm rain out of a June sky had drenched the land that night. He rode all forenoon across a sward green as new plush. Wild roses made pleasant banks of odorous pink in the hollows where they grew. The hum of bees, the crying of plovers, the harsh squawk of long-billed curlews, the liquid song of yellow-breasted meadow larks, greeted him around every bend as he rode up the course of Plentywater. Cattle lay on the banks—Wineglass and TL and Maltese Cross cattle, and a sprinkling of other brands. Wild horses snorted and ran at his approach, and Charlie whooped at them in sheer exaltation of spirit. With that winelike air in his mouth, a good horse under him, and a temporary checkmate to a potential enemy, the world was his, and he was accordingly uplifted. Achievement is a potent brew.

In the Wineglass yard, however, he came down to earth, in a double sense. His bootheels had scarcely hit the ground before Bud Cole appeared.

"The main squeeze is here," said Bud. "Layin' low. Nobody knows he's here but me, an' I asked no questions. You'll find him around the house somewheres."

Charlie grunted and strode away to the ranch house. Perhaps he could get this tangle straight now. At least he wouldn't have to go it blind in a dispute over property if Terry had come home.

A man sat on the porch steps reading a newspaper. He had on overalls and riding boots, a worn Stetson, a black sateen shirt. A gaudy silk handkerchief draped his neck. His face was dirty with a heavy stubble of beard and a short, bristly, reddish-brown mustache darkened his upper lip. Charlie nodded and passed in. He went through the bunk room to his own quarters and to the room especially fitted for the owner. Lastly he peered into the kitchen. The ranch cook said "Hello!" as he plied a rolling-pin on pie crust. There was neither cellar nor attic for Brock to hide in.

Then Charlie turned at a step. The stranger from the porch steps had entered. He grinned amiably.

"Well," said he, "a few whiskers and a change of clothes seems a good disguise."

Whereupon Charlie grasped what Bud Cole meant when he said no one but himself knew Terry Brock was there. Brock didn't need to hide. Certainly, this was Terry in the flesh. But it took his voice, his words, and his manner to reveal his identity—even to Charlie Shaw.

"I'll be damned!" Charlie exclaimed. "I sure didn't know you. Took you for some strange cow hand."

"That's encouraging," Brock replied. "If you don't know me at first sight, nobody else is likely to. That's a decided advantage right now. Things are beginning to tighten, as you fellows say."

"Just what you'd notice," Charlie agreed.

"You had some visitors, I understand?" Brock grinned. "And they sort of surprised you, didn't they? What kind of a session did you have with my estimable wife and her very excellent mother and this legal adviser they have taken on their staff? I suppose they gave you an earful. Were they rather insistent about stepping right into possession?"

"Gosh, yes! Say, why didn't you wise me up about this?" Charlie grumbled. "They've had me worryin'. They came here an' tried to run a sandy on me. But I stood that off. An' I think I got 'em stopped for a while, anyway. What's in this, any-

how, Terry? Are you crazy, like they say? Or are you just a damn fool?"

"A fool with some money, I guess," Brock admitted soberly. "There's a good deal more in it, Charlie, than they'd be likely to tell you, or any one else. I'll come across with a tale of woe in a minute. But what has been done? I had an inkling of some such move, but couldn't do anything. I know them. They'll go as far as they can."

"They won't get very far for a spell," Charlie told him. "I just got through givin' 'em somethin' that'll hold 'em for a while. Let me have it straight, Terry. These people make a lot of claims. You know what they say about you?"

Brock nodded.

"Oh, yes, of course. They say I'm insane. They want me shut up for safety. I'm a dangerous lunatic. Incompetent to handle my own business. Therefore they should be in charge of my affairs. That would be about their claims and statements. Also, they have taken certain legal steps that lend some authority to what they're trying on. What do you think about me yourself, Charlie?"

"Your judgment about some things may not be first class," Charlie said thoughtfully. "You may be kinda uncertain in some things. But if that was a sign of insanity we'd all be candidates for the bughouse. You're my boss, an' I've undertaken quite a contract for you—which I figure I'm darn well able to carry through. You've trusted me farther than you had any license to, an' treated me white. I'm for you all the way. I didn't like that crowd's style. If they'd claimed you had embezzled this money, or robbed a bank somewhere to start yourself in the cow business I might 'a' took 'em serious. But they only claimed you was a lunatic an' dangerous, an' they was goin' to take charge of your property. I might have pointed out to 'em that this property is in darn good hands an' in no danger of goin' to ruin. But I didn't argue with 'em. You may be dangerous. I know plenty good men that are dangerous—to them that tramps on their toes. But not to their friends. I reckon myself your friend as well as your range boss."

Brock took a turn or two up and down the room. He stopped, facing Charlie, and there was a sheepish grin on his face.

"I won't forget that," said he. "Loyalty is one of the cardinal virtues in human relations, according to my benighted way of thinking. And I have looked a lot for it and not found much. I have taken chances on men and women before now, to my regret. But you've got to trust people, or life becomes impossible. Apparently this is one of the times I didn't make a mistake."

"Aw, hell!" Charlie protested in some embarrassment. "You got a stack of trouble buildin' up ahead of you. I was just tellin' you where I stood."

"All right, we won't get sentimental about it," Brock said. "Now, while I have a clear idea what they're after, I don't know what positive steps they have taken to get their way. I know they have a warrant out for me. So I had to lay low. Tell me just what happened."

Charlie began at the beginning and told him in detail what had transpired during that visit of the Brock family.

"Then what?" Brock inquired. "I knew they were coming here. I didn't have time to beat them here after I found out. So I waited till I knew they were gone. But when I got home you had vanished, and Bud didn't know where or why, or if he did he wouldn't say."

"I hand-picked this bunch of riders," Charlie said, grinning. "They're good men. From Bud Cole to that kid

wranglin' horses I can bank on 'em to do what I say an' keep their mouths shut. Well, you'd been outa sight a month. I had to do somethin' about this thing they sprung on me. So I went to Rock Holloway. Rock's pretty smart. An old-timer from Texas happened to be at the TL, a man that's a banker, an' foxy as they make 'em when it comes to seein' all sides of a proposition. I told 'em what the play was. They told me what I better do. I split the breeze to Benton that day and got Billy Arnold to get out an injunction against these people interferin' with my control of the Wineglass. It stands for thirty days. So they're stopped for that length of time. Billy, an' he's a law sharp, says unless they make out a strong case, I can stand 'em off indefinitely. To get possession of this ranch an' the stock, they got to win a civil suit against me on the ground that I conspired with you to defraud. They have to prove first that this is your property. They have to prove your interest in the Wineglass —an' prove you insane before they can get themselves appointed to administer your affairs."

"Good work. That was clever of you."

"It was mostly Rock and Uncle Bill Sayre," Charlie disclaimed. "I played Uncle Bill's hunch."

"It was taking the bull by the horns without losing any time, just the same," Brock asserted. "If I'd proceeded on the principle that when you have to fight you should beat the other fellow to the first punch, I'd have saved myself trouble. Well, there's thirty days in which they can't molest this property. That's what they're after. If they could strip me to the bone they'd do it smiling. You've got them stopped in that direction. But they'll still grab me, if they can find me."

"They can?" Charlie frowned. "Arnold said that if you were not bughouse all you had to do was appear and knock that in the head."

"That insanity charge is just a bluff to get custody of property," Brock declared. "I could beat that flat footed, even with my record. Because I have been off my head, Charlie, I am not mentally incompetent now. But I did cut up rough. I very nearly killed a man who was supposed to be my friend. That is the warrant they are keen to get me on. Attempted murder is a considerable crime. They would take me back to Okhollow, Massachusetts, for trial. This man's relatives are powerful people in that part of the country. Between them and my estimable wife's intentions, I wouldn't stand much chance of personal freedom for some time to come. They didn't say anything about this felonious charge of attempted murder, you notice. They'll produce that when needed. The chances are they will try to prove it the act of an insane man with strong homicidal tendencies. And they might make it stick."

"Was it attempted murder?" Charlie asked.

"No. But it looked like it on the surface." Brock frowned. "I mauled him good, but I wasn't trying to kill him—or I would have done it. And I'm not going to be penalized for that if I can help it. I have a decided aversion to being confined for anything, anyway. I've spent a lot of my time the last few years trying to please other people. I am not going to be such a goat again. I hoped they wouldn't find me away out here. But since they have nosed my trail like hungry hounds and are looking for trouble I'll try to give them plenty. But I've got to keep out of their hands."

Charlie stared at him intently for a minute.

"That means you got to stay on the dodge?" he commented.

Brock nodded.

"Look," said Charlie; "I was with you pretty close for over two months. When I walked in on you to-day, after bein' told you was at the house, I didn't know you from Adam's off ox. Did Bud recognize you before you told him who you were?"

Brock laughed.

"He hardly believed me when I did tell him."

"None of these boys that saw you around every day when we were handlin' these cattle over the river knew you either," Charlie observed. "That beard an' mustache certainly changes your looks scandalous. If you'd change your way of speakin'—talk rough an' ready, I mean, forget you're educated—no reason you shouldn't stay right with the outfit. Sabe? We got to take a tour around the range an' brand some calves. You're a green hand learnin' the business. You'd ought to know it, anyway, from the ground up. The boys'll make allowances for you, if I put you to work. Only, I'll have to treat you like any other common hand. You'd have to try an' hold up your end. But you'd be right here on the job, where we could make medicine any time anythin' new was sprung on us. You'd be a heap safer right in your own outfit. That's the last place they'll look for you, workin' as a range hand with your own outfit. Me an' Bud'll know, an' nobody else."

"By Jove, that's a corking good idea!" Brock agreed. "I never went a week in my life before without shaving. I do look like a rough customer. It would simplify matters if I could stay here."

"Simpler, an' a heap safer," Charlie said. "Nobody'll recognize you, an' they'd have a time takin' you if they did. But how's it goin' to come out in the end? How're you goin' to beat this combination? You don't want to stay on the dodge the rest of your life."

Brock nursed his chin for a minute before replying.

"I don't intend to," he said at last. "I don't want to spin a long-winded and very unpleasant tale, Charlie. I hate to talk about it. It's a sore spot. Eventually it will all get into a court record, I suppose, and the newspapers, and become public property. So the crux of the thing is this: I am married to a woman who hates me because I stand between her and another man. Or, to put it more correctly, she wants to eliminate me so that she can get control of my resources—which would leave her free to cut the kind of a dash she wants to cut, with the kind of a man she wants.

"Her mother abets her. Always has. It's a horrible thing to say, but it wasn't me but my money she married in the first place. Both of them are without any scruples about anything. The man in the case is even more so. And they're all darned fine people, of first-class family. They have a background, and they have brains.

"A man hates to be a goat. When it dawned on me that I was, I took it pretty hard. I did go crazy. There was nothing I could do—unless I killed somebody. They were too clever. If it had been the ordinary emotional domestic situation, we could have settled it easily. I could have divorced her or let her get a divorce, and let it go at that. But she very carefully avoided letting it come to that, because she wanted to have her cake and eat it, too. I knew all about it without having anything like legal proof. She used to taunt me, work me into a fury—deliberately, I know now.

"We have a daughter. That's another weapon. I want that kid. I don't intend to let her grow up under any such pernicious influence. I don't

suppose you can understand the kind of woman who has beauty and cleverness and all that, but none of a woman's natural affection for anything or anybody. There are such, unfortunately. Perhaps not many. It happened to be my luck to get one. Stella wouldn't sacrifice a mood, an hour of her time, or one of her pleasures for her youngster. But the kid has been useful as a club on me.

"I don't look like a nervous man. And fundamentally I'm not. But a man can brood himself crazy if he has to go around with the feeling that he's a mouse helpless in a cat's claws. I finally cracked wide open. That's where they get this dangerous lunatic assertion. I did go crazy—but it was an emotional breakdown, not an intellectual one. She got me slapped in an asylum. Later I was moved to a private sanitarium. I shook off that depression. I knew I would, even when I was acting like a demented being. But when I was ready to get out into the world again and wanted to, I couldn't. I finally had to break out—with a bit of luck and the help of a couple of friends, who believed that I was myself. That sounds like a wild yarn, but it's true.

"But I did get out, and I had a hell of a battle establishing my mental competence and getting control of my own affairs again. I could tell you almost incredible things about that, only it doesn't matter. It was finally settled that I was well able to run my own show. But it was also quite obvious to me that I'd eventually go to pieces again, because the pressure began almost at once. There are some things a man can't stand up under. I offered her an equal division of all I had, to break clean and go do as she pleased. But that didn't suit her book at all. She was at me like a wasp, nagging, taunting, threatening—wouldn't leave me alone.

"I knew that if I lived long under such conditions I'd probably blow up and kill myself or her, or some such fool thing. Men do. So I quietly turned everything I had into cash and just turned my back on the whole business.

"But it happened—pure blind chance—the last sort of encounter I wanted, because I knew it was useless as well as dangerous to blow up—I came across this man under circumstances that touched me off like dropping a match into powder. I put him in the hospital. They swear I used a club on him. That's a lie. I only needed my hands. I thought I had done for him when I had sense enough to let up. And I struck her when she interfered. And I knocked a brother-in-law down and cracked a rib or two of his with my toe for good luck. I guess I was pretty savage. But a lot of steam had accumulated in my chest. And they built the fire themselves.

"But that sort of played into their hands. Before I left I'd arranged for a certain sum of money to be paid monthly for her support, and to maintain our youngster in a private school. I didn't make her allowance any too liberal. And to be deprived of a living that was very comfortable, if not actually luxurious, was naturally maddening to her.

"So between them they have cooked up this latest move. They laid a charge of attempted murder against me at once. I kept myself out of sight for a while and got what information I needed. You can see how it all dovetailed. I had been pronounced mentally deranged once, confined for more than a year in sanitariums. My actions, which of course I can justify personally, don't lend themselves to a defense in court. I wantonly attack an innocent man without provocation. I maltreat my loving wife. I assault a relative by marriage. I disappear,

leaving my wife without the support to which she is entitled. I *must* be mentally incompetent, or I wouldn't do these terrible things. Poor, dear Terry! What a pity he has this mania. You see? If I'm insane they can put me away. If I'm not insane, then I'm a criminal—I've attempted homicide without provocation. On either count—if they can make it stick—I'll be put away and my nearest and dearest will be able to run the show prety well to suit herself. You see?"

"Gosh, sounds like a dime novel," Charlie grunted. "You certainly been up against a hard formation, Terry. Are yet. You can't hardly imagine all that dirty work over a little money."

Brock grinned in a wry fashion. Little beads of perspiration had broken out on his face. He wiped them away with a handkerchief.

"Tough game, accordin' to your account," Charlie mused. "How're we goin' to beat 'em, an' fix it so you can snap your fingers at 'em?"

"This stuff is all in your name," Brock said. "Regardless of what happens to me you hang tight. Defy them. You can. Spend it all fighting every claim they make, if you have to. You don't have to account for possession. I know something about law myself. You can keep them from getting their paws on the Wineglass. If it came to a show-down I'd rather you had it for good than that combination."

He cursed softly under his breath, earnestly, like a man breathing a heartfelt prayer.

"This is only a starter, anyhow," he said presently in a more natural, casual tone. "I'll tell you more about it some time, maybe. Anyway, you've put a temporary spoke in their wheel. The chief thing is for me to keep out of their hands until we can devise ways and means to trip them up for good. I don't know just how, yet. Can't even guess. I'll have to go into the whole thing in detail with an able lawyer first opportunity. But, generally speaking, if you give crooks rope enough, they'll strangle themselves."

"Yes." Charlie nodded agreement—and he was thinking of a clever, fearless man who fabricated a brilliant scheme for looting the Maltese Cross, and how that enterprising rascal came to grief in a haze of powder smoke, through a blunder which no honest man would have needed to make. "I've seen that happen, too. Well, cheer up, Terry. You're among friends. You'll learn for to be a cowboy on your own pay roll, and I expect the Wineglass outfit'll manage to keep you outa jails, asylums, an' the poorhouse, all right, all right."

Upon which Mr. Terry Brock rose and vigorously shook hands with his range boss. After which he walked to a window on the other side of the room, ostentatiously blowing his nose.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREENHORN.

THE Wineglass round-up mustered fourteen riders. They had a grassy empire to themselves. The general round-up swept like a brigade of cavalry somewhere afar, a dozen outfits under a captain, combing half of northern Montana. Another year and the outer fringes of the Wineglass cattle would be scattered from the Missouri to Milk River, and from the rim of Sun River basin to the Larb hills on the east. And the Wineglass would then be a unit with the general. But as yet Brock's cattle were mostly within a radius of twenty miles. Round-up was simple—merely to bunch all cattle within a short ride, brand such calves as showed, move a few miles, and repeat the performance.

Terry Brock strove manfully. Horses bucked him off. Struggling calves kicked him in the stomach at

the branding fire. Other riders caught his mounts to save the time he wasted in futile casts with a rope. He learned that horsemanship, skill with a reata, and knowledge of what wild stock will do and when, are not things bestowed on a man like legacies. He must win to them by ordeal. His own men poked broad fun at him, deviled him with practical jokes, since a tenderfoot is fair game among active men anywhere.

But he survived the long rides, the heavy-eyed hours on night guard. He learned to sit a horse more securely. His men taught him much, because he never complained. To them he was simply a greenhorn, eager and willing and good natured, and they bore with his incapacity because he took it as it came. Things that were easy, matter of fact, for them, were feats for him to accomplish. But he remembered what he was told about a multiplicity of things concerning cattle and horses and the manifold details of a cow-puncher's business, and they told him sometimes that if he held out faithfully he would make a hand yet.

June sprinkled the range with the last of its showers and July came in with electrical storms, dazzling them with lightning, deafening them with sharp volleys of thunder—storms that darkened a clear sky, drenched and roared and flashed and passed on, leaving a pleasant, temporary coolness over that dry, hot land. They made round-ups on alkali flats where the bitter dust lay like gray flour on their clothes when they finished. They worked east to where the Bear Paw Mountains loomed green with timber, north to Milk River with its gnarly cottonwood sentinels along a stream lined with quicksands and black mud. They swung back across the undulating surface of Lonesome Prairie to where the Wineglass Ranch lay in the hollow of Plentywater.

This consumed three weeks. When they were camped on spring water, one move from home, Charlie suggested to Brock that they had better find out how the wind was blowing in Fort Benton.

"I'll leave Bud run the outfit, an' slide into town from here, an' see if there's anythin' new, an' chew the rag with Arnold about your affairs—seein' you don't hanker to ride in an' do that yourself."

"What's the use?" Brock pointed out. "I can't start defending myself until I'm attacked. And I'm enjoying myself here. It's almost like a dream, all that stuff they're springing. I've been too busy to think about it even," he said wistfully. "This sort of life doesn't leave any room for brooding about your personal sorrows. Too much action."

"Like it?" Charlie inquired.

"Wouldn't have missed that course of sprouts for anything," Brock said, grinning, "now I'm getting broke in. I'm learning things about both man and beast. I begin to see the why of the cow-puncher and cattleman, apart from the fact that one is earning a living and the other is in the business to make money. The sluggard and the stupid wouldn't thrive under range conditions. It's like an army or a circus, or the operations of a big railroad system. Precision, speed, a general pride in doing the job well. Why, every rider seems to think the entire welfare of the outfit depends on him. These fellows will do anything, day or night, for the outfit. You'd think it was theirs."

"It is," Charlie said briefly, "long as they work for it."

"Well, it's a great life for a healthy man, anyway," Brock declared. "I've seen more sunrises and sunsets than I've looked at for years. It's a very impressive country. There's room to grow."

"Sure. That's why most of us kinda like it." Charlie grinned. "I guess you'll make a cowboy yet, Terry. It's gittin' into your blood. I can see the symptoms."

"Who wouldn't?" Brock shook tobacco into a brown paper and stared off across the backs of a thousand cattle stringing away from the round-up ground and looked at his men stamping out the fire that heated branding irons.

"Some can't," Charlie replied. "Some men can't ever cut the mustard, on the range. I don't know why. You got to be up an' comin' too much, I reckon. You don't find no natural boneheads workin' on round-up—nor ownin' cow outfits, either—or if they are, they don't last long. Well, I'll drift. Here's hopin' the enemy has took to cover."

But that was a vain hope, although it endured until Charlie had talked with Attorney Arnold. He found that no further move had been made, and went forth to stroll down Fort Benton's one main street. There he met the sheriff of the county, Tom Coats, who knew Charlie Shaw of old.

"Hello, there. Has that feller Brock been around the Wineglass lately?"

Coats was an enormous man. He towered over Charlie, looking down with a whimsical glint in his eye.

Charlie shook his head.

"Funny thing about that jasper," Coats went on. "You know anything much about him, Charlie?"

"I know he's all right," Charlie replied promptly. "An' I'm willin' to gamble some other people are all wrong."

"Maybe. But you got to give 'em the benefit of the doubt," Coats replied. "They got some pretty definite proof about this party's record. Looka here, Shaw; do you own that Wineglass outfit or does he? If you own it, where'd you get the money?"

"You're gettin' too darn personal, Tom," Charlie retorted. "Go look up the records if you want to know."

"I suppose you would call it personal, askin' a man where he got money to do this or that." Coats smiled. "You can put it down to curiosity. An' perhaps a natural cravin' to make a little money in the regular course of business. I suppose you know this man Brock is wanted back East?"

"What for?"

"Attempted murder," Coats said. "Over an' above this claim that he's a lunatic with homicidal tendencies. I am privately offered a thousand dollars reward for his apprehension on either charge."

"You reckon you'll collect that thousand?"

"If he lingers around in my county, yes," Coats replied imperturbably. "His people are worried."

"They must be!" Charlie scoffed. "Worryin' themselves sick, I expect, wantin' to take care of the poor demented cuss. Huh! I guess they're worried all right, to offer you a thousand dollars to bring him in on a murder charge. What do you think about it yourself, Tom?"

"'Tain't my business to think," Coats answered. "I got a warrant to serve, that's all. You know where he is?"

"Think I'd tell you if I did?" Charlie drawled.

"Well, hardly," Coats said, laughing. "You act as if you leaned kinda strong toward Mister Brock of Massachusetts. Still—he's a fugitive. If he can clear himself why don't he come in an' face the music? What kind of party is he, anyhow, personally?"

"White man," Charlie said laconically. "Up against a bunch of lily-handed crooks."

"Got a fine-lookin' wife," the sheriff mused. "Nice-actin' woman, far as I

can see. She's all broke up about the way he's acted. Look out you don't get in wrong yourself, Charlie."

"Accordin' to my understandin' of the law," Charlie observed deliberately, "a man is presumed innocent till he's proved guilty. I've met these sorrowin' relatives of Terry Brock's. They act to me like they was out for his coin more'n anything else, if you want my private opinion."

"Naturally, if they're entitled to it," Coats replied. "Man that's bughouse ain't competent to handle his own nohow. He ain't got no license to give everything he's got away, and beggar his family. So McEwan says."

McEwan was the duly elected prosecuting attorney in Coats' bailiwick. Charlie pondered over this a while.

"I suppose," he said, "it would be their play to work up sympathy and a case against him at the same time."

Coats shrugged his shoulders. He was a capable frontier official, fearless, genial. Charlie had always known him to be fair, even generous.

"Charlie," he said kindly, "I done told you I got no interest in this outside of an official one—and a heap of curiosity, because it looks like some tangle. These people are pretty determined, and on the surface they got a strong case. If you claim the Wineglass with the idea of protectin' this Brock, you might get in pretty deep. McEwan says you can't make it stick. He knows law. I know a cow-puncher'll go to hell for anybody he works for. But if this Brock's non compos mentis from the start, you can't help him, an' you can burn your own fingers."

"Maybe he is, maybe he ain't," Charlie replied. "An' my fingers is my own."

Doubtless, Charlie reflected, as he rode, County Attorney McEwan did know his law. Also, doubtless, he was susceptible to the influence of a good-looking, clever woman with a tale of woe. There was a civil aspect to the struggle as well as a criminal one. Nothing in the code prevented a county attorney from practicing civil law on the side. McEwan, Charlie surmised, was probably little averse to riding one horse for glory and another for profit.

But so did Billy Arnold know law. And Arnold said that while the law was such and such, in practice the law was full of tricks. And Billy had taken the first trick in this game of possession. He was confident they could trump any ace the opposition might lead to take the Wineglass out of Charlie's hands, and particularly positive about this so long as Brock remained at liberty. About the attempted murder charge on which Brock was wanted in the East, Arnold couldn't express an opinion until he discussed every angle of it with Brock personally. On the facts, he told Charlie, he knew what could and could not be done in Montana. Massachusetts was a different matter.

So Charlie rode home, not altogether easy, but reasonably confident against any immediate threat to his control—so long as Brock kept out of the sheriff's hands. And neither the sheriff nor anybody else was likely to pitch on a common or garden variety of stock hand in the Wineglass outfit, a greenhorn named Tom Berry, who was noticeable for nothing more outstanding than sunburn and scrubby whiskers.

When Charlie rode in to the ranch after dark the white gleam of the round-up tents showed on the creek below the corrals. He could hear the bells tinkling on the remuda leaders as the nighthawk rode herd on them somewhere beyond. He knew everybody would be tucked in their blankets, catching up lost sleep. He had a bed rolled in the wagon; but he also had quarters in the house, and there he stalked after stabling his horse. A

light burned in the front window. Charlie didn't think much of that. The ranch cook who served two or three laborers ruled in one wing and he might easily be anywhere in the house with a lamp. It was part of his job to keep that place in order.

But when Charlie walked into the large, rather scantily furnished living room, off which opened his private quarters and Terry Brock's, a woman sat up erectly in a big chair by the fireplace with a tentative and disarming smile—which, however, did little to ease the shock of her presence. Although Charlie strangely found an answering smile on his own countenance he could more easily have sworn. A natural courtesy alone restrained him. For the lady was Mrs. Terence Brock.

Half an hour later Charlie went quietly into the sleeping tent of the round-up camp. He struck a match. Men's bodies were outlined under the tarpaulins that each cow-puncher used to wrap his bed. Here and there a drowsy eye blinked at the light. Charlie located Brock—alias Tom Berry—and shook him gently.

"Hey, Tom," he muttered; "get up an' lend me a hand."

Brock sat up, blinked, reached for his clothes. Charlie waited outside.

"Come on up to the barn," said he, for the benefit of any open ear inside. Brock followed him silently, two hundred yards. Charlie stopped. Brock hadn't said a word.

"I just wanted to get you outa earshot," Charlie explained. "You know who's at the house?"

"Yes. I had a look and a listen this afternoon," Brock replied coolly. "Amused me rather. The estimable young woman looked me square in the face without dreaming who she was talking to."

"You sure of that?"

"Positive," Brock said. "I know every flicker of her eyes. I went out of my way to speak to her casually, just to try her out. She didn't recognize me. She won't. I'll see to that. Did you have a talk with her?"

"She talked," Charlie growled. "For half an hour. She tells it pretty. Her poor heart aches for you in your misfortune. She's grieved and anxious. And, of course, this strange way you've gone off and left her and your kid destitute has made it very hard. It's a terrible strain on her, not knowin' where you are, nor what you're liable to do in your disordered state of intellect."

Brock laughed.

"All roads lead to Rome," said he. "She wants something. She can be very fascinating when she chooses. I recognize the well-known touches. What do you think, Charlie?"

"Hell!" Charlie growled. "I don't think. I just wonder what the play is."

"Cattlemen and cow-punchers are supposed to be brave, chivalrous, kind to women, especially an unfortunate woman," Brock murmured. "She'll work on you from the sympathetic angle, I suppose. I wonder what she has in mind?"

"She didn't show no hole cards," Charlie grunted. "But she wants to stay here. Mama has had to go back East. She's had a hard time, and she'd like to rest in some quiet, peaceful place. Her home is broke up. She just knows that a few days here will do her good. An' Terry might turn up in his right mind, after all. Where should a wife be but in her husband's home, even if said husband has queer notions an' hasn't done right by her?"

Brock muttered a scornful epithet. A decided harshness crept into his voice when he spoke again.

"It might work, at that, if she had a free hand," he said gloomily. "I think I see. What did you say, Charlie? What are you going to do?"

"I'll do whatever you want," Charlie

said decidedly. "I didn't say nothin'. Just listened an' looked wise. I ain't a fool, Terry—nor mushy. I'm your range boss. No smart woman is goin' to twist me around her little finger. You say the word an' I'll send her down the road in the mornin' talkin' to herself."

"Don't admit anything. Be on your guard all the time," Brock counseled, choosing his words. "If she gets insistent tell her point-blank that you control this outfit, and stand pat on that. I don't know what she is after here, unless it's to try and get the inside track with you. It might be as well if she were not here. On the other hand, if she's here we have her under observation. She can't put the outfit in her hand bag. Use your own judgment. Tell her to get out, or let her stay, as you choose. It's all the same to me. I'm not worrying about her in any way, shape or form any more. I'm Tom Berry, a Wineglass cow-puncher. I can stagger along this way pretty well for some time. Let her do the fretting, and try all her tricks."

"You think there's no danger of her gettin' wise to you?" Charlie asked again. "She'e got a kind of a hired man here with her, you know. She may be lookin' for you to turn up, so she can identify you, an' gather you in."

"Not a chance. She's sized up every soul in the outfit," Brock assured him. "She blew in here yesterday. I'm safe so long as I watch my step. And I will. My liberty and a lot of money depend on my discretion. I'm sure I'm safe. I'm not so sure of you, with her around."

Charlie snorted indignantly.

"Nobody, male or female, ever got my goat yet," he protested. "She can't do *me* no harm."

"Suppose somebody got away with you?" Brock put it bluntly. "I couldn't come into the open. What would stop them from stepping in and taking charge of the whole show?"

"Huh!" Charlie snorted again. They squatted on their heels in the grass and rolled cigarettes. Crickets chirped all about them. A chorus of frogs along the creek *cr-eked* in the darkness. A segment of moon showed above the edge of a far horizon. Charlie blew smoke into the shrouded night and spoke again:

"When I got anybody to fight," said he, "I'd as soon have 'em in the open. She can't do nothin' single handed. Let her stay. If her friends show up to make medicine they might give us somethin' to go on. Gosh darn it, they ain't goin' to start in bushwhackin' me! That's too coarse. We're sittin' pretty."

"All right," Brock agreed. "They have made no new move in Fort Benton?"

"None, except to sort of get on the right side of the county authorities."

Charlie told him briefly all he knew.

"Well, don't let her get on the right side of you," Brock said lightly. "If she does I'm a gone goose."

"Don't you make breaks like that at me," Charlie growled peevishly, "or I'll climb your frame even if you are the owner of the Wineglass."

Brock chuckled at that. They ground the fiery stubs of two cigarettes into the dry earth and went their separate ways to bed.

CHAPTER VII.

CORNERED!

LOOKING out over all that he had brought into being with Terry Brock's money, and which he controlled as if it were indeed his own in fee simple, Charlie felt within him a curious apprehension of inimical forces drawing close. There was a feel of a clash in the air, in his bones. He didn't

know why he felt that surety. It was not a sense of alarm. Only a strange certainty that the ways of peace were at an end.

Charlie knew nothing of clairvoyance. Intuition would have required a lot of defining in him. He believed in hunches no more and no less than his fellows. But the certainty of conflict was as clear in his mind, as the course of Plentywater was clear before his vision. What form it would take he could not imagine. But it was coming. He knew that. He felt it, as the unknown is sometimes vaguely presaged before it becomes an accomplished fact.

Perhaps this woman sitting in a chair on the porch, plying a needle interminably in well-kept fingers on a piece of embroidery, radiated the subtle essence of a planned intention.

Possession, as more than one person had harped in Charlie Shaw's ears, was nine points of the law. If Mrs. Brock and her backers could establish possession? Perhaps that significant sentence of Brock's "Suppose somebody got away with *you?*" stirred unconsciously in Charlie's mind. His technical ownership and established possession alone stood between Brock's property and those who wished to pick Terry Brock's material bones. Men had been killed for less. Charlie did not go about in fear of assassination. He did carefully observe the man who had brought Mrs. Brock to the ranch and who remained there, eating his meals with the crew and sleeping apart in a small wedge tent. He was harmless except to fetch and carry, Charlie decided. Otherwise, he did not start at shadows.

It was bred in Charlie Shaw, and indeed in most men of his type and time, to be loyal to their salt. He would look at Mrs. Brock, listen to her talk, and try to fathom her motive in being there. For a woman of her breeding and habits the Wineglass was rough and cheerless. It suited Charlie. It suited his men. They would have been ill at ease in luxurious surroundings. But he was not guileless. No woman like that sought such a barren place alone as a refuge from grief and anxiety. Her story of destitution he put opposite Terry's statement that she was provided with three hundred dollars a month from a trust fund.

Why, then, was she here? Charlie would look at her and be tempted to tell her to move on, taking her attendant. The man might have been a potential thug. He might be a dull nonentity. He did not bear his innermost character on his face. Men are not always open books to be read at will. Some of the mildest men Charlie had ever known were deadly. He had observed brigands in visage who were utterly harmless. But the man was colorless, and his employer, embroidering on the porch, conveyed no menace. Charlie hesitated at rudely ordering them off, wondering in the same breath if he should.

Two or three days later instinct proved to have a sounder basis than reason. The proving was simple.

That spring when he purchased the Wineglass herds, Charlie, with an eye to the future, had also picked up a small herd of range horses in addition to the necessary complement of saddle stock. They ranged on an area ten miles or so west, and had located themselves about a cluster of springs. And for convenience of range work, Charlie had thrown up a stout pole corral close by this watering place.

With calf round-up over, he bethought him of this secondary interest. There were a few colts to brand, a few geldings to be broken as extra mounts, a job that would occupy the pick of his roughriders until beef gathering began.

So he sallied out in the sunrise of a July morning with most of his crew.

They bunched the broomtails, labored with swishing rope and hot iron, picked their broncs for the breaking, and came jogging home with the sun at their backs, the loose horses trotting docilely ahead.

A mile back from the rim of Plentywater, Terry Brock, four cow-punchers, and the two horse wranglers met them. In his capacity as a cow-puncher addressing his boss, Brock said:

"Hell to pay down at the ranch."

"How?" Charlie demanded.

"Bunch of hard-looking citizens rode in about an hour ago and took possession. Told us we were through. They've got guns draped all over them and they're standing guard. They took over the horse herd and told us to take our outfits and get out."

"An' so you got out, like collie dogs with your tails between your legs!" Charlie flared. "Well, we'll go down an' take her back."

"Easy now," Brock answered soothingly. "I had hard work to talk these boys out of starting a row. There's only six of us and a dozen of them. And they had the drop on us. I thought we'd better wait till the whole outfit got together and you could say your say. You're the boss."

Charlie stared at him for a second. Then he asked questions. There was no explanation. This strange crew had taken possession by sheer force. That was all.

"You fellers stay here for a while," Charlie ordered. "I'm goin' down an' see what this means."

"What's the matter with us all goin' down?" Bud Cole inquired.

"We'll do that later," Charlie replied. "I'd like to know the why of this move before we ride in shootin'. I'll look 'em over myself before we start a fuss. It's up to me to do that. You ride along with me a ways, Tom."

He moved on, with Brock beside him. Out of hearing of the grouped riders, Charlie said:

"What is it? A plain grab?"

"Apparently," Brock answered. "They didn't make any demonstration. They didn't pretend to have any legal authority. The fellow running the show knows *her*. That was plain. When they started making themselves at home I took it upon myself to ask the leader what their business was. Then he grinned like a wolf and told us to get out or be run out. I persuaded the other boys and the horse wranglers to come and meet you. They told the cook to stay where he was; they needed him. Our crowd was just about ready to start a war."

"Naturally," Charlie grunted. "They would. They'd look at it that way. Anybody know any of that bunch?"

Brock shook his head.

"Just as we were leaving, two men rode in," he said. 'I couldn't be sure of either; but I think one was that lawyer, by his dress. It struck me that they may be trying to get hold, and have possession in their favor when that thirty-day injunction expires. That is clearly illegal."

"Sure. But in a fight over property people don't always pay attention to law," Charlie observed. "Man for man, nobody can take this outfit away from this bunch that's workin' for you, Brock. We won't shrink from fightin' to hold our own. Some of us has done it before. But I think I better see what grounds they got for this move. I'll ride down there. You go back an' wait with the boys."

"Don't do it, Charlie," Brock counseled. "Let's all ride in together."

"Uh-huh," Charlie demurred. "If this crowd intends to carry things with a high hand, for us to step in with the whole crew means guns poppin' before you could say 'Jack Robinson.' I can take care of myself. They ain't goin' to be alarmed by one man ap-

pearin' in their midst. In some cases it's better to talk first an' do your shootin' after, Terry."

Thus he overbore Brock's palpable uneasiness and rode on to the ranch. The last of the sun lit up the eastern bank of Plentywater. The buildings lay in shadow. The Wineglass remuda was bunched in a corral beside the stable. Two men sat on the fence with Winchesters across their knees. Two more lounged on the threshold of the stable. Charlie counted six noses on the porch as he dismounted at the steps. Two saddled horses stood there with drooping heads.

Charlie clanked up on the porch. He glanced at the lounging men. They were range men, burned with the sun, of diverse feature, variously dressed, but all armed—gun belts on hips, rifles leaned against the log wall. They stared at him with critical appraisal, without hostility, in silence. Charlie grunted "Howdy." One or two nodded. He passed in.

Three men were in the big front room with Mrs. Brock. Two were seated. One stood erect, watchful, both thumbs hooked in his cartridge belt. Something familiar about that face and watchful cold eyes nagged at Charlie's recollection. He knew none of the others. This man he knew, but couldn't place.

And he knew one of the men seated. The other was strange, different—a sheep in wolf's clothing was Charlie's thought as his gaze took in the flannel shirt with pearl buttons, tailored cloth trousers tucked inside patently new riding boots with incongruous nickel-plated spurs. His face lacked the tan bestowed by sun and wind. It was a good-looking face, and the eyes were keen, calculating, but they were not eyes that had squinted long over miles of windy open.

"Who's boss of this bunch of riders?" Charlie asked mildly—an outward mildness. He was boiling within—every fiber tense, every sense alert. That vague, indefinite impression of trouble had crystallized, it focused now in this room.

For, as he asked that question, Charlie recognized definitely the man facing him across the table. He knew that he was in as deadly danger as he ever stood in his life, if he made a careless, hostile move.

"I am. What about it?" the fellow asked. And his tone was a sneer, provocative, insulting—deliberately so, Charlie knew.

"If you are, you might tell me what's the idea for this invasion? I'm running this Wineglass outfit," Charlie continued evenly. "You come in here and take possession an' run some of my men off. What for?"

Harrock clasped his hands together over one knee and answered that question himself:

"We are here solely to protect Mrs. Brock's interests," he said with an uplift to the corners of his thin-lipped mouth that made Charlie long to slap him. "The injunction you hold expires day after to-morrow. We—ah—are merely anticipating the court procedure by a few hours. We have found Mr. Brock and placed him in custody where he properly belongs. We have secured from him an authorization to assume control of his business affairs, thus revoking his arrangement with you and permitting his wife to take charge of this property and his affairs generally. Upon the expiration of this thirty-day injunction, the Choteau County Court will confirm us in our position, if you should be foolish enough to dispute our bona fides. We have taken possession in—ah—considerable force, as you have doubtless observed, to forestall any reckless demonstrations on your part. It was very wise of you to ride in alone and discuss this amicably with us."

"I see," Charlie drawled. "So you've caught Terry Brock, eh? An' he's really crazy, like you claimed?"

Harrock nodded, with a supercilious smile.

"Unquestionably. Periodically insane, with a decided homicidal tendency and delusions of being persecuted," Mr. Harrock recited with unction. "He will probably be confined in an institution for the rest of his life. So you haven't a leg to stand on, Shaw, in court or out. Not a leg to stand on."

"I heard you the first time, Harrock," Charlie smiled. He felt that he could afford to smile. "Would you let me see these here documents you say Brock signed."

Harrock delved in an inside pocket.

"I think it would be as well to satisfy this simple soul's curiosity," he said in a sarcastic aside to his feminine client. "There is also a document for you to sign, Shaw."

Charlie heard but gave no heed to that. He glanced over the formal, typewritten paper Harrock gave him. He read it, read it with half an eye on that silent, sinister figure watching him from a position just behind the seated men. Charlie wondered how long Ed Strachan had been out of the penitentiary, how long he had been waiting for just such a chance as this. Charlie had his back to a windowless wall. He let no possibility of any move of Strachan's deft hands escape him, while he perused that paper. Its contents only interested him casually. The thing was a frame-up, the signature a forgery—like enough to Terry's writing, but signed on a date when Brock was working with the rest of the Wineglass around a branding fire on Lonesome Prairie. Harrock's ponderous statement that Brock was safe in custody would have made Charlie laugh if he had been less strung up.

But he didn't laugh. He scanned that spurious document. He wanted time to think, to organize himself. There was a trap set for him. Strachan was waiting to spring the jaws. He felt it. It did not seem in the least incredible to Charlie Shaw that this woman and this hungry shyster of a Harrock should frame a plot and leave the execution of the decisive part to Ed Strachan—Strachan was a beautiful tool for their purpose. They couldn't have got a better, a deadlier one if they had combed Montana.

Charlie considered. Strachan had not spoken after that one sneering sentence. He merely stood by, wary, cool, dangerous, and full of a definite purpose. Charlie knew that either he or Strachan would never leave that ranch alive. The man's attitude told him that. Strachan would kill him on two counts; first, because he wanted to; secondly, because these people wanted him eliminated. And Strachan could do that with a fair chance of coming clear at a trial, because self-defense would be asserted by every witness to the shooting. Strachan had promised in a whisper once, long ago, to kill him some day, and Charlie had smiled but had never forgotten. On an even break he had a very slender chance. Strachan had learned his trade when Charlie Shaw was playing with mud pies in a Texas hamlet. He was notoriously fast with a gun. And if Charlie did beat him, there was still his crew. To fight Ed Strachan, in daylight, was plain suicide. If he did get Strachan, one of Strachan's men would get him. Charlie knew he needed the friendly cover of the dark to meet this situation.

He didn't trouble about Harrock, nor this strange young man who patently did not fit his new boots, nor even the woman. He reckoned only with the problem of Strachan and his hand-picked gang. To cope with that he needed time. He did not betray

uneasiness because he felt none. They had him. Nobody was going to shoot him down in a nervous panic. That wasn't Strachan's style, nor indeed, any gunman's. These other people wanted something of him which would strengthen their undertaking. Strachan would give them their time. And time was all Charlie Shaw wanted.

He laid the agreement on the table and moved casually a foot or two, getting out his tobacco and papers as he did so. He rolled a cigarette, manifesting a frowning perplexity of deep thought nicely simulated. Despite the occupation of his hands and the apparent preoccupation of his thought, no movement of the four, nor shade of expression on their faces escaped him.

"Well," he said after an interval, "admittin' that Brock is bughouse an' that you've got him where he's harmless, an' that he's give you authority to handle his affairs, where do I come in?"

"You don't come in." Harrock could not forbear a sardonic triumph. "You go out."

Strachan grinned. His lip curled. Without a word he contrived to register insult. He seemed to put the more sinister interpretation on Harrock's last phrase. Charlie disregarded that. Perhaps Harrock meant it so; but Charlie chose to take the superficial meaning. He answered the lawyer earnestly enough, but without animus.

"That's all right to say. But your agreement ain't worth the paper it's wrote on if I stand pat," he pointed out. "I'm the legal owner of this whole show, accordin' to record. I've organized this outfit, put it on the map. How're you goin' to get around that?"

"You know very well that won't wash," the stranger broke in for the first time, speaking in a nicely modulated, precise tone. "You can't bluff along that line. You have no more interest in your own right in this concern than your cook. Brock hid behind you, that's all. We've looked you up. A fellow that never had more than a saddle and a pair of spurs doesn't become overnight the owner of a business worth a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. If you take that tack you will ultimately find yourself in the penitentiary like any other common thief. No, my man, it won't do. We will prosecute you, and convict you."

"On the grounds of collusion, conspiracy to defraud, wrongful conversion of moneys to your own use, and so forth," Harrock added with evident relish. "It's no use, Shaw. We've got you over a barrel."

"Who might you be?" Charlie asked the man—merely to prolong the discussion. Already the shadow of evening crept into the room. Another ten or fifteen minutes! "Where do you come in?"

"Mr. Holden is a friend of mine. A friend of the family," Mrs. Brock answered for him. She leaned forward with an expression of anxiety that became her very well. "Do be sensible, Mr. Shaw. Just because poor Terry labored under those strange delusions and foolishly put himself entirely in your hands doesn't justify you in claiming everything he had. His wife and daughter have suffered enough by his irresponsibility. We don't threaten you idly. I know my rights; and you can't deprive me of them to your own advantage. You may cause us a little trouble, but you will surely suffer for it."

"All these men around here—are they friends of the family, too?" Charlie asked facetiously.

No one answered. Mrs. Brock looked at her legal adviser. So did Holden. Harrock's eyes wandered to Strachan momentarily. Charlie tightened a little. They were getting impa-

tient. That look was significant—as if they depended on Strachan for something. Strachan stood immobile, expressionless, outwardly indifferent. But Charlie got the impression that Strachan, cocked and primed under that indifference, was growing nervous, eager to break loose. All this palaver meant nothing to him. He was there for action.

"If you reckon you have me where you want me," he addressed Harrock in a peevish tone, "what do you aim to do about it? I mean, do you figure I'm goin' to tip my hat an' kotow an' let it go at that. You know better'n that. You want to make *some* kind of deal with me."

"It's really immaterial," Harrock answered, but at Charlie's reluctant mention of a "deal," a gleam came into his eyes, belying the casual assurance of his tone. "We're in possession."

"Possession of the ranch, yes," Charlie agreed. "That's nothin'. There's seven thousand cattle on the range. You can't put them in your pocket, or sit up nights with 'em."

"No, but we can gather and rebrand them or sell them," Harrock declared. "Which is what we shall do. We have a capable range man and a force of riders here, as you can see."

"I've likewise got a pretty good crew of riders," Charlie replied. "If you think you can pull high-handed stuff without reckoning on them you'll find out. You'd better make up your mind to treat us right."

"That's another way of saying that you want money to leave us alone, isn't it?" Harrock demanded.

Charlie shrugged his shoulders.

"Make me a proposition," he invited.

Harrock looked at his companions. His eyes wandered once to Strachan.

"Listen, Shaw," he said. "Here is what you can do and avoid serious trouble for yourself. You must give Mrs. Brock a formal bill of sale of that brand, and an agreement to relinquish to her any claims you may have to this land and improvements. You must turn over to her a check covering your balance in the bank at Fort Benton. Of course, we shall allow you to hold back your wages as foreman to date, and we will be responsible for paying off your men. And—as a special concession"—Harrock paused to make this impressive—"we will allow you to retain one thousand dollars of this bank fund for yourself. You may as well make up your mind to agree to this without argument. It's your last chance to withdraw gracefully."

The room was getting dusky. Charlie considered, nursing his chin—with his left hand. His right hung conveniently—as did Strachan's.

"Light a lamp," he said at last. "So we can see what we're doin'. Let me see what sort of agreement you want me to give you."

He marked the flash of relief that went across the faces of three of them. Mrs. Brock rose and went quickly to a shelf against one wall where an oil lamp stood. She set it on the table. Holden put a match to the wick. Strachan flung a sentence over his shoulder toward the partly open door. He spoke in Spanish. Charlie Shaw had been born within sight of the Mexican border. A few years of disuse hadn't lost him a language he had once known. What Strachan said was the equivalent of "Keep your eye peeled for a break."

Under the yellow glow, Harrock produced a paper.

"I had this drawn up with the expectation that you would see reason," he said smoothly. "And here is a blank check on the bank. Your balance there day before yesterday was twelve thousand nine hundred and eighty dollars and some odd cents.

You see we have you tabbed to a gnat's eyebrow. Sign here."

Charlie wrinkled his brows at the bill of sale.

"I gotta read this over," he said mildly. "Might be signin' my soul away, if I don't."

Suddenly he looked squarely at Strachan. His thigh stiffened against the edge of the table on which the lamp stood and documents lay, on which Harrock and Holden and Mrs. Brock rested their hands in an eagerness they no longer concealed. Charlie's eyes matched the gunman's unwinking stare.

"What are you waitin' for, you lantern-jawed rat!" he flung venomously in Strachan's teeth.

Various impulses registered ever so briefly in Strachan's eyes—surprise, passion, gratification that now he had a cue and provocation to act.

In that blink of an eyelid, while the impulse went swiftly from Strachan's brain along the motor nerves to the waiting fingers hovering six inches from the pistol grip, Charlie was already in action—as he had been planning to act for twenty minutes of futile talk.

His knee spilled the table with a violent jerk that sent the lamp flying. His right hand plucked the .45 from its holster. It roared across the falling table, over Holden's head—a resounding detonation within those walls.

A grunt, a scream, a peculiar thud. Scuffle of feet on the porch outside. A queer, clawing sound on the floor. Sobbing gasps. A querulous choking oath. Silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOYALTY.

CHARLIE knew the interior of that house, the arrangement of furniture, as a débutante knows the layout of her dressing case. He had that advantage over these others in the dark. He moved swiftly and surely as Strachan went down. He collided with the woman and thrust her sharply aside. His foot touched an outflung hand on the floor. But he gained the door of his bedroom without hindrance.

On the wall above his bed hung a Winchester carbine, a filled cartridge belt. His hands found them. One window of that room opened on the porch, another gave on plain earth by a hinged sash. One door only, that to the living room. He had moved on his toes, making no sound. They could not know where he was. For a time no man would dare strike a light. Without vision they would not fire lest the bullet find an unseen friend. Charlie grinned. He had that much the best of it now. He himself, if necessary, could shoot at a movement—they were all enemies, actual or potential.

They knew that as well as he. For a few minutes, until they got their bearings and counted noses, they would be nervous, uncertain, circumspect in their movements.

Strachan was out of it. Charlie could hear a voice from the porch whispering. "Ed. Oh, Ed!" and the muttered reply in Holden's precise voice: "He's shot. Strike a light."

'Light, hell!" the snarling answer came. "You want that feller to kill somebody else? Lay low till we get him located. Where'd he go?"

Again that waiting silence. Charlie slid through the open window, gently, to the ground. A new leader might rise swiftly to the occasion, but while they were temporarily paralyzed he was gone. The men outside had not the wit immediately to leap to every egress and pen him in the house.

He stole warily out of the yard. He could hear boots on the porch floor, voices calling from the stable. He dropped into the bed of the creek, mov-

ing with caution. No chance to get his horse standing by the porch. It was no more than a mile to where his men waited. Charlie smiled in the dark. By sunrise he would make that crowd wish they had never seen the place.

The Wineglass riders hadn't waited. He climbed the west bank of Plentywater. As his head came to the level of the plain that swept up to this depression he heard the thump of hoofs, the clink of bit and spur, the creak of saddle leather. He dropped in the grass to listen, to make sure. Riders in a compact group. They drew up. He recognized discreetly lowered voices.

"Hey! Shut up, you fellers," he commanded. "I'm here."

"Get tired waitin'?" he asked when he came among them.

"You were so gosh darned long we got to thinkin' they'd took your scalp," Bud Cole said. "Thought we heard a shot a few minutes ago. So we moved up—just in case."

"You did hear a gun pop," Charlie replied. "You'll probably hear more, before long."

He stood, laughing a little to himself. He remembered that he had the forged agreement in his pocket, and the bill of sale Harrock had prepared for him to sign. He scarcely knew why he had snatched them from the falling table while his gun hand came into play, unless because they might be evidence of criminal intent. But quite apart from any documents, he knew what he was going to do now. He had beaten them to the first punch. The thing had gone beyond legal processes, become elemental. It was sixty miles to Fort Benton, twenty-five to the nearest ranch. They had resorted to force; let force decide. Law itself was only codified and official enforcement of the rules of the game. These people had started a fight. If they would have it that way——

"How many of you fellers got your guns on?" he asked.

All but two had Colts and full cartridge belts. Three had rifles besides, scabbarded under their stirrup leathers. Brock was one. He liked to shoot at coyotes. A six-shooter was an awkward thing in his hand; but he could use a rifle.

"Say, get down off your horses," Charlie addressed them. "Gather round me an' let's make medicine."

Saddles squeaked. They squatted in a ring, horses' heads looming at their elbows.

"Don't roll no pills, because you can't strike matches," Charlie warned. "That bunch down there is buzzin' like a nest of hornets, I expect. A flash might bring 'em."

"They're welcome," one drawled. "We're here first."

"Listen, now," Charlie began. "Bud, you remember Ed Strachan, don't you?"

"I sure do," Cole answered.

"I remember him, too," Mark Smith put in. "I was at the Maltese Cross when they brought in what was left after that scrap in the Sweet Grass."

"He was in on this play," Charlie told them. "And he had a gang collected that looks like it might be tough. He was at the ranch all cocked and primed to snuff me out. When the show-down came I beat him to it. I think I got him right. Anyway, he went down an' I didn't linger to see if he was winged or finished. Now, there's nine or ten more of this gang holdin' the house an' stable. They been hired to do that by these people that are makin' the play to take Brock's whole outfit out of my hands. You fellers are working for wages. You wasn't hired to fight. If you want to let it go as it lays, all right. If you want to back me up we can take that ranch at daylight. Who's with me?"

Some one chanted lugubriously:

"Take me to the prairie an' lay the sod over me—
Oh, I'm a pore cowboy an' I know I done wrong."

"Say that's a hell of a question to ask, Charlie," cried another. "Name your poison an' we'll administer the dose."

"Why wait till daylight?" another asked.

"Are you all with me?" Charlie persisted.

"Aw," Bud Cole grumbled, "don't talk like an old woman. Tell us what you want done."

Charlie laughed.

"You see," he said to Brock, "I told you this bunch would go all the way an' back again. Boys, Tom Berry is Terry Brock. I got to take you out from under cover, Terry, because you're owner, an' boss when it comes to cases. Harrock's down there. An' a feller name of Holden."

"Holden? Slim, dark. Good looking—pshaw! there's only one Holden likely to be mixed up in this. Go on, Charlie."

"They claim they've got you under arrest, in safe custody," Charlie chuckled. "What you think of that for a bluff? They got a sealed-and-dated document signed by you personal, authorizin' Mrs. Terence Brock to take over an' administer your affairs."

"Well, I am certainly not in custody yet, nor have I signed any documents lately, unless I did it in my sleep," Brock said with savage emphasis. "They are certainly overreaching themselves in their eagerness. Damn it, that's forgery! If I could get my hands on Mr. Holden it might simplify matters."

"You will if I don't miscalculate," Charlie promised. "I don't suppose all that gang is as bad medicine as Strachan. I'd like to know how a man that's been achin' for a chance to kill me got in with your people, Terry, but that don't matter now. I drawed first blood anyway. Right now that crowd is bound to be kinda on edge. I downed their ace in the hole an' got away. There's fourteen of us. Two ain't heeled, so it's their job to stay with the horses back here on the bench. The rest of us sneak down to that pile of tamarack posts on the creek above the barn. That gives us good shelter an' commands the whole layout. Then we cut loose with a burst of shots. After that we lay quiet an' don't shoot at all, except if we see or hear somethin'. That'll worry 'em. Come daybreak we can make it hot for 'em an' we're there to take advantage of any openin'. I don't believe they reckoned on a real fight. I'd just as soon give 'em one. I think they figured on gettin' me when I showed up to protest, which I naturally would, an' that their bluff would carry 'em through once I was out of it. But I'm still on deck an' I'm damned if a bunch of plug-uglies can walk in an' take possession of an outfit I'm runnin' an' get away with it. I could make more explanations to you fellers. Brock is here on the job himself——"

"Aw, you don't have to explain nothin', Charlie," Bud Cole said. "Take your word for it that you're right. Them that don't can sit tight an' watch the show from a safe distance."

"I don't want you fellows to get shot up or shoot anybody," Brock broke in. "This is my trouble. These people have put themselves on the wrong side of the law properly by this move. I'd rather——"

"Rather let 'em get away with it?" Charlie interrupted softly.

"No, damn it!" Brock swore. "I've stood too much from them already. But these boys——"

"Don't you worry none about these boys," Charlie assured him. "We're all darned well able to protect ourselves. Some of us has gone up

against thieves before, tougher formations than this. Gee whiz! Our clothes is in the bunk house and tents. Our beds ain't even rolled. Nobody can take a ranch in that high-handed style an' run off a bunch of cow-punchers like they was mangy sheep dogs. If these people got a right to your property, Terry, they don't have to come at us this way. We're goin' to take that ranch, Terry, unless you absolutely forbid it. If they want to fight, we'll accommodate 'em. That's all."

"Forbid it?" Brock echoed. "No, I'd go in there single handed rather than let them walk roughshod over me like that. I was thinking about these men. Why should they use their guns in my quarrel?"

"Because guns is made to be used when needed," a voice out of that squatting ring told him. "Speakin' for myself, I had a sample of their high-handed way this afternoon. I don't shrink none from takin' a crack at that crowd. A man don't like to be run off his job at the point of a gun."

Sundry grunts of agreement arose.

"That's settled. We're on our way," Charlie said. "Peters, you an' Haig hold the horses. Lay back outa sight an' outa the way of stray lead. You fellers foller me. Keep close to me an' step soft."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ATTACK.

THEY stole downhill, a silent company, and gained the pile of posts scarce a short pistol shot above the silent buildings. No light showed. No voice sounded. The Wineglass lay hushed as if every soul had been wrapped in honest slumber after a hard day's work. But Charlie Shaw knew that eyes were peering and ears straining in the dark. A scum of clouds had drifted up to screen a sky that the moon would later brighten.

Soundlessly Charlie and his men disposed part of the pile of posts in a suitable breastwork. They lay still for a few minutes, watching and listening for sounds of the enemy.

Then, spread in a row, at Charlie's order, they flung a volley at the house, one quick burst of firing. The dark bottom of Plentywater was filled with that spiteful snapping. Red rosettes glowed briefly. Almost instant answer came from the house, from the stable. Bullets whined, went *phut!* in the earth about them.

The Wineglass fusillade ceased as suddenly as it began. They lay watching, not troubling to fire at the flashes here and there. And gradually the defending guns fell silent.

Charlie chuckled.

"They'll be all worked up. We sound like an army when we all cut loose. In about half an hour I'll give the word again. Four shots apiece as fact as you can pop 'em, an' all together."

The second burst of firing brought a hoarse cry from the stable.

"Pinked somebody that time," Charlie observed. "Make 'em think war's what Sherman said it was."

A July night close to the forty-ninth parallel has but a brief span of darkness. The Wineglass men lay on their rifles, well pleased with themselves. They loosed at rare intervals a sharp burst of shots to keep Strachan's gang uneasy. Dawn laid a pale streak along the eastern horizon. The banks of Plentywater took form. Buildings grew from dark blurs to sharp-cut lines. Sun shafts flicked across the plains, struck on the painted roofs, making them glow like red banners. Birds began their morning song.

"Keep your eyes peeled," Charlie instructed his men. "Don't waste lead. Lay for something alive to shoot at."

They watched for the space of an hour, unseen behind the sheltering post pile. Once a window curtain shifted and the glass in that sash was shattered by a dozen bullets. A movement at the stable drew instant fire, and there was no more movement. Shots were flung at them, to their amusement. They commanded every avenue of approach or departure. Once or twice the Wineglass men with rifles deliberately raked windows and doors with bullets. But with the siege thoroughly established they held their fire and watched.

Silence had wrapped Plentywater for a full half hour when Charlie Shaw grunted. A single shot barked from the house, and Terry Brock, peering out beside Charlie, rolled over on his side, clasping his head in both hands, and then collapsed.

"Give 'em hell for a minute, boys," Charlie said. He and Cole turned the wounded man over, examined him. Terry breathed. His heart pumped. Crimson splotched his face, and they found a crease over the top of his head.

"Knocked him out," Cole muttered; "but he's a long way from a dead man. Unless it busted his skull."

The creek gurgled in a curve behind their cover. Cole slid himself down and brought his hat full of water. It did not revive Brock, but they bound his head tight and let him lie. The war was still on and there was no ambulance for casualties. The firing had stopped again.

"Aha!" Charlie exclaimed. "They don't think so well of the undertakin' as they did. Look at that."

A white cloth waved from a stick poked through a window, waggling vigorously.

"Anybody got a white handkerchief?" Charlie inquired.

One had. He flew it on a rifle barrel. A voice from the house called:

"Hey! Let's talk this over."

"Walk out here an' talk then," Charlie shouted back. "We won't shoot. But we ain't takin' chances ourselves."

A man stepped clear of the house, came toward them with his hands aloft. Twenty feet short of the post barricade he stopped.

"I'm supposed to say my say to the boss of this outfit if he's here—feller name uh Shaw."

"I'm him. Right side up," Charlie answered. "How's your friend Ed Strachan, this mornin'?"

"Strachan?" the man answered. "You mean Ed Seeley. You got him proper."

"He was Strachan when I knew him," Charlie scoffed. "An' a pretty hard citizen, too. What do you want, flyin' the white flag?"

"No sense in this scrap," the man said. "Us fellers don't hardly know what it's about. Ed's dyin'. These pilgrims we're workin' for claimed they had a right to take this place. Now they're hollerin' blue murder. The woman's scared stiff. Us fellers don't hanker for war. Nothin' in it for us, that we can see."

"You'd as soon saddle up an' ride on about your business, eh?" Charlie inquired.

"A damn sight sooner."

"I'll give you a chance," Charlie agreed promptly. "Go back an' tell your crowd to walk out into the open an' lay their guns in a pile an' stand fifty feet away from them. Bring out that lawyer an' Holden an' the woman. Can Strachan move?"

"Ed, you mean? Naw, I tell you he's done. You hit him plumb center. He's paralyzed. Look for him to cash in any minute."

"See that he can't reach a gun, then," Charlie warned. "He might feel like wingin' somebody in his dyin' gasp. I know him."

"Yeah. But look here. Where do

us riders get off?" the man inquired. "We ain't disarmin' ourselves to be throwed in the Benton calaboose—not so's you could notice. We can shoot our way out if we have to."

"Try that," Charlie said. "See where it gets you. You make a break for the open an' we'll pot you like coyotes. Stand us off all day an' tonight an' we'll burn them buildin's around your ears an' shoot you after we've smoked you out. You surrender an' we'll give you a show."

"Well, I'll tell 'em what you say." The man looked doubtful.

"Go to it," Charlie drawled. "Give you fifteen minutes. Then we'll declare the ball open again."

When half that time elapsed, the white flag waved again. Men issued forth. They stacked their guns and stood away from them. Charlie counted noses. Eight men, over and above Harrock and Brock and the woman, who did not appear.

"Where's the other two?" Charlie yelled.

"One dead! One crippled!" they shouted back.

"Where's the two pilgrims an' the woman?" Charlie further demanded.

A ribald laugh greeted this query. Strachan's riders were nowise disgruntled over a lost cause, and they had a sense of the ridiculous.

"Scared to come out!" their spokesman yelled. "Scared you'll scalp 'em or string 'em up or somethin'."

"Drag 'em out," Charlie commanded. "I got to see them outside before a man here takes his eye off his sights."

Two disappeared within. They came out, forcibly propelling Holden and Harrock.

"The female party," they called, "is plumb loco."

"All right," Charlie said. "Stand where you are."

"Markham, you come with me," he said. "Bud, you an' the boys cover us. If they start anythin', don't waste no shells. When we get those guns you fellows walk up an' surround the house. Two of you pack Terry in when you come an' put him on a bed inside."

Carbine in hand, its muzzle on the waiting group, Charlie rose up from behind the post pile. Flanked by Markham he moved in to accept surrender. It was complete enough. Markham emptied the cylinders and magazine of every gun in the heap and left them lying. Then Charlie waved in his men. They surrounded the house.

"Shaw, when the authorities at Fort Benton hear of this outrage——" Harrock mustered nerve to protest.

Charlie slapped him across the mouth with his open palm.

"Shut up, you crawlin' snake!" he growled. "I'll do all the talkin' here, now."

Harrock shrank back, cowed, furtive.

"You fellers," Charlie addressed Strachan's crew, "stay right where you are. Chances are you'll be free to take your dead partners an' the crippled one an' hit the trail. But meantime you wait where you are till I look things over."

They shrugged their shoulders and stood in a knot, rolling cigarettes, squatted on their bootheels. Perhaps with their leader down and their employers in a panic they considered it a fight well lost. Or perhaps they had little stomach for fighting with no reward in sight.

The two men carrying Terry Brock passed inside. Charlie and Bud Cole drove Harrock and Holden ahead of them, up the porch steps.

There was, the Strachan gang had told them, a wounded man in the stable. By the window in the living room, with his head on a rolled-up coat, another lay dead. Broken lamp glass, shattered window panes strewed the

floor. Window casings were splintered by bullets. The upset table lay where it fell. A dark stain smeared a rug. But Strachan wasn't there, nor Mrs. Brock.

"Where is she? And where is Strachan?" Charlie demanded of Harrock.

"He's in there." That worthy pointed hastily to Charlie's bedroom.

"She's in here," said another, indicating another room.

She was, huddled in a chair, with startled eyes, and tear-stained face.

"Come outa there," Charlie commanded; and when she came reluctantly forth he said to the men carrying Brock: "Put him on that bed, an' see if you can bring him to."

Then he turned to his own room. Strachan wasn't dead. Alive, he was dangerous, so long as he could crook a finger. There was no yellow in Strachan. Charlie knew that. He was "bad" clear through, in the sense that the West used that expressive word. Charlie put Harrock ahead of him, making a shield for his own body out of the lawyer's angular figure. He opened the door of his bedroom with his toe. Over Harrock's shoulder he saw Strachan stretched on the bed. His hands were on his breast, his eyes closed. Slowly he opened them.

"See if he's got a gun," Charlie commanded Harrock.

"I'm through with guns," Strachan whispered. "Too weak to hold one, or you'd never walk in on me like this, Shaw."

He was weaponless, weak, palpably dying. Charlie Shaw looked at him with mixed feelings. He was sorry—yet he knew Strachan would have gloried in killing him.

"Well, I guess the round-up's made," Charlie said. "Now we'll trim up the herd. My luck was your misfortune, Ed. Can I do anythin' for you?"

Strachan moved his head feebly. Behind Charlie a slight commotion made him turn. Holden was backing into the doorway of his bedroom, away from Terry Brock. Terry had come to consciousness with an impulse for war. He was a rather dreadful sight with his scrubby beard and stained bandages and that savage look in his eye. He followed Holden, head down, arms out. Suddenly he leaped and struck, a sweeping right-hand blow that caught Holden under the ear. Holden went down in a heap. Brock did not even open his mouth. Holden scrambled up. Brock knocked him down again.

"Let up," Charlie said. "You're only bustin' your knuckles. I know a better way. Go an' get that scalp doctored up."

Brock turned in the doorway. His eyes fell on his shrinking wife.

"You overreached yourself this time, Vera," he said. The woman stared at him blankly, unbelievingly, with surprise and apprehension that grew to startled horror in her eyes. And then Brock's knees gave way under him and he tumbled to the floor. His men gathered him up once more and bore him back to his own bed.

Charlie called a couple of his riders.

"Take these two," he indicated Harrock and Holden, "an' that woman an' keep 'em on the front porch. You stay here with me, Bud."

Charlie closed the door. He came back to the bed where Strachan lay.

"I ain't got nothin' against you, Strachan," he said. "I never had, except that you were in a crooked game in the old days, an' I helped put you where crooks go unless they get killed first. I didn't think you'd be foolish enough to try to make good on that old war talk you made five years back. I knew you as soon as I stepped into the room last night. You shouldn't 'a' made that play for this cheap crowd. Ain't there nothin' you'd like me to do for you?"

"I should 'a' downed you as soon as you walked into the room last night," Strachan whispered feebly. "Too much talk. Threw me off. I told them damn fools they couldn't bluff you. No, you can't do nothin' for me —except let these boys go, what's left of 'em. You might do that. They only did what I told 'em. I'll be dead pretty soon. That ought to satisfy you."

"Did these people, Holden an' Mrs. Brock an' this shyster Harrock, frame you up to get me?" Charlie asked. "Were you wise to what they were doin'—grabbin' this outfit?"

Strachan's face twisted in a sardonic grimace.

"You go to the devil!" he said. "You can't get nothin' outa me now."

"I can put your gang in Deer Lodge for life for this night's work," Charlie said reflectively. "You can square it for them if you want to by tellin' the truth. Or you can blink out, figurin' that you gave your own crowd the worst of it for a couple of slick Easterners that wouldn't look at you only when they wanted to use you."

Strachan studied Charlie's face. His fingers plucked at the bedclothes.

"If I come through with what they framed up," he croaked, "will you let the boys ride away?"

"I will," Charlie promised. "Cheerful. I want these big guns, not the hired men."

"All right. It's simple," Strachan began to tell him in short, gasping sentences. "They said——"

"Wait," Charlie said shrewdly. "Just a second."

He darted into Brock's room, got a pen and ink from a desk, called in two more of his men to witness.

"Now you tell it. an' Bud'll write it down," Charlie said to Strachan. "As soon as you put your John Henry to it, you can look out the window an' watch your gang ride away."

For ten minutes thereafter the only sound in that room was Strachan's mumbling, hoarse with pain. sometimes growing so weak the men had to bend over him to hear, and the scratching of Bud Cole's pen on paper. Then Strachan scrawled his signature.

"I should never 'a' took on a job for these people an' let them have any say about it," he said in a strangely clear voice after a minute of silence. "Serves me right. All talk. No nerve in a pinch."

With that he coughed sharply and shuddered once or twice—and died.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

CHARLIE SHAW sat on the front porch at the Wineglass some three weeks later, staring down Plentywater. A gang of hay diggers operated whirring mowers and clanking rakes on a meadow. Teams with great basket racks were coming and going between the field and a growing stack of hay.

The round-up tents were camped in their accustomed place, a little aside from the buildings. All sorts of activity punctuated with impatient language took place in and around the corrals. The Wineglass riders were shoeing saddle stock and breaking horses for the fall round-up, the beef gathering which would fatten the Wineglass bank roll.

Charlie wasn't quite certain whether the war was over, or merely halted by an armistice. There was still a lot that puzzled Charlie Shaw, despite the fact that he had come out on top in a fairly exciting clash. He was not worrying about raids or raiders, however, as he sat there. He had other things to ponder upon.

A four-horse team from Benton with a top-heavy load of furniture had rolled in to the ranch a day or two before. Furniture—luxurious, expensive

stuff. And there had been packages for every man in the outfit, all sorts of little things that a cow-puncher uses, and prizes. Silver-inlaid bits and spurs of the finest steel and most exquisite workmanship, silky horsehair *macartas,* rawhide reatas from Clarence Nelson in Sacramento, a flock of special Stetson hats. Charlie smiled to himself. Was Terry Brock going to make the Wineglass a regular dude outfit in his gratitude? Gratitude was a good thing, Charlie reflected.

He couldn't figure out Terry Brock yet. The vague impression that he might be a fool with some money still lingered in Charlie's mind. But he liked him anyway.

Strachan had passed out of the picture. His crowd had vanished. The emptiness of the plains had swallowed them up. But Strachan's signed statement on top of that fight had drawn the teeth of the Mrs. Brock-Holden-Harrock combination. Harrock faced disbarment proceedings. He would probably lie out of it, Charlie cynically reflected. These family rows were miserable. Mrs. Brock and Roy Holden were at large on ten thousand dollars' bail, charged with conspiracy, forgery, aiding and abetting attempted murder, perjury. The items in the complaint which Billy Arnold had set forth in his information against them made Charlie's head swim.

Brock had surrendered himself to the Fort Benton authorities as soon as his head permitted him. They scarcely knew what to do with him, so they did nothing but release him on his own recognizance. These practical Western men were shrewd enough to see for themselves that Terry Brock was as sane as they. Billy Arnold was sanguine that, in view of Holden's late activities, Brock would never be extradited to stand trial for that old attack on Mr. Holden's immaculate person. There was too much evidence that Brock had had ample provocation. And anyway, no one from Massachusetts was pressing any charges whatsoever against Brock.

And then Terry had vanished again. He was, Charlie thought, a mighty uncertain proposition, in some ways. He merely said to Charlie one day:

"Well, you've got the Wineglass in the hollow of your hand once more. I'm going East. I'll be back by and by."

Charlie's experience of cattle owners had never embraced any such specimen as Terry Brock. That furniture —mahogany dressers, heavily upholstered chairs, barrels of dishes, silver, draperies of silk and rich brocade.

"He's some punkins, that boss of mine," Charlie muttered to himself. "Times I think maybe he *is* a little off. But he's a darned good head, an' he sure gives me a free hand. She'll be a cow outfit yet, the Wineglass will."

Late that afternoon a double-spring buggy came over the hill into Plentywater. Charlie strolled to the house from the cook tent when the rig drew up at the porch. He arrived in time to see Terry hand out a pretty, flaxen-haired child of seven or eight. A hearty, middle-aged woman followed her.

"This is Stella, my youngster, Charlie," Brock introduced him genially. "This is Mrs. Gault, who will try to keep her out of mischief. I've been telling Stella about you, Charles."

The child gave Charlie her hand with a curious sort of dignity, smiling at him.

"Have you a nice pony for me?" she asked—and Brock laughed. "Daddy said you had lots of ponies here. I like to ride a pony."

"Make her a cattle queen between us," Brock laughed. "Eh, Charlie?"

The woman and girl bestowed themselves in Brock's bedroom.

"Got to fix up the house a bit,"

Brock continued. "That furniture get here all right?"

Charlie nodded.

"Have a cigar." Brock offered.

They sat down on the steps, puffed smoke, and looked at each other appraisingly. Brock smiled at last.

"Well, it was a sort of touch-and-go business for a while, wasn't it?" Brock remarked. "I think it's all over but the shouting. Vera and Holden have jumped their bail—gone to South America. They'll never show up here again—for trial or anything else. And I have taken steps to divorce her."

"You sure they quit the country that a way?" Charlie asked.

"Yes," Brock said quietly. "I set people watching them in case they had any more tricks up their sleeves. They have left the country. They didn't like the sample of wild West you showed them. They'll never try for the big stake again."

"Seems kinda funny they were so much after you," Charlie commented. "You told me once you offered her half of all you had. Now, she don't get nothin'. What more could she expect to get—even if she'd got control?"

"A heap, my son." Brock's eyes twinkled. "I never told you where the real joker lay. They weren't so much concerned with the Wineglass, except as a means of establishing themselves in control. This was only a flea bite."

"You call this here outfit a flea bite." Charlie grew almost offended. "Gosh, you put a hundred and fifty thousand dollars into it."

Brock smiled.

"This is only a starter, Charlie," he said. "Let me tell you something. Things will be plainer to you then. My grandfather was a very rich man. And he had ideas of his own. He left all he had to me several years ago. But I have neither interest nor principal from his estate until I am thirty. Then I get it all in a bunch—no strings attached. When I'm thirty. In a little less than one year and five months now. One million six hundred thousand dollars in cold cash—that's what they were after. That's what they wanted to get their fingers on if they could get me where they wanted me and get control of my affairs."

"Gosh! A million and a half! No wonder they took chances," he remarked. "Ain't it a corker what people'll do when there's a lot of money in sight?"

"It is a lot of money, when you think of it," Brock said thoughtfully. "But she will never get her fingers on any portion of it now."

He looked off toward the east and then to the west rim of Plentywater where the plains flowed up like a grassy sea. His gaze took in the meadows, the bunched remuda with the horse wrangler snapping a rope at them, the tents flapping a little in a vagrant breeze. And after a minute he used almost identically the same words that had been in Charlie Shaw's mind not so long before:

"We'll make this old Wineglass a cow outfit yet."

He elaborated that after a little.

"With my money and your experience we ought to do well in the cow business, Charlie," he said with a curious friendly twinkle in his eye. "And since you appear to have about as much surplus experience as I have surplus coin it seems to me that the best thing I can do is to take you into full partnership with me on this outfit."

"Gosh!" Charlie grinned. His mind took a backward fling over a few months. It left him almost as speechless, almost as incredulous as Brock's first proposal, in that lonely cabin behind the Goosebill with a March frost sparkling in the air.

After all, he reflected, there was something in the laborer being worthy of his hire.

The Progress of Peter Pratt

By

Fred MacIsaac

Author of "The Rebellious Pawn," "Scum of the Sea," Etc.

EPISODE I.—THE COUNT OF TEN

You're in Hollywood now! Home of the motion picture, home of the—— Oh, here's Peter! Know Peter Pratt? He's a prize fighter, a real guy, too—fine, clean cut—and he's going to have a lot of great experiences as time goes on. He's going to get in the movies, and meet a wonderful girl, and—— But follow this corking series, each episode of which will be a separate story, but connected by the thread of Peter's advance.

FRIDAY night at the Hollywood Stadium, a barn of a building containing about three thousand seats, all occupied, ranged around a raised platform fenced with ropes and covered with canvas. Bright lights beat down upon the squared circle, and six thousand eyes were glued upon it. A man in knickers and a sport shirt was standing with lifted hand, counting monotonously.

Set with sturdy, brown legs spread wide apart, was a youth of twenty-five, a powerful youth with a torso of great strength, also very brown. He had a head as round as a cannon ball, a flattened nose, cauliflower ears, a puffed lower lip and vicious black eyes, and the expression upon his face was one of much ferocity. A brute from the abyss, a missing link, a low-browed, half-witted human beast; his resemblance to an animal heightened by a week's growth of black whiskers upon his ponderous jaw and a thick jet mane —by name, Isadore Goldstein; nom de guerre, Mickey Murphy; profession, preliminary fighter, and at present a conqueror.

Prone on the canvas lay the victim, a blond youth, whose white body gleamed where it was not stained with dirt and hurts, resting with his eyes turned up to the rafters, oblivious to the happenings in the ring, heedless of the roar of the throng in the stadium.

Presently the referee lifted the glove of Mickey Murphy, who immediately stooped and most tenderly picked up his ex-enemy in his arms.

A beefy man in a ringside seat suddenly let out a bellow:

"Throw those bums out of there and bring on some fighters!"

Immediately the stadium rocked with laughter, bass mirth and—treble peals of merriment, for at least a third of the spectators were women.

His victim stirred in the arms of Mickey Murphy; his eyes—blue eyes, well blackened—opened. His swollen lips parted and he whispered something.

"Was I K. O'd?" he inquired.

"I'll say you was," chortled Mickey. "He's all right, fellers."

Thereupon he turned the fallen gladiator over to his seconds, two sweatered and rough-mannered youths who set him upon his feet, walked him, still tottering, to the ropes, lifted him over, and carried him up to his dressing room, unnoticed by the mob which was already studying new fighters who had climbed into the ring.

This dressing room was nothing but a closet containing a small table and a couple of wooden chairs, the garments of the fighter hanging upon a single nail on the inside of the door. There was a washstand at which one of the seconds wet a sponge. The second then grasped the young man by the arm and rudely slapped him in the face with the sponge, permitting the water to trickle down over his chest.

"A hell of a fight you put up," he observed. "You're lucky if they pay you."

"One minute by the clock in the first round and you let that pork-and-beaner floor you!" snarled the other. "Snap out of it and get your clothes on; we got to second Pete Brown in the semi-final."

The face which now emerged from its coating of dust and crimson streaks was not unattractive, though it bore a cut above the right eye, a puffed upper lip and a badly bruised jaw. The fellow had a lot of light-brown hair which was inclined to curl, his eyes were large, clear and deep blue, his nose was well shaped and still unbroken, his mouth looked as though it might be pleasant under normal conditions, and his chin was strong. No beauty, but a fairly good-looking boy.

His shoulders were broad, his neck solid, his chest thick. His waist was slim, and his arms and legs well muscled—all in all a perfect physical specimen of a middleweight and not more than twenty-three or four years old. Already his splendid physical condition enabled him to throw off the effects of the blow upon the point of the jaw which had carried him to dreamland; beyond a slight headache he was well enough, yet he had been completely out twenty or thirty seconds.

Without further ado the seconds had left him, and he slipped off his fighting trunks and began to pull on his street clothes.

"They're right," he told himself. "I'm no fighter. I got to find some other business."

He was completely dressed when the door opened and a squat, dark man of middle age came into the room.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"I'm all right, Mr. Prother. Ready for another bout to-morrow night."

Prother, who was the manager of this and several fight clubs, seated himself and chewed on an unlighted cigar.

"You're through, Peter Pratt," he said gruffly. "You're no damn good. Three times in succession you've been knocked out in the first round. To-night you offered to fight for nothing if you got licked just to show me you had something, but it was the same old story. You've got a punch, but you haven't got a defense, and you're not one of these chopping blocks that can take it all night to get in one wallop. I'm giving you ten dollars and I don't want to see any more of you."

"Don't you think I can improve?" asked Peter Pratt eagerly.

"Kid, you're not there. This scrap

finished you; you can't get a bout in California. You're not even a good set-up. Nobody wants a man who goes out in the first round. On your way."

So Peter Pratt, ruined prize fighter, his shoulders hunched, his big fists thrust into his trousers pockets, eleven dollars to his name—it had been one dollar before the unexpected generosity of the club manager—departed from the Stadium and drifted toward Hollywood Boulevard, where he had no special business but to which the bright lights drew him as flames draw the moths.

Pratt was a native son. His grandfather had been holding in his hands the handles of a plow in Burlington, Vermont, when he heard that the hills of California were full of gold. He had run away from home the same night. In Boston he had shipped as an apprentice upon a sailing vessel bound for the Isthmus of Panama. That was in the winter of 1849-50. He had walked across that fever-infested jungle, accompanied by the passengers and half the crew who had deserted. The railroad had not been built, the Canal was sixty years in the future. Swamp fever, Indians, alligators, and white murderers thinned their ranks before they reached the Pacific Ocean.

At Panama City he had stowed away upon a brig bound for San Francisco, was half killed by the brutal skipper when discovered, and was driven mercilessly, until the craft staggered into Frisco after a voyage of six weeks. Then he swam ashore.

Grandfather Pratt wandered through the hills of California until his hair was gray and his beard was long, but he never found gold. Many years after his arrival, he married a Mormon girl who was brought in by an overland wagon train. Her family had been slain by Indians.

They settled near Sacramento. The Vermonter supported her and the son she bore him by working for wages in various mining claims between his prospecting trips.

He spent his last years by the fireside in his son's cabin, west of Merced, California, while that son tried to earn a living for his family by following the plow upon his small farm, just as his father had been doing when he began his Odyssey, and with even less profit.

When Peter Pratt, Jr., was sixteen years old, his father made the discovery that he had never owned this farm upon which he labored for forty years. It was within the proper boundary of an Indian reservation, and there was a member of the tribe who wanted it. So he had to trek. He moved to San Francisco where he got some work as a stevedore, and, while under the influence of bootleg liquor, fell into the bay and was drowned.

Peter's mother had died shortly after they lost the home, and he found himself an orphan—about three years before we met him in his hour of humiliation.

In a State where a good education is almost universal, he had escaped with comparatively little, and under this handicap he had been forced to do common labor—ditch digging with Mexican and Italians, fruit picking, during which time he wandered from the Mexican border to the Columbia River. It was in this latter environment that he had learned to fight. As a rough-and-tumble, bare-knuckles scrapper, Peter Pratt was a holy terror; but bare knuckles had gone out with Paddy Ryan, and with pads on his hands Peter was like a cat with fly paper on her paws.

Peter turned into Hollywood Boulevard and crossed to Tommy's lunch room, where he seated himself and ordered a steak. Several motion-picture girls regarded him disdainfully, for his bruised and battered countenance

marked him for a rowdy in their eyes, but Tommy waddled over and handed him a fat paw.

"How did you come out, son?" he demanded.

"Took one on the jaw in the first round and faded," replied Peter briefly.

"Tough luck. The steak is on me," said the proprietor, who then returned to his corner where he could watch both the door and the cash register, and folded both hands across his paunch.

Tommy owned a little gold mine in that café, for it was the Reuben's of Hollywood, open all night, packed with picture stars, directors, producers, and those who love to look at such. But, to him, it was just an avocation; his vocation was playing bits in pictures at from ten to twenty-five dollars a day. At the call of Art, Tommy would abandon his cash register with the greatest joy, and his satisfaction when he saw himself upon the screen was greater than when he put in the bank his weekly profit from the restaurant.

Presently he came back to Peter, who was wolfing the steak; the boy had been overweight and had not eaten since morning.

"Who you going to fight next?" he wanted to know.

Peter sighed.

"I'm through, Tommy," he said. "I go out too easy. Got to find a job."

"Who licked you?"

"Mickey Murphy."

"Can you run a car?"

"Sure, and fix it, too, if there isn't too much the matter with it."

"To-morrow," said Tommy, "go down to Poverty Row and see Abe Gooltz. Abe wants a chauffeur that can fight, and he'll pay you thirty dollars a week."

"I'll take the job. Why does a chauffeur have to fight?"

"It's like this," explained the restaurant proprietor. "Abe is always in trouble. He makes cheap pictures and often he forgets to pay the actors. Some of those hams are husky and they come around to beat Abe up, or they might want to grab his car and hold it for their wages, see?"

"Sounds like a good job," said Peter Pratt.

Poverty Row is located on Sunset Boulevard, as every Los Angelino is aware, and it consists of an array of motion-picture studios, with names as imposing as any of the big ones, but which specialize in low-priced films.

A photoplay consists of about six thousand feet of celluloid film, upon which impressions have been made by a movie camera. Film is cheap and the camera is not expensive. What, then, makes a great photoplay cost a million dollars? In the first place, there is the overhead—plant, and executives, permanent pay roll, and so forth, which upon a million-dollar picture runs up to fifteen per cent.

Then, there are the actors, some of whom get five or ten thousand dollars a week and may work six or eight weeks, and the director and his staff. Add the costumes, and the sets which keep busy an army of carpenters and painters and designers and architects. Consider the scenario writers; sometimes a dozen scripts are written, each by a high-salaried man, before the satisfactory one is produced. Plus the multitude of extra people, and the transportation and support of this multitude upon locations often hundreds of miles away from the studio, and innumerable other items, all counting like the mischief. These may all be omitted. Poverty Row gets along without most of them.

Peter Pratt entered the Montana Studios Building next morning—a three-story structure in bad Renaissance just off Sunset Boulevard—and wandered through the corridors. It was an ordinary office building, but every office bore the name of an im-

portant sounding picture company. Each office usually contained one desk with a young, middle-aged, or elderly gentleman seated at it, and sometimes there was a stenographer and sometimes he ran his own typewriter.

Mr. Gooltz had a "studio" on the third floor, and he had a stenographer, his wife. The name on the door was: "Epitomy Film Corporation, A. Gooltz, President."

When Peter knocked, the door opened cautiously, and Mrs. Gooltz peered out.

"What do you want to see him for?" she demanded.

"Tommy sent me down to see about a job as chauffeur."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, relieved. "Come in. Abe, here's your chauffeur."

Abe Gooltz sharply inspected the youth The president of the Epitomy Film Corporation was a small man, with a head almost as hairless as a Hollywood mountain is treeless. He had black eyes that twinkled, big ears, a huge hook nose and a small black mustache.

His English was fair, but his accent was unmistakably Russian, and his gestures would have revealed his nationality if his tongue had not unconsciously admitted it.

"You a fighter?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir. I fought last night at the Stadium."

"I saw you. Why did Tommy send you? I could use the winner?"

"The winner ain't looking for a job," said Peter dryly.

"Can you drive a——" He named the most expensive car on the market.

"Sure; I can drive any kind of a car."

"Hired," said Abe brusquely. "Go down and sit in my car. Its number is 24-D-333, right outside the building. Twenty-five dollars a week."

"Thirty-five for a swell bus like that."

"Listen, friend. It's five years old. Have a heart. Thirty dollars."

"You got a chauffeur," declared Peter.

"Minnie, this is our new chauffeur. He can sleep over the garage, but he buys his own meals. Get out. What's your name? Oh, yes; Peter Pratt. Go sit in the car and tell everybody you're my chauffeur. I'm busy. I'm writing a scenario."

Wearing a broad grin, Peter descended to the street and found the car without difficulty. It was an opulent automobile which did not look as though it was in its sixth season. He found the driver's seat so comfortable that he fell asleep.

Some time later a tugging at his coat sleeve awakened him. He looked into the pretty, anxious face of a girl. She was a small, thin girl, with a brown pot hat concealing all but a few strands of jet-black hair. Her eyes were large and blacker than her hair—thrilling eyes, too big for her small, sweet face. She smiled rather timidly, and her smile was betwitching. Absolutely the loveliest girl that Peter had ever seen in his life, and his cap was whisked off his head in a second.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "Would you mind telling me if this is Mr. Gooltz's automobile."

"Yes, marm," he stammered.

"Then he must be in his office. Mrs. Gooltz told me he was out of town."

"I s'pose he's there. I only got hired a little while ago. You go right up and you'll catch him."

She sighed.

"I'm afraid he won't see me. I recognized the car and wondered if I might wait until he came out. He owes me money."

"Say, are you an actress?" he demanded.

She nodded.

"I think I am."

"What's your name?"

"Annabel Green. I don't believe you ever saw me. I've only played one lead,

and nobody ever sees an Epitomy picture."

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "Listen, miss. You climb into the back seat and be comfortable. The boss has to come out to lunch, and then you'll be sure to catch him. Does he owe you a lot of money?"

"Four weeks," she replied, as she stepped into the roomy tonneau and snuggled into the deep cushions. "Two hundred and forty dollars."

"Think of that," he said indignantly. "And him owning a car like this. Why, he's rich."

Miss Green smiled.

"I don't think Abe has a dollar," she said, "and, most likely, he doesn't own this car. He has to put up a front because he is a producer. He's honest, too, but he often keeps people waiting until he sells a picture and gets some money. All I want is a little on account."

Peter turned around in his seat so that he could face her. Her sharp eyes studied the discolorations upon his countenance.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Have you been in an auto accident?"

Pink suffused his face.

"No marm," he mumbled. "I was in a fight."

"How dreadful. What made you do it?"

"You see, I thought I could scrap," he explained. "I needed the money."

Her delicate black eyebrows lifted, her manner changed.

"You mean you are a pugilist?"

"Was. I've retired."

"Oh," she said, less coldly. "You realized that it was a horrid, brutal business, and your better nature forced you to withdraw."

Peter smiled; despite his three knockouts, he had not lost a tooth.

"Yes, marm. It's no profession for a feller unless he is good at it. I was rotten."

"Oh," she twittered. "You wouldn't be a bad-looking boy if you didn't have those marks on your face. Do you think you'll like being a chauffeur?"

"It ain't hard work so far."

"Why do you say ain't? It's bad grammar."

"I never had much schooling."

"You're young enough to go to night school. Oh, here's Mr. Gooltz."

The president came briskly toward his automobile and laid his hands upon the door. Then he observed the small figure sitting primly on the back seat, whereupon the change in his expression was comical.

"What—what—how'd you get here?"

"Good morning, Mr. Gooltz," she said sweetly. "I called on you, but you were not in, and I saw your car, so I thought I'd wait for you."

"Now, Annabel," he said cajolingly, "you know this ain't right. What are people going to say if they see you sitting in my car?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Come. Get out like a nice kid. I'll send you a check."

"I had rather have the cash, Mr. Gooltz," she declared, "and I will take fifty on account. I need it, really."

"Annabel," he said, "you're a fine actress. Only to-day I was showing the fillum to the president of Superfine Films, and he says, 'Abe, who's the leadin' lady? She's a comer, she is.' That's what he said."

Annabel's eyes widened, and she smiled happily.

"Really?" she exclaimed.

"Sure. And I've decided to use you in my next picture, supporting the dog star, Napoleon. Think of that!"

Annabel clasped her hands.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she declared.

"And that's not all, kid; you're going to have your salary lifted from sixty to a hundred a week. Now step out, because I got an engagement and I'm in a hurry."

The little acress was rising from her

seat when a voice from the front halted her.

"Sit down, Miss Green," said Peter Pratt.

She flopped back.

"Don't let him hand you a line like that."

"Say?" demanded Gooltz. "What do you mean by butting in? You're my chauffeur."

"You are going to raise the kid's salary?" demanded the chauffeur.

"Certainly I am."

"Pay her what you owe her!" shouted Pete.

"You mind your own business. You ain't kicking, are you, Annabel?"

"N-oo," faltered Annabel.

"Come on, Mr. Gooltz, take the strings off your pocketbook," commanded Peter. "Be quick, or I'll forget myself."

The threat in Peter's glance was too much for Abe. He drew a roll of bills from his right pants pocket.

"I got to buy fillum with this," he grumbled.

"Give her a hundred," commanded the chauffeur.

Abe shot him a glance of hate.

"That feller what knocked you out last night—it's a shame he didn't murder you," he said.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Gooltz," said Annabel, gratefully, as she received in her tiny fist five twenty-dollar bills. "And do you still want me to support Napoleon, the dog star?"

"Sure, he does," asserted Peter.

"Sure," affirmed Abe, with a resigned shrug of his shoulders.

"Can we take you anywhere, Miss Green?" asked Peter, most politely.

"Thank you, no. I am so happy!" the little girl answered, then stepped out upon the sidewalk as the producer opened the door. Mr. Gooltz entered his car and seated himself, with an air of great depression.

"Thank you very much, Mr——"

"Peter Pratt," the chauffeur informed her. "If you come around in a few days, Mr. Gooltz will be delighted to pay you the rest of your coin."

"Is that so?" asked the injured Mr. Gooltz.

But Annabel had turned a contented back to the automobile, and the chauffeur remembered his duty. "Where do you want to go, sir?" he asked his employer.

"Where can you go without money?" questioned Abe. "Say, you big cheese, you're fired."

"I like this job, and you got to give me two weeks' notice," retorted the ex-pugilist.

"In two weeks I'd be bankrupted, with you around. Twenty dollars she would have been glad to take, when I told her I raised her salary. Ain't you got no sense?"

"Why didn't you pay the poor girl? She earned the money, didn't she?"

"Sure, she earned it; but with the hundred dollars, I was going to buy some cut-outs for my next picture. Now I'm down to lunch money. Go to Tommy's—I can't afford the Montmartre."

Peter drove skillfully through the lunch-hour traffic upon the Boulevard and pondered upon the strange good nature of Abe Gooltz, the surpassing beauty of Annabel Green and the curious satisfaction he felt of having been the means of transferring coin from Abe's pocket to the girl's purse.

"Say," said Abe, as he prepared to enter the lunch room, "if any more beautiful fillum stars start to hang around this car, come in and tip me off so I can beat it out the back way. Positively, I can't pay no more actors today. I only got ten dollars."

"Say, Mr. Gooltz, you got a right to be sore, the way I butted in, but honest, I was awful sorry for the poor kid."

"All right," replied Abe, with a knowing grin. "You're green. This time

goes; but I hired you to chase them performers away, not to collect their debts for them. Why, you didn't even get a commission from Annabel."

Peter sat patiently for half an hour until his employer returned. Then he was instructed to drive to a certain address, which turned out to be an alley in the rear of one of the very large picture lots. Here Abe got out and knocked on a gate, entered, and returned in a few minutes, followed by a man with a barrel. The barrel was placed in the tonneau of the machine. Peter saw the fellow receive a ten-dollar bill and depart. Then he started the car back toward the Montana Building.

Curiously, he glanced at the barrel and saw that it was full of old and torn film. Catching his glance, Abe grinned, and waved his hand to the receptacle—which was certainly incongruous in the tonneau of such a car.

"Friend," he said, "you are looking at the next Epitomy super production."

"You must be kiddin', boss. What is it, honest?"

"It ain't nothing but scraps of fillum, stuff that is no good to the Phœnix and was headed for the dump; but I bet I get three or four hundred feet of shots that I can use—swell cabarets, elegant scenery, mob scenes, you know."

"But it ain't got anything to do with your story, has it, Mr. Gooltz?"

"Boy," said Abe, laying two fingers upon the chest of his chauffeur, "them shots cost money and it don't cost anything to change my story. I was going down to buy some swell cut-outs with the money you made me give Annabel, and instead, I got to go to the dump. But maybe in that barrel is the best fillum I ever made. It's a gemble."

"Gee!" ejaculated Peter.

"Listen. You're a fine, big feller and you've got sense. You don't want to be a chauffeur all yer life. And working for me you get opportunities, see? You drive my car and wear a uniform, because I got to put up a front. You got to look prosperous in Hollywood. But when you ain't driving, I teach you the fillum business. I show you how to run a camera, I make an actor out of you. I learn you how to write scenarios and patch fillum. In six months you'll have a business; only don't you fall for these actresses, and don't you shoot off your mouth about my business, see? Do you know how much my last picture cost?"

"No, sir."

"Nine hundred dollars. Six big reels, lots of melodrama, some million-dollar sets, and terrible actors, but good enough. Here we are. Carry up the barrel for me, Peter."

Shouldering the barrel, Pete followed his extraordinary boss. The barrel was not heavy. The brilliant prospects just revealed to him thrilled him through and through; however, by the time he had gone up on the freight elevator and carried the "super film" in its case into the headquarters of the Epitomy, his sober common sense was in charge of him. Abe was a promiser. Look what he had held out to dazzle poor little Annabel—a raise in salary, continued stardom, the interest of the president of a real film company, everything, except cash; and it was done to avoid paying her what he owed her.

All this bunk had been thrown out to make him carry up the barrel, something no real chauffeur would think of doing. And there was a twinkle in Abe's eye, as his victim set down the load, which betrayed his motives.

Mrs. Gooltz eyed the producer malevolently.

"You went out to buy some cut-outs!" she snapped. "You come back with rubbish. What did you do with the money?"

"Cut-outs I couldn't get," her husband assured her. "Bills I have to pay. I need Annabel Greene for the

dog picture, and she got an offer, so I cough up a hundred on her back salary to keep her in line."

"Chauffeur, go down and sit in the car," said Mrs. Gooltz. "I need to talk to Abe alone."

As Pete descended to the street, he felt sorry for Abe, who seemed to be in for a bad quarter of an hour. Mrs. Gooltz was the power behind the throne of the Epitomy Film Corporation.

Several evenings later, Peter Pratt, having conducted Mr. and Mrs. Gooltz in state to the opening of a new film at the Chinese Theater, drove the big car down a side street and parked it at the curb. For two hours his time was his own, but he wished to spend it with the multitude which crowded the entrance to the theater to watch the stars arrive.

The East knows nothing exactly like the opening in Hollywood of a new and important photoplay. Seats sell at grand-opera prices, and are purchased by the aristocracy of the picture world for the same reason which brings New York society to the Metropolitan—to be seen rather than see.

Outside the theater a battery of huge searchlights, mounted upon trucks, played upon the heavens, while tremendous motion-picture lights made the courtyard of the playhouse as bright as day. A squad of police pushed the crowd back and kept this space clear, for reasons which will be explained.

A line of automobiles, a mile long, moved down the center of Hollywood Boulevard, discharging, one by one, their gorgeous contents upon the pavement at the theater. These machines were the richest and most expensive and most flamboyant cars ever turned out by the factories which built them, for they were the property of the great stars of Hollywood. Most of them had their dome lights on, so that the multitude which lined the sidewalks could see and recognize the owners, who sat within like dolls on display in a shop window.

As the car stopped, its door was opened by a mandarin of a theater doorman and the star and her husband or the star and his wife stepped out and stood smiling upon the sidewalk. Immediately, a person with a vocal amplifier roared an introduction:

"Miss Mary Mainwaring, of Tantamount Films, ladies and gents." From the multitude a roar of applause. Mary bows to right and left.

Then she moves slowly down the lane of spectators, while half a dozen motion-picture cameras begin their significant buzzing, until she is greeted by the proprietor of the theater, a small man with a lion's mane of iron-gray hair and the face of a Shakespearean actor.

To the stars this is recognition. Unable to hear the applause as they appear upon the screen, they revel in the worship of the movie-mad multitude outside the theater upon an opening night.

One after another the stars pass in, while the camera men occasionally stop their machines to prevent luminaries of minor magnitude from getting upon the film; and finally, about an hour after the scheduled time of commencement, the last of them have come, and those laymen and their wives, who were admitted to the courtyard because they had purchased tickets for the opening, have followed them into the theater.

Incidentally, after the photoplay has been performed, upon the screen are thrown the pictures of the aristocrats of the films which were taken two hours before upon the sidewalk.

Peter Pratt feasted his eyes upon the stars until they had all gone inside, then turned away aimlessly, only to be thrilled by a soft voice which said: "Hello."

Annabel Green was beside him.

"Hello," he replied joyously. "I s'posed you'd be seeing the show."

The little actress shook her head.

"I can't afford the five dollars and fifty," she replied, "and if I could, I haven't a flossy looking car to drive up in, and if I borrowed one, those camera men wouldn't take me. I'm not important enough. So what's the use?"

"You just bet you're going to be among the big ones," he declared. "I seen your last picture, and you was great."

She walked along with him and smiled up at him reproachfully.

"My, but your grammar is dreadful," she said. "But thanks for the compliment."

He chuckled.

"I wonder if the Gooltzs got their picture took?"

"They did not. Abe hasn't a chance, but he never gives up hope."

"Say," he stammered, "I'd like to take you in somewhere and blow you to an ice-cream soda or somethin'."

"No, thanks. I'm not thirsty. I might walk with you for a little while."

"Will you?"

"Uh-huh. You know, I'm so obliged to you for making Abe pay me. I certainly needed that money."

By a gentle pressure upon his arm, she turned him off the Boulevard down a dark side street, an operation which Peter hailed with pleasure.

"What do you want to work for people that don't pay you for?" he demanded.

"Because otherwise I probably wouldn't work at all. And you can't ever tell who might see me on the screen—though Abe's pictures are never shown at a decent theater. How do you like him?"

"I kind o' like the little cuss. He's an awful liar, but he's a good feller."

It was very dark on the street by now, so Peter slipped his arm about the slender waist of the girl.

"Stop that!" she cried sharply. "What do you take me for?"

"Say, I didn't mean any harm," he protested.

"What made you think you could hug me?" she demanded.

"Gee, it was you that led me down a dark street," he retorted, in his simplicity.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "So that was it. You thought I was cheap and just wanted a petting party. You did, didn't you?"

Peter looked at her sheepishly; they had stopped walking and were facing each other.

"I don't see any harm."

"Then it's time you found out something," declared the angry girl. "You aren't a bad chap, but you are very ignorant. I was grateful to you for helping me collect my salary; and there is nothing snobbish about me, so I couldn't snub you; but I couldn't be seen going into a restaurant or walking along the Hollywood Boulevard with a chauffeur. I just didn't want to hurt your feelings, so that's why I led the way down a side street."

"Oh," he said miserably. "You're ashamed to be seen with a chauffeur. That's it."

Annabel relented.

"I'm not exactly ashamed," she explained. "I'm trying to break into pictures, and a girl has to be very careful. This place is just a village, and if I was seen going around with a chauffeur it wouldn't do me any good. It's the same principle that makes Abe run an expensive car when he can hardly pay for gasoline. You've got to put up a front to get along in this town."

"I get you," he said sadly. "I'm not good enough. Gee, I liked you fine."

"Well, I like you," she admitted. "But my boy friends can't wear livery. I'm almost a film star."

"I can refuse to wear the uniform."

"But you're still a chauffeur."

"I could go back to scrappin'," he muttered. "I seen film stars going

around with champions. One of them married one."

"No," she retorted. "It's a nasty, brutal business."

"Listen, if I was to get some other kind of a job, could I see you some time? Tommy might give me a job in his hash house."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Annabel. "Haven't you any pride? Those are all low occupations."

"I ain't had much schoolin'," he defended, sullenly. "What the deuce could I do?"

"Do you want to make something of yourself, to be somebody a girl like me could associate with?"

"Sure I do. I like you."

"Well, I like you," she admitted, with an exasperated laugh. "You're nice, somehow, but you've got no ambition. You could go to school and learn to talk, or you could get into some business that is respectable but doesn't require brains."

"Abe said he would make me a scenario writer."

The girl laughed merrily now.

"You give Abe the gate; he's kidding you. You might be an actor, you stupid thing. That doesn't seem to require brains and you're not bad looking when you're not bunged up. I'm going home now."

"Can't I see you home?"

"I live around the corner. Good-by, Mr. Pratt."

"Look, Miss Green. Say, when am I going to see you?"

"When you've got a respectable job." With this retort, she walked away from him. Peter sighed, then slowly retraced his steps, found his car, climbed in and dozed in the driver's seat, until it was time to get in line to "collect" his employer.

"Mr. Gooltz," said Peter Pratt, as he drove his employer to the studio next morning. "I got to quit being a chauffeur. This uniform ain't so good."

"And as a chauffeur you ain't so good, either," retorted the boss. "The uniform you got to wear—it's class."

"I was thinking there might be some other job—an actor or something."

"Oh my gosh!" exclaimed Abe. "An ector. And his face ain't hardly healed yet. To be an ector I would pay you nothing. As a chauffeur you get wages."

"I'll work for nothing," Peter declared. "You give me a job in this dog pitcher, and you don't have to pay me more than you do the dog."

"What do you mean, 'the dog?' I have to pay the man that owns him. But how are you going to live, Pete, if you don't earn no money?"

"I'll live," said the aspirant grimly.

"Well, I need an ector that lets the dog bite him. For nothing, mind you."

"I'll take the job."

"I got to get another chauffeur," sighed Abe. "The servant problem is terrible. They all want to be ectors."

Encounters in Hollywood do not call for the long arm of coincidence. There are only so many restaurants, only one main street; and if you stand upon a corner of the Boulevard long enough, you will see everybody in the picture capital. So Peter saw Annabel Green, shortly before six that night, coming from a delicatessen store, her arms full of bundles.

"Lemme carry 'em for you," he demanded.

Annabel faced him with a frown.

"You know what I told you last night," she retorted.

With a wide grin, Peter reached for the bundles.

"Lady, I ain't a chauffeur any more. I'm a movie actor, same as you are. Not so good, of course."

The girl passed him her burdens.

"For pity's sake!" she exclaimed. "How did that happen?"

"I remembered what you said, so I

threw up the job to-day. Then I made Abe take me on as an actor in the dog pitcher. Gee, Miss Green, we'll be in the same fillum together."

"Don't say 'fillum.' One might think you were a picture producer. And I haven't heard anything more about my working in that picture. Wasn't Abe very angry at losing his chauffeur?"

"He didn't like it, but when I explained my ambition was to be an actor, he was good-natured. Can I take you out to dinner?"

"No. I'll tell you. My dinner is in those bundles. You come home with me, and mother will cook you a real dinner. I'm glad, Mr. Pratt, that you had spunk enough to get out of livery; but working in a film of Abe's isn't really being an actor. What is he going to pay you?"

"Oh, that'll be all right. Him and me understand each other."

"He understands you, all right," she said, satirically. "Come along."

Mrs. Green was a nice, motherly woman of fifty, from Topeka, Kansas, who kept house for her daughter in a tiny bungalow and occasionally secured a day's engagement as a type in a film employing a mob of extras. She welcomed the guest cordially.

"I hate these Hollywood sheiks," she said frankly, "and I tell Annabel to keep away from them; but you look as though you worked for a living. What hurt your face?"

"He was in an accident," her daughter hastily replied.

For several days Peter Pratt basked in the sunlight of her favor. Although he could not afford a Hollywood actor's suit of clothes, he brightened up his appearance by a yellow band around his straw hat and a sky-blue necktie with yellow polka dots on it; so the girl did not shrink any more at the thought of walking down the Boulevard in his company.

During the day he aided Mr. Gooltz in the study of the discarded film they had salvaged. Abe taught him how to unroll the film without cracking it, and the mechanics of cutting and pasting. The producer studied the transparent ribbons, aided by a small electric lamp, his spectacles within a couple of inches of the film—and mostly to no purpose. Out of eight or ten thousand feet, he secured a couple of hundred feet of stuff which might be utilized, but he considered the barrel to have been a poor investment.

Abe also utilized the services of Peter Pratt by making him listen to the reading of scenarios.

"The public ain't got no more sense than you, Pete," he said frankly. "What you'll like, they'll like."

Mrs. Gooltz sent him on errands. Peter, in truth, was serving as an office boy without pay until such time as the new production got under way, which would be when Abe drew some cash from the sale of State rights on his last thriller, and was able to find a cheap director and rent a studio and scenery for no money down.

Annabel Green got tired waiting and accepted a small part in a big picture in the making on the Famous Players lot.

Weeks passed. Peter Pratt managed to see Annabel two or three nights a week. Of course, he was in love with her; but she told herself she had too much sense to fall in love with him, even if he was "sweet."

There were other young men who were interested in her, but they were what her mother had described as Hollywood sheiks. Peter Pratt did not amount to much, but he was decent.

However, a rival loomed. At Famous, the celebrated "heavy," Montague Loomis, singled her out, and his attention was flattering. She accepted an invitation to dine with him, and, as he behaved like a gentleman, she ac-

companied him to an opening in Los Angeles. Because she was escorted by the famous actor, she was shot by the cameras on the sidewalk for the first time in her life, and had the thrill of seeing herself shown on the screen, after the feature picture, among the great ones of the film business.

Mr. Loomis had washed down his dinner with numerous high balls, and exhibited a tendency to affection during the performance; but Annabel deftly held him in check; she had not touched the liquor.

However, she could not prevent him from dragging her to Tommy's for some sandwiches and coffee, particularly as Mr. Loomis was three times her size and very determined.

It was a big night at Tommy's. The long, narrow café was filled with film folk in gala attire, and the din of conversation and laughter was deafening. To avoid an embrace by Loomis, Annabel declared that she must powder her nose, and walked hastily to the rear of the room. It was necessary for her to pass through the kitchen, for despite its fashionable clientèle, Tommy's was only a lunch room. Half a dozen cooks in dirty-white coats and caps were fussing over the long stove on one side. On the other side a brawny young man was thrusting big, bare arms into a tank of dirty dishwater.

Waitresses with trays brushed by Annabel without giving her a glance, and one of them bumped into her, which caused her to recoil and collide with the dishwasher. He turned, gazed, and uttered an exclamation. Annabel glanced up.

"Oh!" she cried. "You! Here! Washing dishes! Peter Pratt, don't you ever dare speak to me again!"

Forgetting her mission, she fled from the humiliating scene, while Peter stared after her, his mouth opening and shutting like a fish yanked out of its native element.

Her cheeks pink, her eyes snapping with anger, Annabel swept through the café and flopped into a seat beside Montague Loomis.

"You darling," exclaimed the heavy, who immediately opened his arms and embraced her. Annabel struggled vainly. His bold eyes were close to hers, and she was held in a viselike clasp.

"Help!" she screamed; but the crowd of loafers in the vicinity only laughed. Loomis was not a man with whom to interfere. Annabel was released for a moment, and she slipped out from her seat by the wall and started for the exit.

"Here!" cried the heavy. "Come back!"

Annabel was passing out. Loomis grabbed his hat and followed. She started to run, once upon the sidewalk; but he was swift in pursuit. He grasped her, lifted her bodily in his big arms, and carried her back.

"Let me go, you brute!" she protested.

But Loomis carried her to his great, glittering sports roadster and lifted her into the seat without opening the door.

"Help!" cried Annabel. "Make him let me go!"

He was about to spring in beside her when a heavy hand landed on his shoulder, and spun him around. He confronted a big young man who wore a straw hat with a yellow band, and a blue coat, but no shirt, collar or necktie.

"What's doing here?" demanded the newcomer.

"Peter!" cried Annabel. "Make him let me go."

"Get out of the way, you bum," commanded Montague Loomis, with the frown which was worth a thousand dollars a week in pictures.

"May I see you home, Miss Green?" asked Peter Pratt, most politely.

"Oh, yes, Peter."

Loomis wasted no more words upon the intruder, but lifted a hamlike hand. Peter Pratt saw it coming. His own right suddenly came up from his side in a swooping curve, which caught the heavy on the point of the jaw with such force that the actor went down without a moan and lay stretched out on the sidewalk.

"Come on," said Peter to Annabel. The girl sprang out of the machine and tucked her hand confidently under the arm which had felled the ogre. Mr. Loomis was stirring and profane language was coming out of his mouth, but he was too discreet to rise just then.

They walked a block, in complete silence.

"Well," she complained, "why don't you say something?"

"You said not to speak to you again."

"Oh, Peter," she said softly, "I was so shocked to see you in that awful place, washing dishes. But you are wonderful. I'm glad you hit him. It served him right."

"If it's an awful place, what were you doing there at two in the morning with that drunk?"

"I couldn't help it if he drank, and everybody goes there late at night."

"I may be a dishwasher, but I don't drink or smoke," he averred. "I s'pose it's worse for you to be seen with a dishwasher than with a cockeyed ham actor."

"I'm sorry, Peter," she said meekly. "But you promised to make something out of yourself. I was disappointed in you."

"I'm making something out of myself. I'm learning to be in pictures, but Abe won't pay me anything, so I got the job from midnight to eight a. m., washing dishes for Tommy. I chucked it after you bawled me out."

Annabel looked at the youth, with misty eyes. Fortunate for him that he could not see her at that moment, or he might have ruined things by being too precipitate.

"Peter," she said softly, "you are good. You work all night washing dishes, and then work all day in the studio, and spend evenings with me when you can. When do you sleep?"

"Now and then," he said, with a grin.

"Peter, you are ambitious. You are going to make something of yourself, aren't you?"

Peter patted the little hand so confidingly tucked under his right arm.

"You bet your life I am," he replied.

Continue Peter Pratt's Progress in the next issue, October 1st.

A ROYAL SALESWOMAN

PLENTY of the old social distinctions are turned topsy-turvy in this modern world. Noblemen and even noblewomen have gone in for occupations that were considered miles beneath them by the old traditionists of yesteryear.

And now we read that a Turkish princess, granddaughter of Sultan Abdul Hamid II., is a traveling saleswoman, and a very successful one, too. She is selling French hats to the modern type of Turkish woman.

But the Princess Fetie has always been an up-and-comer. When she was only sixteen she ran away from the harem to escape marriage with an old-timer who was not at all to her taste. She went to Paris, continued her education, and began—as every one outside of the nursery should—to lead her own life.

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Morningstar and the Navajo

Author of "Thimblerig," "Maurice and the Bay Mare," Etc.

Bill Morningstar, the big, genial soldier of fortune, has appeared in these pages before. Here he tells of a lively adventure among the Navajo Indians.

A DAY and a night of rain, and still another day of it, with evening closing down and never a break in the sky. Tobacco had lost its proper tang; black coffee, its old authority. My Airedale was bored. Occasionally he looked up at me and thumped the floor with that which had once been a tail.

I tried to ignore him. I took up a book, but I could not read. I took a rifle from the rack and examined it. The Airedale jumped up, quivering all over. Then he quickly settled down again as I put the rifle back in the rack. I had scarcely realized that absolute darkness had settled over the land, that another day had ended and the rain still kept on. I sauntered out to the kitchen, a bachelor's kitchen, and, after turning on the light, began to prepare a bachelor's supper. Just why I set the table for two is a mystery still unsolved. I was alone, and yet I laid the table for two and did not realize that I had done so.

The kettle was boiling, the bacon sputtering, and the canned corn, extravagantly submerged in cream, was bubbling, when the doorbell buzzed. My Airedale bristled and stole softly toward the front door. I followed and switched on the porch light.

"Friend or acquaintance?" I asked my dog, as he sniffed along the bottom of the door. My house is in the foothills, isolated, seldom visited save by an unexpected guest. No one had

called up on the telephone. Yet here was some one, on the other side of the door, in the rain. All at once life seemed to be worth living. I spoke to my Airedale, and swung the door open. He surged past me, stopped, and began to whine. It was a modulated, joyous whine, beginning deep in his chest and ending in a shred of mist just beyond his nose. It was a greeting, a recollection, and an anticipation.

Bill Morningstar, huge, steaming, his black beard glistening with rain, shook himself like a black buffalo, stamped the mud from his feet, and thrust out a red, hairy paw. I pulled him into the room. My dog curved round the door as I closed it, and stood gazing up at Bill with nothing less than adoration in his age-weary eyes.

"Dog knows more than you do," declared Bill Morningstar. "One devil of a night!"

"It was," I said. "Not now, O 'Heaven-sent,' it is not. Whence, and whither bound?"

"Out there," said Bill, shrugging his shoulder toward the night. "And I'm here," he added, his keen, blue eyes twinkling. "I smell food! Bacon, and something else, but no coffee."

"'A glint of the eye is sufficient,'" I told Bill, quoting one of his favorite sayings. "I was going to make tea, but now——"

"Tea! Are you sick?"

"No. Been in the house two days, that's all."

"And me," said Bill, "I been in California two days, that's all. Rained every second."

I piloted Bill to the bathroom, fetched a pair of overalls and a pair of large slippers. I laid out towels, and lighted the gas stove.

"Say, beat it for the galley!" growled Bill Morningstar. "I smell burned offerings."

My Airedale and I made for the kitchen, arriving in time to save the bacon. Then it was that I realized that I had laid the table for two. I made jungle coffee, stout and black and inspiring, sliced a loaf of bread and dumped a can of beans and a half cube of butter into the skillet. I opened a two-quart can of ripe olives.

Bill Morningstar stood in the kitchen doorway, puffing at his black pipe. He had stripped to his undershirt, donned overalls and slippers; and if ever a man looked like the immemorial castaway on a desert island, it was my long-time friend Bill. The tattooing on his gigantic forearms, the white scars showing through his close-cropped black hair, his great beard, surging over the arch of his chest, his seafaring attitude, difficult to describe, but as obvious as the sea itself—all this filled the eye and stirred the imagination to far flight of romance and adventure.

"It's been most two years——" Bill waved his hand toward the south, toward Mexico.

"And, as usual, I haven't heard a word from you," I told him. "Here's the layout. Fall to, old-timer. Try the bacon."

"This here bacon looks like a piece of burned moccasin," said Bill, sticking his fork into exhibit A. "Speaking of moccasins, them you got on are Navajo, ain't they?"

"Yes, from Oraibi, but made by a Navajo."

"Well, I been up in that Navajo country since I saw you. But that'll keep. Your dog is nosing my leg, under the table. He knows a visitor will feed him when his boss won't."

Bill didn't need much assistance to help him clear the table of anything and everything eatable. I helped listlessly. I had not been buffeting the rain, the wind and the world. I had no outdoor appetite.

Presently Bill heaved himself up,

glancing at the empty plates and dishes.

"Nothing left but the dog," he stated, as he filled his pipe.

I told him to make a fire in the living room while I cleaned up the supper things. Bill Morningstar had returned, a ruddy Ulysses, pausing for a space beside my fire. He would never stay long. In the meantime——

I found Bill comfortable on the couch, his feet on the low bench close to the fireplace, his head enveloped in a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"I stoked her for a long run," he said, gesturing toward the blazing logs.

"Good. Feel cold?" I asked.

"What? Me? I'm smoking at both ends. This here is fair tropic."

"Oh, very well. I merely thought that a little——"

"Got any? My gosh! I'm near froze. Fetch in the grog."

Following an ancient and honorable custom, wherein the host is pleased to drink at least one glass with his guest, Bill Morningstar sank back on the couch, drew the bright Mexican serape about his shoulders, and, with head bent forward, stared into the fire. His great beard sprayed over his chest like glistening black water. The smoke from his pipe curled up in thin, lazy spirals. My dog climbed up on the couch, and, with his feet bunched, he lay down, his muzzle against Bill Morningstar's knee.

"They know," said Bill, patting the Airedale's head. "Dogs, and Indians —they know."

"You said you had been up in the Navajo country. Isn't that a bit out of your regular line?"

"Nothing is out of my line what happens," declared Bill. "Just like that there Marco Polo, though I don't know as he ever played any. Or the Old Man of the Sea, or that there Ulysses, whose wife stayed to home and tended to her knitting, so she could keep him in socks."

"Yes, these are Navajo moccasins," I said gesturing toward those I had on.

"Oh, them? Well, I was coming to that. And seeing as you're standing first watch, and all is snug below and aloft——" Bill waved his hand, and broke into his narrative with no further preamble. "You heard about that oil strike in New Mexico, up near Shiprock? Well, I was resting up in Gallup, which is about a hundred flat miles south of Shiprock, when a fella that was driving one of them supply trucks asked me if I would like to go on up with him, just for company. It's a kind of long, lonesome trip across that mesa, and if a truck breaks down, or gets stuck in the sand, an extra hand is worth all he weighs in freight charges.

"Anyhow, I tucked some grub in my bed roll, stacked her aboard, and we set out. It was a rough cruise for as long as I stayed with the ship. I was marooned about fifty miles from port by the truck breaking down, and another truck, out of ballast, taking on the load and the driver—but not me. Them fellas offered to take me on top of the load, but I'd had enough of dry cruising and foundering and getting stuck in arroyos and such. They told me I could catch an empty truck coming down from Shiprock.

"But seeing as none hove in sight right away, and it was getting kind of dark and chilly, I made for one of them Navajo hogans that I seen a couple of miles off the road. It was Navajo country, and I didn't even know the Navajo lingo for water; but then, folks is folks, most anywhere you go. And, by the same token, an Indian will size up a stranger quicker than most; mebby knowing nothing about what the stranger is, but he don't need a pencil and paper to figure out what he ain't.

"When I hove to in front of the hogan, I noticed the door was shut. I could see a twist of smoke coming up out of the chimney. There was a little corral, near by, and some hosses in it. It was getting dark, and the air nippy, and I was willing to eat. But something tells me to sit tight and wait. Not that I knew what I was waiting for, but I knew that most Indians don't like to be rushed in the way of entertaining strangers. So I sits on my bed roll and lights my pipe, and folded my arms against the itch to knock on the door and ask for supper. Thinks I: 'If them folks in there knows I'm out here taking it easy and saying nothing, they'll get curious, especially me being a white man, and acting like an Indian.'

"And I had a hunch that they knew I was there. Just try walking up on an Indian hogan or camp, across open country, in the daytime, without somebody spotting you. It ain't in the books.

"Anyhow, there I was, with plenty of stars to look at, and a cold moon edging up over the hills to the West, and that there hogan crouching in front of me in the dark like a big cat what was laying down and watching me. It was like which of us was going to make the first move, and neither of us wanted to.

"Not so long after my second pipeful, the door opened easy, like it opened itself, and out steps a young Navajo buck and stands looking at me in the moonlight. So I puts up my hand and says, 'Good evening!' cheerful and hearty. He says something in his lingo, and points to my bed roll and then to the open door of the hogan. Thinks I, 'One foot inside is worth two on the doorstep,' so I picks up my roll and marches in.

"It was warm and bright in that there little adobe, a fire snapping in the corner fireplace, a red blanket on the wall, and a saddle and gun, and one of them big belts with silver plates on it, like all the Navajos wear, and a bridle which was mostly silver, by the looks of it.

"The young buck made a sign for me to draw up to the fireplace, which I done, sitting on my bed roll and pulling on my pipe like I had nothing else to do. Then he fetches me out a coffeepot and a couple of tin cups, and a broken china cup with some sugar in it. He starts to make coffee. Them Navajos like coffee, but they don't know how to make it. He puts a couple of pinches of coffee in the pot and was going to pour in some water, when I sticks up my hand, same as a traffic cop, and produces my own little red can of java. I also dig up a can of beans and a loaf of white man's bread. He hands over the coffeepot, and I do business. And pretty soon we are both squatting by the fire, he making a cigarette with his long, slim fingers moving graceful, and me filling my pipe and feeling mighty comfortable.

After he had smoked his cigarette, he says something to me in Navajo. I shook my head, telling him I didn't understand a word of his lingo. Then I set to and made signs of how I come up that way, and the truck breaking down, and how I seen his wickiup and headed for it, thinking mebby I could get a place to sleep with a roof to it. Course, I was talking while making them signs, telling my story both ways, and saying as how I figured to go on up to Shiprock and see the country and the new well, that was pumping stuff so powerful you could put it in the tank of an automobile and drive right off.

"I finished my talk by trying to tell him that the Navajos would get done out of their oil property if they didn't watch out, and that I hoped the well would take fire and blow up and singe

the shirt tail of every oil speculator on the reservation.

"That smooth-faced young Navajo didn't take his eyes off me when I was talking. And when I got through he says slow, like a kid counting pennies: 'You are a white man. Why do you go to Shiprock where the oil well is?' And he said it in English. At that I felt kind of queer, but I took a reef in my reelings and says to him, offhand: 'I come up here to see the wheels go round. I like to see the sights. I'm what you might call a traveling man, in a way.'

"'You do not sell things? You are not a trader?' he says.

"'I been most everything in my time,' I tells him. 'But I never fell so low as that.' And I could see that my long-haired friend was doing some thinking. Pretty soon he makes another cigarette, picks a coal out of the fire like his fingers was made of asbestos, and lights up. He takes a couple of puffs, and then he says:

"'You like to be here?'

"'You mean, right where I'm sitting, in this here hogan?' says I.

"'In this country,' he says, and waves his hand.

"I told him I liked it well enough, for a change, but that I wasn't figuring on living there, that all I wanted was a place to sleep until I could get a lift back to Gallup. He asks me if I worked for the oil people. I tells him I don't work for nobody. And seeing as he didn't seem to get me, I went on and told him how I had been poking around the world for quite a spell, and that I didn't have any folks, or other incumbrances, or any home except where I happened to be camped, and that I didn't see any good in working as long as I could eat and sleep and keep on seeing things.

"And we was having a right pleasant visit, and I was thinking it was kind of queer that he didn't have any folks around—no wimmen to do the cooking and pack the wood and water, and the like, when the door swings open quiet, and in steps a old, shriveled-up Navajo buck, and following him is a young Navajo girl, and I see right away that she has been crying. Thinks I: 'This is where I lose my happy home. It will be me for the prairie and a cold camp. The rest of the family has arrived. The old buck pays no attention to me, but comes to the fire and squats and rubs his hands. I never seen him even look at me, but I'm betting he could have told how many buttons was on my shirt and how many good teeth I had, without turning his head to look. Indians is like that.

"Well, the girl, she was different. She looks at me and then looks away, quick. The young buck spreads a blanket, and she sits down. I get up and start to rope my bed roll; but the young buck tells me it is all right, and he says something to the girl. She looks at me again, kind of quick and interested, like I was in the cage and she was outside being told I was the man-eating tiger of Borneo, or something. The young buck is talking to her, and the old man is putting in a grunt, once in a while, like he was having his say, also.

"'If this is a family powwow,' says I, 'I'll just mooch out and take a stroll round the garden.'

"But the young Navajo says no, that his friends just dropped in for a little visit and will be going soon. So I fills up my pipe again and sits looking at the fire. Then the old man makes a talk which sounds like sharpening scissors and cracking walnuts and trying to talk without opening his mouth. Navajo lingo is like that. And all this time the young buck sits and listens, not looking at anybody, but staring at the wall across from the fireplace. I don't savvy their lingo, but all the same

I can savvy that the talk is mighty serious, not just passing the time of day and the weather and such.

"And seeing as how it all came out, I might as well say right now that my young Navajo friend was in love with the girl, who was a mighty good-looking young woman, in a velvet waist and one of them wide skirts, and moccasins. Seems the old man was broke and had hocked everything he had, including his silver belt and bracelets and rings, and even his gun and his horses, except one the girl owned. He had hocked 'em to the trader at the post I had passed, coming in on the truck. Seems the trader wanted to marry the girl, and the old man was willing; for it would mean a soft thing for him, his daughter married to the trader.

"But the girl didn't fancy the idea. She wanted to marry the young buck, and he wanted to marry her, but he was right close to being broke himself and couldn't scare up enough cash to wipe out the old man's debt to the trader. The girl wouldn't marry the young Navajo till he bought off the trader from pestering her old man and herself, on account of their debt to him. Course, I didn't know all this right then, but I heard about it later.

"Well, they finished their talk. The old man and his daughter got up and went out, and the young buck, he went out with them. I set there, wondering what it was all about, and feeling kind of sleepy, what with the fire, and no windows to open and the door shut.

"Pretty soon, in comes the young buck and sets down. I can see he is thinking hard, and that things don't look any too good to him. And him being friendly, and asking me in, and talking pleasant, I thinks mebby I can return the compliment, only I don't know what his trouble is, right then. So I heaves a line in the dark.

" 'If there is anything I can do,' says I, 'this side of murder, to even up for your entertaining me this evening, just name it.'

"The young Navajo looks at me and shakes his head.

" 'You are a poor man, the same as me,' he says.

" 'If you're meaning money, you're right,' says I. 'But I got plenty of health, and lots of time.'

"But he just sets there, staring at the fire. And by the same token, I got to nodding, and pretty soon I spreads my blankets and rolls in. I slept good."

The sun was shining through the doorway in the morning when I woke up. The young Navajo wasn't there. I stepped out and seen him in the corral saddling up a horse. He says good morning, and after a while he comes in and we eat.

"Then we set out for the trading post, the young Navajo riding a fine, lively horse, a white stallion with a pink muzzle, and a mane and tail like a snowstorm. I was riding a tough little buckskin pony that the young Navajo had saddled against my having to walk to the trading post and pack my bed roll. I wouldn't have minded walking, at that, for the air was right sharp, with a bit of a breeze honing it to a fine edge. Across the flats, quite a piece off, I could see the low buildings of the post, and a curl of smoke coming up from the chimney and straightening out on the breeze. But what with sticking to the horse I was riding, and hanging onto my bed roll, I was not observing the country a whole lot, or I would have noticed there was a big bunch of Indians and horses at the trading post, where usually you don't see more than five or six at a time.

"When we did ride up and I got a look at the crowd, I says to myself it wasn't what you'd call a friendly bunch, by and large, even if the young fella I was with did seem to stand high

with most of 'em, what with their talking to him and admiring the white stallion and acting like they was glad to see 'em both. No, they weren't feeling friendly, for all of that. I figured there was some kind of a storm brewing, and I didn't have to look at the sky, either.

"I got off my horse and moseyed over to the post. Only two or three Indians was in the store, and they were just standing around, saying nothing and seeing everything without moving a blinker. And down at the end of the store was the old buck that had come to the hogan with the girl, and he was talking to the trader.

"The minute I laid eyes on the trader I knew that the trading room was small for two such as him and me. From the red bristles flaming on his head, to his big paws, hairy and spotted, liver colored, he was the bully, bucko mate of that little stone ark, where he traded cheap goods for honest blankets and silver and such. And he was a fine-set-up man at that, with a bull neck and shoulders of a wrestler. But his eyes was skim milk and shifty, and he carried too much flesh to be real fit. I could see him sizing me up as he talked to the wizened old Navajo.

"I steps over to the counter, wishful to buy a sack of grub against having to make another camp afore I hit the railroad again. But the trader paid no attention to me, mebby figuring I was there to nick him for a hand-out. Anyhow, the old buck got through talking and shuffled out. The trader, whose name was Hurley, turns and starts taking some canned stuff out of a box and putting it on a shelf. I waited, watching till the last can was on the shelf. He picks up the box and starts for the back door. He chucks the box out and comes back and lights a cigar. With his big, red paws on the counter, he eyes me.

"'And what the devil do you want on the reservation?' he says.

"I could feel my neck getting hot, but I hangs fast to the main idea, which is grub.

"'A can of beans,' says I. 'And a loaf of bread, if you got it. If not crackers will do.' And with that I slaps a dollar on the counter. He sweeps the silver into his jeans, and gets the can of beans. 'Half a pound of crackers will do,' says I.

"He puts the crackers in a paper bag and shoves the stuff at me. I'm waiting for my change, and by the same token I see that he is waiting for me to go.

"'How much was that grub?' says I.

"'A dollar,' says he.

"'Too much,' says I. 'Half of that would be plenty.'

"'Not out here,' says he, puffing at his cigar.

"'There's a counter between us, or I'd shake you loose from my change,' says I.

"He grins round his cigar.

"'Got a permit to travel on the reservation?' says he.

"'I have,' says I. And I laid my fist on the counter. 'Look at it,' I says to him. 'And when I'm not using it, I'm keeping it in my own pocket and not my neighbors'.'

"'You're a bum,' says he. 'Move on down the road.'

"'Come out on the flat and I'll take you apart,' says I.

"'Get out of here and stay out!' he says, and with that he grabs a gun from under the counter, and shoves it in my face. By the same token I know that he is a coward, way down deep inside, which means that he would kill quicker than a brave man would.

"'I have seen your like rolling in the scuppers with a knife in his back,' says I. 'Put down your gun. I would not make you a murderer.' And with that I walk out and stow the crackers

and beans in my bed roll. I was fair boiling inside, but I'm saving my steam against the chance that Mr. Hurley will step out where I can get a swing at him. I was bending over my bed roll, when out comes one of the Indians I had seen in the store, and he stops and talks with my young friend the Navajo buck. And pretty soon my Indian friend steps over to me.

"'Did "Fire-head" make you pay one dollar for a can of beans and a few crackers?' he asks me. Fire-head was the Navajo's name for the trader.

"'He did,' says I.

"'And he said he would shoot you if you did not go out of the store?' he asks me.

"'He did,' says I.

"'And you were not afraid?' says he.

"'Of him?' says I. 'Not this fine morning, my boy. But he stood beneath his own roof, and he poked a gun in my face. Just get him out here, and gun or no gun, I'll take him apart with my two hands and give you and your friends the pieces to play with.'

"'He has robbed my people for many years, and he has told lies about us to the agent,' says the young buck.

"'Then what are you doing, the lot of you, standing around here, and him so handy,' I asks him.

"'We would kill him—and then the officers would come, and we would be sent to prison,' And he says it kind of mournful, as if he hated to give up the idea.

"'For why is the gathering?' I asks him. 'So many men and horses and nobody doing any trading.'

"'To-day, Fire-head is to marry Cho-cha-wee-ti,' says my young friend. 'Some of my people say that it is good. Some of them say that they will kill Hurley if he goes and marries Cho-cha-wee-ti.'

"'Who is this Cho-cha-wee-ti?' I asks him.

"'With her father she came to my home, last night,' says he.

"'Oho!' says I. 'And that's how the wind sets? And you like this young lady pretty well, yourself, eh?'

"'I am poor,' says the young Navajo. 'I have but the white one. He has beaten many fast ponies. To-day my pony will race with the pony of Fire-head. That is why so many are here. That—and because to-day Fire-head is to marry Cho-cha-wee-ti.'

"At that I got an idea. I told the young buck to come over away from the post where we could talk private. So we walked across the road and out on the flats a piece, and set down, facing each other, Indian fashion. And I told him what I thought of him, a good-looking, likely young fella, with a rip-snorting fast pony and a couple more good ones, and no handcuffs or leg irons on him, letting a beef-head like Hurley get away with his girl. Father or no father, I told him, it's up to him to get busy.

"And I talked to that young Navajo like I was his own father, and pretty soon I see his eyes commence to get bright, and the real Indian come back into 'em. You see, Hurley had bulldozed them Indians so long, they kind of got the habit of stepping around him, and taking his word for law. But my young friend had some education, and a whole lot of pride, and all he needed was a bit of encouraging to make him see that he was a better man than this Fire-head, at any turn of the wheel, and had a better right to marry the girl than any white man breathing.

"Oh, aye! I dinned it into him: first because he had been friendly to me, and second because I was willing to help anybody this side of a rattlesnake get a good swipe at the trader, Hurley.

"'You will stay and see the race?' asks the young buck.

"'I will do that,' I tells him. 'And seeing as how I have not finished my

talk with your red bull, Mr. Hurley, I may stay a bit longer than he would like.'

"'It is good,' says the young Navajo. But I couldn't figure who it was good for, yet. And then my young friend takes me around and introduces me to every Indian there. Seems he had some kind of a pull with them, mebby on account of his owning the white stallion, the same being a kind of fetish, because he had white-and-blue eyes—amazing eyes, like albinos, and likewise wicked and human.

"So when the first truck from Shiprock rattles in, I sits tight and lets her drift on down the prairie. Thinks I, a Indian horse race, a wedding feast, and the chance of a fight, all rolled up in one wrapper, is a lot more interesting than Gallup and a box car headed west.

"Not that all the Indians was backing my young Navajo friend when it came to a horse race. Most of 'em were strong for him and the white stallion; but Hurley had a fast pony, which same had once belonged to old Puzzle-face, the father of this here Cho-cha-wee-ti. Seems Hurley had paid a long price for the pony, for the Navajos don't like to sell their race ponies. Then old Puzzle-face took to gambling with Hurley and lost his roll. Hurley lets the old man have provisions and such for a couple of seasons, and then lands on him for the pay. The old man has nothing left but Cho-cha-wee-ti, the same being what Hurley is after.

"You see, with this Cho-cha-wee-ti the wife of Hurley, old Puzzle-face would be setting snug and warm the rest of his days. Now a lot of the Indian friends of Puzzle-face was strong for his pony, even if it was in the Hurley corral. Which same is horse racing, ever since that guy Ben Hur took a wheel off the chariot of his friend.

"Anyhow, them Indians had a big talk and couldn't seem to get anywhere. The sun was edging toward noon when Hurley comes to the doorway of his store and makes a talk to the crowd. He talks the Navajo lingo, and Tclee, the same being the name of my Navajo friend, tells me that the trader says he is expecting the parson from the mission school, and when he comes there would be the wedding, the wedding feast and the horse race. Then an old Indian talks up and says something to Hurley. Tclee tells me the old Indian says why not have the horse race while they're waiting for the preacher to come. A lot of them Indians joins in with the idea, and says so.

"Then Hurley says if the parson don't get there by noon, they'll have the horse race, anyway, and the wedding later. And Hurley steps back into the store. Some of the Indians follow him into the store, but most of 'em hang outside, talking plenty and moving around restless.

"Thinks I, what a fine chance to start a riot, if a fella only knew how to talk Navajo. Some of the bucks would side with the trader, and some would side with my young friend. Just about then my young friend gives me the sign, and I walk round the horses and bucks, to the back of the post where the trader keeps his horses.

"In the corral is a couple of ponies, a bay and a gray. Tclee tells me that the bay is a very fast horse, as Navajo ponies go. Likewise, he tells me Hurley done the old man out of the pony in a gambling deal. But that ain't what's on Tclee's mind, and I know it. So I ain't so surprised when he says to me, that if anything was to happen to the trader and the white police came, would I tell the police that he—meaning Tclee—didn't have anything to do with damaging Mr. Hurley any?

"I told him sure I would see that his

name was unscratched, if there was any trouble, and I was around that part of the country when the police came.

"'But,' says I, 'ain't it a wonderful chance to grab the young lady and make a ride for the hills or somewhere, and get married, Navajo style, and then mebby come back and tell this Fire-head to chase himself around the corral, or somewhere?'

"And just about then a Ford rattles into the post, and out steps the parson. He goes into Hurley's store. The Indians begin to talk a lot, and, I reckon, argue some. Anyhow, Tclee seems to be getting nervous. Cho-cha-wee-ti's old man is in the store, with the girl, and they don't come out for a long time. Then, mebby about noon, out comes Hurley and Cho-cha-wee-ti and her old man and the parson, and I see right away what has happened. Without advertising his rush, Hurley has got married to the girl, mebby having a hunch that he better step lively, seeing as how things are around the post. But his mistake is in thinking that a few words by a white man settles it—for the Indians.

"Hurley makes a short talk, saying as how Cho-cha-wee-ti is now Mrs. Hurley, and that they will now proceed with the horse race. Hurley passes around some cigars to some of the bucks and some cigarette tobacco to others, and for a minute it looks like everybody is happy and the clouds have rolled by. But only for a minute.

"Then everybody is excited about the horse race, and doing their betting and such. After a while, Hurley has a young Indian fetch up the bay, and Tclee, he fetches up the white stallion, and the crowd line up along the road leading north. Some of 'em string out to where the ponies are going to start, but most of 'em are in front of the trading post where the ponies are going to finish.

"Among those present, as the society paper says, is Mrs. Cho-cha-wee-ti Hurley and her husband. They are standing close together, Hurley talking with some one, and Cho-cha-wee-ti kind of gazing at nothing, and looking right mournful.

"Now I didn't say nothing about what me and young Tclee had rigged up as the main feature of the show. Right here is where I better begin. You recollect I rode over from Tclee's hogan on a stout little buckskin horse. Well, I took the reins of that little buckskin and led him over to the crowd near the finish, and worked in to where I could just about touch Cho-cha-wee-ti's hand, from behind, which I done. She turned kind of quick, but, being Indian, didn't give herself away. I stepped up close and put the ends of the bridle reins in her hand, and by the same token she didn't drop 'em, but hung onto 'em, and I knew that my young friend Tclee had won.

"In case it should look like she was holding a horse, I kind of kept between her and the horse, ready to grab the reins if she dropped 'em, account of Hurley asking her what she was doing holding a saddle horse so handy, or something. But everybody was looking up the stretch and paying no attention to his neighbor. And up at the end of the stretch, where five or six Indians was setting on their horses, was Tclee on his white stallion, and a young, slim Indian on Hurley's bay. The ponies were excited and jumping around pretty lively. Hurley was right interested himself.

"Cho-cha-wee-ti gives me kind of a scared look, once or twice, just before the ponies started; but I eyes her friendly and nods my head and tries to encourage her all I can by signs, one of 'em being that I edge up between her and Hurley and give her the elbow to back up and get the pony out of the crowd, some.

"Then, somebody up at the other end

of the stretch sings out, and the white pony and the bay pony shoot out and come pounding down on the dead run, and running crazy, like most Indian ponies, with the bay working into the lead, and Tclee quirting the white stallion plenty. It was a short race and over before we caught a second breath. The brown streak shot past and the white streak shot past, neck to neck, almost. But no whooping or cheering of the winners. It was cold still, all of a sudden.

"Then the Indians began to talk among themselves. It was old Puzzleface that started the real trouble. He saw Cho-cha-wee-ti back away from Hurley and me and climb aboard the buckskin, and instead of being a real sporting old dad, and figuring that his girl must have wanted Tclee pretty bad to give up the comforts of the trading post, the old fool squawks like a scared hen, and the beans are in the ashes.

"By the same token, Cho-cha-wee-ti can ride. She kicks that buckskin in the ribs and just sweeps out of the crowd to where Tclee, on his white stallion, is waiting for her. And it was right pretty to see him swing alongside, and the two horses going at a free gallop across the big, open mesa toward the hills. And Hurley didn't know it was his wife, until he turns and looks round, and my face is what he sees. And because of what I see in his, I send my right for his chin, and none too soon, for he is reaching for his gun when I hit him.

"Hurley is a big man, and hard to jolt. I can see plain and quick that I got a day's work cut out for me, and that I got to do it in about five minutes. Hurley sags back, but he don't fall. So, before he can get his hands up, I let him have it again. And then I clinch with him, not that I'm looking for any of the close-up stuff, but I am scared of that gun. In the clinch, and while we're having it all over the place, the gun drops on the ground and I kicks it away. Then I break loose and dance back.

"Hurley has kind of come to and is swinging for me, wicked. He's next thing to blind mad, but not quite. He gets to me with a swing that made me see hoops and stars, and come close to landing another before I got my bearings. I waded in, and after taking some right stiff ones, I saw a chance to land, and I put all I had in her and shot for Hurley's stomach. He just had to buckle, and when he buckled I let go with my left and caught his chin coming to me. It broke two of the bones in the back of my hand, but it was worth it.

"Tclee and Cho-cha-wee-ti are nothing but a couple of dots moving up and down way out across the mesa, their horses still on the gallop, and nobody chasing them, so far. But the Indians is excited. Mebby it was my scrap with Hurley that started 'em, and mebby it was the old hate boiling up. I dunno. Anyhow, first thing I know there is a smoke coming from behind the trading post, and Indians running round the back of the post, and I think they are going to put the fire out. But not that you would notice. They are helping start her up.

"Now all this leaves me in kind of a fix, and I just begin to savvy that I am it. Here is the trading post burning like a gas torch, and the trader flat, and a young Indian eloped with his girl, and Bill Morningstar the only surviving witness for the law to jump on. And speaking of law, you ought to see them Navajos enjoying the fire, and everything. They started up a song, a few of 'em, and some of 'em took to their ponies and fanned it across the flats.

"One bunch kind of stayed around, watching the smoke roll out of the trading post, and keeping kind of still.

Pretty soon a couple of 'em comes over to where I am pouring some water on Hurley's chest, and they tell me in pretty fair English that I am not wanted around there. I told 'em I had known that for some time, and as soon as I got Fire-head so he could sit up, I'd light out cheerful. But one of them Navajos takes the bucket out of my hand and the other, who can talk some English, says:

"'You go or you dead man.'

"Or, as the poet says, 'birds to that effect.' I seen he meant business. And so did I. My business was just to fade down the sky line and forget I had even seen the reservation or a trading post. Even then I didn't realize what them Indians was up to. You see, you got to live with 'em a lifetime to even begin to understand some of their ideas. Hurley had been robbing them for years. So Tclee said. And now it looked like it was their turn.

"Yes, it looked like it was their turn, and I didn't want to get mixed up in it. I hunted around and found my bed roll and swings her up and starts across the road, headin' west. The store and buildings was blazing good, and the Indians was standing around watching it. I would have kept on if I hadn't turned and looked back, and I seen some of them Indians lugging something heavy over toward the blazing store.

"Thinks I: 'Here is where they fix Hurley for keeps. He is out, and they'll chuck him into his store and let him burn up. Nice, easy way to cover their tracks.' But I couldn't stand for that, even if I had to keep Hurley company on the long trail west, so I dropped my bed roll and walked back. The Indians motioned for me to keep away, and they acted right ugly.

"But I just walked on up to the front of the trading post, and sure enough they had packed Hurley over from where I last hit him and had dumped him in the store. The fire was on the roof and at the back in the storeroom where he kept oil and such, but it hadn't worked to the front yet. I shoved the door open, but I couldn't see, account of the smoke, so I knelt down and crawled around, feeling my way and wondering where Hurley was. After a while I found him behind the counter. I dragged him out, and through the doorway and across the road.

"The Navajos watched me, but didn't try to stop me, just then. They crowded together, talking and making motions. About that time Hurley groans and tries to sit up. I give him a hand, and pretty soon he is on his feet, shaky, but able to navigate. He sees that his trading post is done for, but he doesn't know what a mighty close call he's had. Even after I told him what them Indians had done to him, he wouldn't believe me. The Navajos is on their horses, kind of bunched together, watching us, when Hurley starts over toward 'em. I tell him he better stay right where he is and let 'em drift away, but he won't listen to me.

"He is mebby four or five yards from the bunch of Navajos, when *pop!* goes a gun, and Hurley wilts down and I see that he's got his this time, for keeps. I'm expecting to get mine, but instead, them Navajos whirl and ride off in a clatter, bobbing away across the flats, and the trading post roaring up red in the sky; and pretty soon the gasoline tank catches fire and the whole works blows up.

"Now I didn't like the idea of leaving Hurley there, alone, and a hole in his chest and him dying fast, as I could see by the way he breathed, and I didn't want to stick around and have to answer a lot of questions. I knew the Navajos would tell any kind of a story to save their hides, and I was a

white man and a stranger in their country.

"I was bending over Hurley, trying to make it as easy for him as I could, and him cursing and saying as he knew which one of the Navajos got him, when I hears a patter behind me, and there is the young Navajo, Tclee, and his girl, and their horses are lathered up terrible. I was mighty surprised to see 'em back, but you can't figure what an Indian will do. Seems they saw the smoke and flames of the trading post, and Tclee guessed the rest. Seems, also, he figured seeing as I had kind of stuck to him and encouraged him to grab the girl, he felt kind of scornful of himself, riding away and leaving me in trouble, for he knew I was in trouble when he seen the fire—knew that his people wouldn't do me no good if they was on the rampage after Hurley.

"Anyhow, Tclee came back, and the girl with him. She was scared when she seen what had happened to Hurley, but the young buck wasn't scared, or anything else. He says to me, easy and quiet: " 'Fire-head will be dead very soon.'

"And it wasn't so long before Hurley took the big journey. And honest, mate, I was kind of relieved, at that. What if some truck driver or oil man had come along, just then, and Hurley had told 'em I was responsible for the damages, or had shot him, or set fire to his joint? It would have been pretty tight for your uncle. And I had mixed in it just enough to make it look awful bad to a jury.

"Well, anyhow, that young buck Tclee, was a prince. Instead of riding on over into the Black Hills, with his girl, like he had figured to do, he comes back and stays on the job. Yes, he took the girl over to his own hogan, and set up housekeeping, and just waited for things to bust loose.

"Course the Navajo police came, and the agent and the government men, and they held an investigation and arrested about twenty Navajos, and among 'em was old Puzzle-face, the same being Cho-cha-wee-ti's father. They also arrested Tclee and the girl. But I wasn't there when that happened.

"My young friend Tclee saddles up a couple of horses, that evening, and, telling me to follow him, he leads me over the hills on a ride that sure rattled down my loose bearings something fierce. It was a short cut to the railroad.

"About a mile out, Tclee leaves me, saying nothing. You see, he had said it all by doing what he had done. I hopped a freight and dropped off at Flag, and took a little rest and a snooze, and then hopped another, and at Ash Forks I worked south, and round by way of Yuma, killing time until that Navajo mess was straightened out. Course you read the papers and seen as how them Navajos swore seven ways that I killed Hurley in a big fight, and then set fire to the trading post and chucked him in to fry. And there is where they made their mistake. Nobody had said a thing about Hurley being chucked into the store when it was on fire. Evidence showed he'd been found out on the flat, dead, with a bullet hole in him.

"Then old Puzzle-face comes to the front and gives his evidence, scared to say too much for fear them other Indians will bump him off later. And while Puzzle-face is giving his evidence, he takes a queer streak of boasting of his mighty deeds and such when he was a young man, and before he knows it, he has told the examining board that he himself bumped off Hurley, with a .44 Colt. Queer stuff, but a fact. Then, when he seen he was in for it, old Puzzle-face goes on and tells as how he set fire to the post and the other buildings and the whole works, as well as killing Hurley. He figured he was in for it, anyhow, so he

wanted to take a lot of glory along with him.

"But he didn't get hung. He got sent down for a spell, because the folks handling the trial knew what Hurley was. Some of the other Indians got sent down for a short hitch, for mixing up in it.

"The lawyers tried to send Tclee down, likewise, but Puzzle-face and one or two others handed out talk that showed that Tclee had nothing to do with the fire or the killing; that all he did was race his pony and lose.

"Now, I got to studying it out for myself, coming over here. Tclee had the fastest horse on the reservation, according to the evidence that came up at the trial. And he lost that race with Hurley's horse, which Puzzle-face himself said couldn't beat the white stallion. My idea is that Tclee played deeper than anybody guessed yet. He lost, because losing would make the gang mad, and most of the Navajos were backing his pony. Those backing the Hurley horse were kind of hangers-on at the post, and Hurley's friends.

"It looks to me like Tclee just touched off the fuse and left it for them Navajos to do the rest. He didn't tell 'em to set fire to the post, or kill Hurley. He was too wise to do that. And him riding away with the girl, right under Hurley's nose. That was what you might call hot stuff and calculated to stir up them Indians. Yes, I figure Tclee, what with his American education and his Indian blood, played a deep hand. But I got to say he was a friend to me.

"Next time you are over that way, take a look at the ashes, and there's the answer."

"Answer to what?" I asked Bill.

"To everything." And Bill Morningstar gestured toward the fireplace, and the feathery white ashes that moved slightly as the wind freshened and the air grew noticeably cooler following the cessation of the rain.

IS IT SAFE TO CALL THIS SAFE SAFE?

WORKMEN have been busy of late on the underground vaults of the Bank of England. And, judging from the information about those vaults which has leaked out, it would seem that ambitious, unscrupulous people who would like to get hold of some ready money had better give the subterranean strong boxes of the Bank of England the go-by, and turn their attention to some such comparatively hopeful project as digging for gold underneath the Rock of Gibraltar with a beach shovel.

The first barrier to the would-be marauder is a concrete wall fifty feet deep and over seven feet thick. Inside this is a passageway patrolled by numerous guards, and protected by several alarm systems which are not mentioned in either the Koran or the Domesday Book. The next obstacle is a double row of steel grilles. And, last but not in the least there are steel doors, weighing twenty-four tons each, which it would take the finest-known drills three days to cut through.

No, no! Much better to earn an honest living!

THE Dollar God

IN SIX PARTS—PART I.

Football! This time of the year is consecrated to the smashing old game. These Thousands of us are dreaming of touchdowns, forward passes, flying tackles, fifteen- automobile mechanic who was destined to become the greatest college gridiron

CHAPTER I.

THE SANDLOTTER.

IT was a lovely day in early October, a lovely road—one of the few about the unlovely little town of Mercersville—a lovely girl, and a lovely car. They made a lovely picture, the kind you see with the adjuration "take a kodak with you." The flanking trees were russet and red, the girl pink and white, the car vermilion and black. It was a new car, an obviously expensive article, and it was drawn up on one side of the sun-splashed road. The girl was reading a book and eating chocolates.

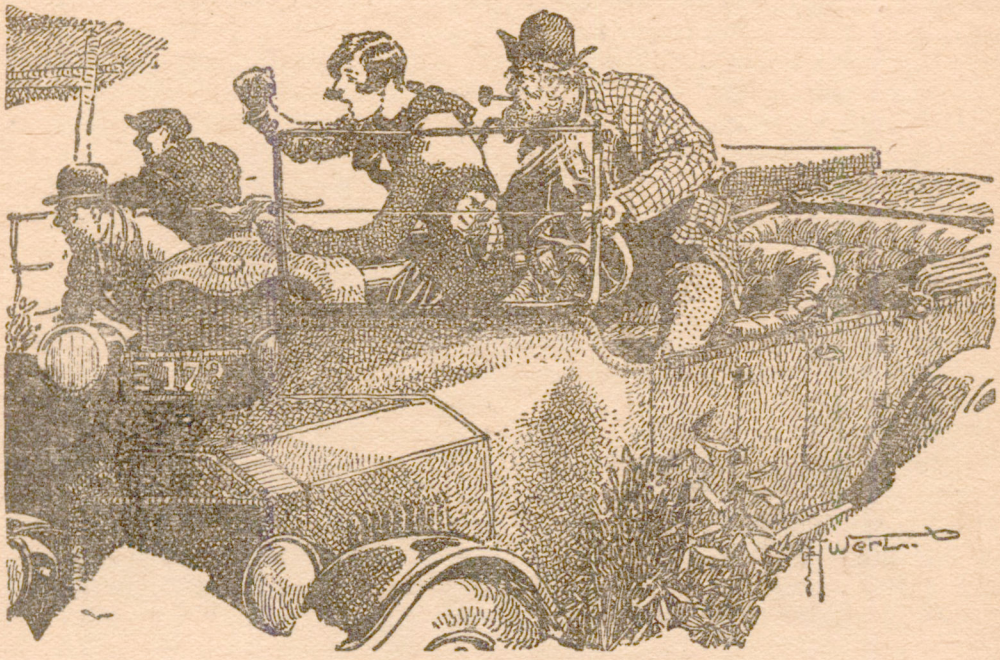
This was all that was lovely in the picture; there was a reverse side to it, as there always is. Somebody must pay for making such beautiful pictures possible. There was another girl, but you could not see her because she was under the car. But you could hear her. She had been there, in various postures, for twenty minutes.

"Oh, do shut up, Judy," said the girl in the car. "I've just got to the place where the sheik——"

The girl under the car had emerged, spanner in hand and one eye tightly closed. The remaining orb was murderous.

"Look at me! The darn thing squirted all over me. I just happened to turn something—it did it on pur-

By W. B. M. Ferguson



Author of "Lightnin' Calvert," "Deep Water," Etc.

are the days of rooting for the big team, of listening breathlessly in over the radio. yard lines. Tune in here on the thrilling story of Bolt Gary, the small-town star of the country—the chap who restored Bolton College to its old pinnacle!

pose, the—the——" She wiped the sleeve of her motor coat across her face, thereby adding to its smudged disfigurement, stood off and fetched the nearest comfort tire a vicious kick. She kicked it again.

The girl in the car closed her book with a petulant snap.

"How do you expect any one to read with such goings on? You're the most inconsiderate creature in the world. I've just got to the place where the sheik——"

"And I've just got to the place where I could stew the maker of this junk in boiling oil! And we've both got to a place where we may be stuck for the rest of our lives. Nobody seems to travel this neck of the woods. We'll be late for the game. It would be more to the point, Marie, if you helped me 'sheik' some life into this corpse."

Marie opened her brown-velvet eyes very wide. She had studied the effect of this, and other matters, in her mirror, and it was known to cause severe palpitation on the Bolton campus and about the environs of that venerable college town. So might an aristo of the Old Régime have looked in Marat's day when introduced to scrubbing brush and pail.

"Me?" she exclaimed, pointing a pink, almond-shaped nail at the perfumed artificial violets in her bosom. "Oh, la, la! You know I don't know

a thing about automobiles—and I shouldn't have come if I'd known you didn't either."

"I do know everything about them; but this isn't an automobile—it's a mule, and I never pretended to understand mules. There isn't a thing wrong with it, but it just won't go because it knows we're in a hurry. There are people and things like that. One of us will have to hoof it into town and bring out somebody from a garage. Of course, we'll miss the first half, but we may be in time to see something."

Marie opened the book, settled herself comfortably and dipped anew into the box of chocolates.

"Well, I don't mind waiting, dear. Anything to oblige. And I've just got to the place where the sheik—— What! *me* go? Walk a mile, and in these shoes?" She displayed half a yard of cobweb hose and a ridiculously inadequate heel. "Don't be ridiculous, Judy. And what's the use of getting mad at the car? One must learn to accept annoying situations with philosophy and fortitude. Always in good humor—that's my motto."

Judy, bareheaded and arms akimbo, regarded the other from under level brows. Unlike Marie, her figure did not rival the trees in tall, willowy grace, her hair their russet coloring, nor was her complexion pink and white. With her cropped poll and skirt not much longer than the leather motor coat, marle stockings and brogues, she looked like a boy. Her movements, her gestures were those of a boy. No, she was not beautiful. Her mouth was too big, her nose too small; her skin was roughened and stained by wind, sun and rain. But the mouth, if big, had the vivid scarlet of perfect health, not lipstick, and the teeth it disclosed were milk white. And there was no criticizing the beauty and splendor of her eyes; there was more than size and coloring there, nor did she need to practice before mirrors to get over their message to the discerning. The young manhood of Bolton, however, was not noted for its discernment.

"You're a selfish little pig, Marie," she said with a laugh. "Of course I'll go. If anybody should come along in this wilderness—oh, here's somebody now! They aren't all dead. Botheration, it's a woman—no, it's not. What is it?"

Her doubts regarding the approaching stranger were permissible. At that distance all one could see was a figure bent over the handlebars of a bicycle, a flying skirt and long lengths of legs amid a trailing dust cloud.

"It's a man," pronounced Judy, and Marie quickly produced a vanity case and began to powder her nose. "No woman could push a pedal like that. He's breezin' like Frank Kramer. Hey, you, stop! Stop!"

It was a man and he stopped—stopped by the simple expedient of clapping home the brakes and taking a header over the handlebars. Going at such a pace, it was either that or crashing into the girl who had taken up a position in the right of way. There was no room to pass between her and the car, or her and the ditch. He had seen that too late, but Judy had not. She meant to stop him at all costs and had not budged an inch nor flinched, when a collision seemed certain.

He hit the road with a smack, rolled over, bounced up and shook himself like a dog struck by a speeding automobile. Marie had screamed faintly and covered her eyes, but Judy had watched the proceedings critically. There was approval in her smile.

Marie now was smiling also, but in a different way. "Always in good humor," and the get-up of this chap was certainly funny. He wore an old trench coat and what was evidently

a homemade football suit; the pants were canvas, not moleskin, and might once have done duty as a tent. They were padded with cotton batting, which now peeped out through a window opened by his fall, and this ballast was evidently mobile, producing strange bumps and ridges in most unexpected places and lending to his large form a corrugated appearance.

One stocking was black, the other of nondescript hue, and both were liberally darned by the simple process known as top-sewing. The whole was crowned by a leather helmet that looked as if it might have been converted from an old football. This improvised adornment covered every thing but a formidable nose and chin, two high cheek bones, a wide mouth and a pair of unwinking, deep-set, gray-blue eyes.

These eyes now expressed mild dismay as they noted the damage to his regalia.

"Thunder!" he said, poking at the cotton batting with a strong, brown finger. "My new pants have burst a blood vessel!"

"I'm so sorry," said Judy contritely, while Marie tittered. "But that's what comes from scorching."

He regarded her with unwinking eyes.

"That's what comes from boneheads, you mean. It would have served you right, Johnny, if I'd run over you. How much of the road do you want, anyway?"

"I'm not a bonehead," said Judy, "and, if you'd like to know, I'm not a Johnny either."

"Oh," he said, staring. "My mistake. It's hard to tell the difference these days."

"I'm a female in distress," said Judy with dignity. "You knew that perfectly well. And I meant to stop you."

"I'll say you succeeded. Where's the fire?"

"We've had a breakdown. Do you know anything about automobiles?"

"I've heard of them," he said cautiously. "Is that one there?"

"You're very funny, aren't you?" demanded Judy. "But if you don't know anything about automobiles—and I think you should because you don't seem to know anything else—I'll take your wheel and go into town."

He shook his head.

"I'd rather fix the car. That wheel cost fifty dollars."

"He thinks you'll steal it!" chortled Marie. "Isn't he perfectly unique?"

"Hurry up, then!" said Judy, and poked him imperatively in the back. "We want to see something of the football game. The kick-off's at two isn't it?"

"No, two thirty."

"Really? Are you sure? How do you know?"

"Because I'm playing."

"O-o-h!" There was vast and unflatttering astonishment in Judy's tone, but a new look in her eyes. "Well, then, if there's nothing seriously wrong with this bag of tricks, we'll be in plenty of time. I don't know what's wrong with her; she always ran perfectly until now. She just died on me without a whimper. You see the spark's all right and——"

By this time the helmet and the Eton crop were close together over the engine, and Marie had ceased to be even the frame of the picture. She tapped a resentful foot and pretended to read, for she was accustomed to receiving homage even from a clown. How dare this ludicrous fellow ignore her as he had done! And what could two strangers find to talk about so confidentially in a stupid piece of machinery?

The man straightened up and wiped his hands on the ancient and soiled trench coat. Judy noticed that they were remarkably well-shaped hands, and by them alone he had convinced her that he knew a great deal about

motors, probably more than she herself.

"Well?" she asked. "Is it serious?"

"Nothing that can't be fixed," he said in his sober way. "There's a peculiarity about this make of gravity feed car that I've noticed before. Somehow or other they never run just right without gas."

"You're very funny, aren't you? But you're all wrong; the tank's half full. Of course it is."

"Of course it isn't. Bone dry. Come around and we'll see."

She marched stiffly to the back of the car where he unscrewed the cap of the tank, inserted a stick and proved the correctness of his diagnosis.

"Well!" said Judy, expelling a long breath. "I—I never thought of looking, but of course I knew it must be something like that. It's all my brother's fault; he said he'd filled her last night. And now what are we to do? You'll have to lend me your wheel so that——"

"No, it cost fifty dollars. And I can push it a bit faster than you. I'll go get a gallon."

"Well, that's awfully good of you. But won't it make you late for the game?"

"No, I'll be back in ten minutes. And they can't play without me."

"O-o-h!" said Judy. "Well, then, do hurry up. What are you waiting for?"

"For the money."

"O-o-h," said Judy again, and fished out a dollar bill.

"Why should you trust him with that when he wouldn't trust you with the bicycle?" said Marie. "How do you know he'll ever come back?"

"I'll take a chance," said Judy.

"I guess you've got to," said the man, and jumped on his wheel.

"I'll say he can ride!" exclaimed Judy as he streaked up the road in a cloud of dust. "Some character, eh?"

"Some clown," said Marie. "Of course he didn't mean to be funny—he hasn't the intelligence, and he wouldn't dare laugh at us—but did you ever see such meanness? He wouldn't spend his own money for fear he mightn't get it back."

"He mayn't have any to spend. Would he be wearing those homemade togs if he had?"

"Would he be playing football at Mercersville Academy if he hadn't?" countered Marie. "They don't give scholarships. No, he's too mean to buy an outfit or pay car fare. I know his kind. He thinks almost as much of a nickel as he does of himself. Did you get that about them not being able to play without him? He hates himself."

"He looks mighty old to be an Academy or Hightstown High boy," said Judy. "Must be in his last year, anyway, if he isn't a ringer. If we'd seen his jersey we'd have known his colors. Maybe dressing that way is his form of dissipation. But we never heard there was a star down here."

"Who says he's a star? Who says they can't play without him? If you want to know who he is, his name's 'Mr. Tightwad' and his father's the local *Shylock.*"

"Maybe," said Judy; "but I'm not concerned with that. It's not what he said but what he did. I've had a pretty good line on him and I'll say he can play football. He not only knows how to fall but he can think and act in a flash, and he has all the courage in life. That tumble of his showed me a whole lot. And if he's as fast in a broken field as he is on a wheel, if he can kick a ball like he can pedal——"

"And if he had a different face he'd be almost handsome," finished Marie. "And if he had different manners he'd be a gentleman. So there you are."

"I'm not concerned with his face," said Judy; "but there's nothing wrong with it. It's a good, strong face——"

"Like Limburger. Don't be ridiculous, Judy. He's a mean, raw sap, and it's ten to one that you'll never see him again or your money either."

"He doesn't talk like a sap," said Judy. "And I bet I shall."

Her confidence was justified. The man—Judy could not think of him as a boy, whatever his youth might be—had done the two miles and his errand in the promised ten minutes, yet his hand was steady as the proverbial rock as he emptied the gallon can into the tank, his breathing almost normal. He had ridden three miles and now had four more to cover before reaching Hightstown where the opening interscholastic game of the season was to be played. Hardly a fitting preparation.

"Couldn't we give you a lift?" suggested Judy. "There's the rumble, and we could manage the bike somehow. You'll be in no shape for the game."

"Why not?" he asked in evident surprise. "I've done nothing—just a little warming up. No, I'd rather pedal, thanks."

"Oh, did you get your change, dear?" asked Marie sweetly.

"I did, thank you," said the man.

"I wasn't addressing you!"

"My mistake," he said in the same imperturbable manner as he handed Judy the change. "Better count it."

She laughed, shook her head and dropped the money into her pocket. She hesitated, colored, and brought out a dollar bill. "You've been so frightfully decent. I—I wonder if you'd mind—if I should—if you would feel insulted if I—I——"

"Not a bit," he said with alacrity, and took the bill. "Money is money these days. Thank you very much."

"Thank *you,*" said Judy as he ushered her into the car. "Only for you we'd have missed the game. Now we've plenty of time."

"Oh, yes, loads."

"And this is the road to Hightstown?"

He nodded.

"Are you going there?" he asked.

"Why, of course! We want to see the Mercersville-Hightstown game."

"But there isn't any game," he said. "It was called off this morning because somebody or other died. It's a fact."

Judy grew very red while Marie tittered.

"Wh—why didn't you tell us that before?" exploded the former.

"But you never said you were going there."

"You knew perfectly well we were! You did so! You're very funny, aren't you? And you told a lie. You said you were going to play, that they couldn't play without you."

"Neither can they. You see, I own the football. Is it possible you thought I played for Mercersville Academy? Oh, no. I'm only a sandlotter, and we play a scrub game every Saturday in old Higgins' pasture. But some day, maybe, I'll go up to Bolton and put it back on the map."

He was smiling now, smiling for the first time. It was a nice smile, one that wholly redeemed the plainness of his face. But Judy was not smiling.

"Will you, indeed? We'll see about that," she said through clenched teeth, then flung open her leather coat and disclosed a sweater of golden brown, several sizes too large for her, on which was a big white "B."

"That's a pretty good color," said the man. "Bolton brown. Am I right?"

"Yes, Bolton!" exclaimed Judy. "It may be off the map, but not far enough where it needs a sandlotter to bring it back!"

"I don't know about that," said the man; and with a ceremonious bow he flung a leg over his wheel and rode off.

"Of all the nerve!" breathed Marie. "Why, he was laughing at us all the

time. And the meanness of him! He got a dollar out of you——"

"He earned it, didn't he?"

"He shouldn't have taken it; you know he shouldn't. No gentleman would. That's your good, strong face for you. He's just what I said. Well, now we don't have to go to the stupid game at Hightstown. I tell you what; we'll go to the pictures at Mercersville."

"You may, if you like," said Judy. "But *I'm* going to Higgins' pasture—wherever that is."

CHAPTER II.

HIGGINS' PASTURE.

JUDY found it twenty minutes later, Marie insisting that she leave her first at the picture house.

To Marie Burdet this particular screen drama, even though she had seen it before, was infinitely preferable to a burlesque football match. She really did not understand the science of the game, anyway, though it was policy to pretend otherwise. But a real match in the proper setting was all right; what occurred on the field was but a small part of it. She did not even object to an interscholastic affair where there would be new nice young men to meet. But a performance among a lot of uncouth sandlotters? No, thank you.

Judy was queer; she had a queer sense of what she was pleased to call duty and college spirit, a ridiculous passion for the game itself. To her football was football, no matter who played it. Probably she could not help it, no more than she, Marie, could help being beautiful. It was a family heritage, and poor Judy was fit for nothing else but holding pep rallies and rooting from the bleachers in the driving rain. She had no regard for her complexion—not that she had any worth guarding.

Higgins' pasture was two miles from Mercersville, a mile farther from the spot where the car had inconsiderately run out of gas, and Judy found it because she could not conceivably have missed it. It was what its name signified, a large field that half the year was transformed into a diamond, half the year into a gridiron, and was inhabited the whole year by various ruminants. These added to the glorious uncertainties and hazards of the game, an enterprising mule on occasion making off with a fly to deep center, or a sympathetic group of cows suddenly taking it into their heads to help break up a mass play through tackle.

Nor were these the only hazards; there were practically no rules that could be enforced without a stand-up fight, and nothing but makeshifts in the way of protective covering. The player who had a complete uniform was unknown, and had he dared to appear in one he would probably have been mobbed. There are Higgins' pastures in almost every city, every town, every village.

Judy thought of this, thought of it for the first time, because she was seeing a new angle of life and the game. There were no Higgins' pastures in ancient Bolton where she had been born and brought up, and "sandlotter" was a term known only in the abstract. It was a contemptuous term signifying a roughneck who assaulted a ball, instead of his garden work, on Sundays and holidays. And, strictly speaking, it was confined to the diamond. To her world, football was divided strictly into two classes: intercollegiate or interscholastic, and professional. One played for one's college or school, or, if good enough, for money. But what did these men play for?

Yes, men; they were not boys. They looked a hard, tough lot, obvious products of workshop and bench, and they had come on bicycles, shanks' mare,

or commercial tin lizzie, one of which was evidence. Not one of them had a proper uniform; there was a leg guard here, a nose guard there, while more than one sported what were supposedly baseball pants.

Judy looked at them, at the makeshift gridiron with its rudimentary irregular lines, the sagging goal posts, the ruminants. Then she looked at the crowd. He was a bleary-eyed old man, sucking a corncob pipe, the chauffeur and probable owner of the tin lizzie. It was drawn up on the side lines in isolated splendor, and she parked the handsome roadster beside it. The game had not begun; some players were grouped in midfield, where a wordy argument seemed to be in progress, while their more industrious fellows were removing the least desirable rocks and rubbish and chasing the permanent inhabitants of the pasture into the background. Among the latter was Mr. Tightwad. He had discarded the old trench coat and now displayed a still more ancient green jersey and a physique that Jack Dempsey himself could not surpass.

"What's it all about?" she inquired of the "crowd," who had been eying the roadster disparagingly and sniffing at intervals.

"Hey?" he replied, making a trumpet of a horny hand. "Speak up, young feller. I'm a leetle deef."

Judy permitted the slur on her appearance to pass without comment.

"What's going on?" she shouted, waving a hand at the field.

"Land's sake, ain't you never seen a fitball game?" demanded the crowd.

"Yes, but what are they arguing about? And who are they?"

"Why, there's Lige Somers 'n' 'Bolt' Gary 'n' Jerry Owens 'n' Fritz Pudelheimer 'n' 'Piggy' Jones—but, land's sake, I ain't got breath to name 'em all over to you, young feller. Go ask 'em yourself."

Judy slid out of the car, thereby occasioning the crowd quite a shock.

"Land's sake!" he said, touching his hat. "And here I be'n thinkin' you was a young city sport! There ain't no weemen no more."

Judy climbed into the seat at his side.

"I can see far better here, and talk, too."

"Them things," he said, evidently flattered, and thumbing at the roadster, "ain't no good for seein' nothin' but dust and trouble. If you want a real car, you'd oughter get one of these. Them fellers? Why, they're all Mercersville boys; some of 'em work in the foundry and some don't. But they all work. They'll soon be playin' now; just wrastlin' over the rules. Gary holds that it don't count if a feller scores by bouncin' the ball off any of them heifers that tries to take a hand in the game. The foundry boys got a goal that way last Sat'day and they're disputin' about it yet. Lige Somers says there ain't nothin' in the rules agin' heifers; but Gary says 'tain't rightly fair. It's a problem."

Judy agreed.

"I suppose it all depends on which side the heifer is playing—and they aren't communicative as a rule. But what do these fellows play for?"

"Why, for fun, of course."

"Oh," said Judy. "Who's the one in the green sweater?"

"Him? That's Bolt Gary I be'n tellin' you about. He's cap'n of one team 'n' Lige Somers is cap'n of tother. But they're really all one team, you might say."

"I see. The varsity and scrub?"

"No, that ain't their names. Somers belongs to the foundry boys, Gary to the rest of the fellers who have all sorts of trades; but they all belong to the Comets. What! Ain't you never heard tell of the Comet Athletic Club of Mercersville? Why, they be'n

playin' fitball and baseball games with Four Corners 'n' Willer Holler 'n' big places like them for years. Play 'em every Sat'day. Everybody has heard tell of the Comets."

"I don't even know where Willow Hollow is," said Judy humbly. "I'm a stranger here."

"Should say you was, young feller—I mean ma'am. Well, the season don't rightly start till the middle of the month, and the big game's Thanksgivin'. This is only a friendly one 'tween theirselves to see who's best fitten to be on the reg'lar team. The Comets ain't be'n much," he conceded, "but this year it's goin' to be diff'rent. Since Gary come back from the war—well, there ain't a football player like him. You'll see somethin' worth watchin', young feller—I mean ma'am. Do you know anythin' about fitball?"

"A little," said Judy. "Bolt—what a queer name! It can't be his own."

"Well, his ma calls him Martin, and some of the boys Marty; but if Bolt ain't a right proper name, I dunno any righter. A thunderbolt ain't no quicker; no, sir, 'tain't. And he can hit 'n' kick like one, too. Lige Somers thought he was the big noise in fitball till Gary showed him diff'rent. Lige and the foundry boys was the hull team, 'n' then Gary, he gets the rest of the boys together, fellers that weren't thought fitten to play on the reg'lar team, and he learns 'em to lick 'em. Yes, sir, they licked 'em good last Sat'day, and they'll lick 'em ag'in to-day. You see if they don't, young feller—I mean ma'am."

They did, or Bolt Gary did. He was practically the whole team. Judy never forgot that game, but she forgot all else until it was ended. That she could become excited over a sandlotters' game had been hitherto unthinkable, but now she rooted as hard as though watching Bolton in one of its customary desperate and forlorn struggles. She thumped the old man at her side, and he thumped her, and time and again her shrill, boyish treble rang out with "Gary! Gary!" There were other spectators by this time, a sprinkling of farmers and townfolk, who all had something to say, but her trained voice carried like a trumpet call.

An unforgetable game in every way. There were incidents worthy of Gilbert and Sullivan, more that were worthy the pen of a Homer. More was being fought out here than a game. One moment Judy could have shrieked with laughter, the next her face was white and tense, her heart racing. This "friendly" game was a blood match, a fight between those anxious to make the team, between the rival captains and their methods, between old enemies. Somers, the iron molder, and his men outweighed their opponents by twenty pounds, and it was only Gary's individual and amazing skill, his strength and versatility, the spirit he instilled into his mates, that decided the issue in their favor.

"It's fine practice," said the old man, rubbing his hands, "because Four Corners and Willer Holler 'n' them places don't play with kid gloves, neither. And you can't get a referee that ain't partial, one way or tother, so the boys has got to learn to take care of theirselves. Raw stuff gets over in the best of games, anyway, if you know how to get away with it."

Gary was in the line for the first half. He played opposite Somers at right tackle, and when that gentleman finally went out with a wrenched shoulder and broken collar bone, Gary became a plunging, twisting, hurdling back that nothing could stop. The second half was a slaughter of the foundry boys, with their leader out and Gary running wild.

But what the ultimate score might have been remained a matter of conjecture. The game was suddenly in-

terrupted by a man running out on the field and calling something which Judy could not hear. All the players gathered round him, and her companion jumped down to see what was happening.

"Mebbe a scrap," he said hopefully, taking the starting handle of the tin lizzie as he hobbled off.

But his hopes were unrealized; Judy saw Gary bursting out of the crowd and sprinting for his bicycle. He passed her with bent head and flying legs, but not before she had seen. His face was smeared, one eye tightly closed, for Lige Somers had earned his retirement; but this was not what caused her to wince. Gary had suffered more than physical hurt.

"What's the matter?" she asked the old man when he returned to the car. "Mr. Gary must have got some bad news."

"Yes, the wust possible," returned her companion, looking distressed. "They just brung Bolt word that his widder ma's dead. Run over and killed dead by an ottermobile."

"Oh, I'm *sorry*," said Judy, clasping her hands.

"So'm I. So's all of us. I guess Bolt, poor feller, will remember this game to his dyin' day. He thought the world 'n' all of his ma, he did. Guess he'll play no more fitball for a spell; no, nor mebbe Lige Somers neither. And just when we thought the Comets was goin' to turn out the best team it ever had! Don't it beat all? And ain't it allus the way?"

"There's a bright spot, for somebody, in the darkest cloud," said Judy.

CHAPTER III.

BOLTON.

BOLTON was one of the oldest, smallest and poorest seats of learning in the whole country. The two latter terms are generally synonymous. Its ancient ivy-clad towers had crowned Bolton Hill when the site of the present gorgeous State University was nothing but a wilderness. It had remained a college while mushroom growths had blossomed into universities, and it was fortunate to remain even that.

Bolton had traditions, lineage, scholastic prestige, but it had no money; and in this commercial, advertising age money would appear to be the most important factor. A signer of the Declaration of Independence had been its founder, it had given a great president to the United States, an ambassador to the Court of St. James, many a light to the literary, scientific and artistic world, but it had made the mistake of not graduating a potential millionaire pork dealer or any commercial genius who felt grateful enough to give it some of the spoils. Not that it would have taken them without due and proper examination of their source.

Rather than be remembered in such fashion, most of its modern alumni preferred to forget where they had been educated, tried to live down the fact of Bolton being their Alma Mater. Whatever its scholastic attainments, there was little prestige accruing from connection with, not only poverty and obscurity, but a college that had become a joke in the athletic world.

For the past dozen years or so it had finished an inglorious last in intercollegiate sport, and its football team had degenerated into nothing but a certain point-getter for the smallest fry on its schedule. Its student body numbered perhaps two hundred, while every year there was a steadily decreasing enrollment.

It had not always been thus; that was the bitterest part of it. Time was when the attendance had numbered nearer a thousand, when the name of Bolton was on every tongue and graduates from the prep schools were eager

for admission, not because Bolton had developed another president or ambassador, but because it had electrified the country by beating one of the "Big Three" on the latter's own field. And its victim, that year, had ultimately won the football championship. They did not count the defeat by Bolton.

That had been Bolton's glorious year, the supreme pinnacle of endeavor toward which it had been steadily working, athletic prowess keeping step with scholastic achievement. They had men who could do both in those days, for they had sent a Rhodes scholar to England. That game was the one great feat around which songs had been written, tradition built, the glorious year when Bolton beat the winners of the championship.

That a fresh-water college could beat one of the Big Three, at home or afield, was unthinkable for the simple and adequate reason that the forward pass was unknown and naturally the big universities got the pick of brawn and beef. Speed and skill counted little against bone and muscle; it was in the days of guards and tackles back formations, mass play that crashed a way to victory by sheer irresistible poundage, when players who were knocked out stayed out, and the little colleges were simply so many worms to be chewed up and swallowed at leisure by the bigger.

But Bolton was the worm that turned. It wrote an inspiring page in history that day for worms in general, chiefly through the endeavors of its captain who had the signal honor of sharing that year with a seasoned star, Walter Camp's choice for All-American full back. To freshies and old grads alike that meant infinitely more than the ancient occupier of the presidential chair, or the more modern representative at St. James, and its value was shown in the coffers of the college during the years immediately following. Never had Bolton been so financially sound.

The team of '96! They were spoken of like the old forty-niners. They finished the season by winning the State championship, and held it the following year while still practically intact as a fighting unit. All honor and reverence were theirs, this heroic band of Argonauts, and their photographs, now faded and yellow, still adorned the trophy hall of Bolton. In that same hall, so pitifully lacking in trophies, there also hung, framed in glass, an old golden-brown jersey the battle flag of their famous captain, Humphry Bolton. Faded relics of a brief but glorious past.

There are some names inseparably connected with certain places, as there are with certain movements, and, like the Poes of Princeton, there had always been a Bolton on the team since football was first started. A Bolton had played brilliantly against the great Heffelfinger, far back in the days when all-conquering Yale honored the college by including it in its schedule.

Football genius, the expression of their fighting blood, ran in the family as instinctive musical or literary expression may run in others. These earlier Boltons had sown the seed which brought ultimately the team of '96 to such brilliant flower; they were fine players, every one, and more than that, fine men. But Humphry had been the finest of all.

Always had they given of their best; nor was their best confined to the field of sport. The family made the college and town to which it had given its name and traditions. They were the original white lords of the soil, older than the Dearings and Blackstocks and Hunekers who justly prided themselves on their lineage. Old Commodore Bolton, who fought with Decatur, had carried on the work founded by his sires, and succeeding generations held aloft

the torch. And then, when the flame was brightest, there came a series of winter winds that left it but the feeble flicker it now was.

Those who look for the supernatural in everything said that the ill luck started when Colonel James Bolton refused to forgive his only daughter for eloping with a nondescript. Whether true or not, this mésalliance was followed in swift succession by the death of his wife and elder son, followed by the panic year that wiped out over half the Bolton fortune. Then came the final blows, news of his daughter's death and the Spanish-American War. Humphry, the younger son and only surviving child, went to Cuba in a transport and came home in a coffin. That is why the old brown jersey in the trophy hall is framed in rusty black. And that is one reason why Bolton never won another important football game, another reason why the team of '96 will always occupy a special niche of fame. They enlisted to a man with their captain, and more than one died with him in the last great fight of all.

Colonel James, as he was called, did not survive this last blow very long, but long enough to taste even the bitter cup of poverty. Though he held his head high to the end, though he never struck his flag and went down fighting, he had lost his grip and the will to live. The mainspring had gone, even though the watch still miraculously ticked, and the rest of his fortune soon dwindled into insignificance.

He lived long enough to see Bolton Hall, that beautiful and historic estate, go under the hammer and be bought in by a glorified huckster with social aspirations who promptly set about cutting it up and "improving" the original edifice. Then, as though having waited grimly to meet this final degradation, he died.

And so, in a twinkling, as it were, the whole Bolton connection was wiped out, the tree that had stood for over two centuries was uprooted and swept away leaf and branch, and with its going there seemed to fade the spirit that had made the college what it was. Only tradition remained, and tradition without spirit is nothing.

The tragic passing of the Boltons had its repercussion on the college. This was inevitable, for they were as closely identified as parent and child. The college began to decay, slowly but surely, in spite of the efforts of a heroic few. Impenetrable gloom had been cast over the football team by Humphry's death and those of his comrades. There had always been a Bolton to coach them, an expert who would give up whatever he was doing and come from the ends of the earth, if need be, to lick them into shape during the important weeks of their training. Now there was none. And those of the famous team who had not been killed had graduated and scattered. There was little or no foundation on which to erect another winning team, no driving force to achieve it. Nor was there any Bolton money, given without stint or question, to meet its demands.

This want became felt in the college itself. A Bolton had always been chairman of the board of trustees, virtually the whole board, and now it was understood for the first time all that that meant. It may be assumed that the family had its enemies also; integrity always has, more especially if it be identified with power and prestige. Bolton had its jealousies and intrigues, and perhaps there are more in a college than elsewhere, while the inflexible Colonel James had not scrupled to make opponents if need be.

It is possible that the board, so long accustomed to have its thinking done for it, was now incapable of thinking for itself; possible that long frustrated ambitions now found opportunity for

outlet. One need bring no charge of deliberately seeking to wreck the college with malice aforethought, though there can be little question that there were those who, regarding it as a Bolton monument, found pleasure in its decay.

At all events, it became worse than a ship without a captain; it was a ship with too many captains, none of them competent, or at least who could afford to make it his life work like the late chairman. There was internecine strife, muddle and mistake; and then the president died. He had been a capable man, athlete as well as scholar, and had seen eye to eye with Colonel James. His successor was Doctor Doremus, also a scholar, but never an athlete.

Doremus reverenced tradition, but the memorable victory of the team of '96 had no part in his worship. To him Bolton's prestige rested solely and properly on its ancient lineage and scholastic achievement. Football was all very well—so was any sport—but it should be a mere incident of college life. He had always been against his predecessor and Colonel James on this point, always deprecated their attitude, though Bolton was one of the few colleges that had never suffered from the game's worst abuses. It had never played a ringer, and its students were all genuine. That was one of its traditions. But a college, Doremus held, was a place for working, not playing; a place for developing brains, not brawn. He was unable to see that one might be the complement of the other; he could see nothing but his own viewpoint.

Matters had got to a very deplorable pass indeed when a mere football player was more honored than an incumbent of the presidential chair. Bolton was forgetting its true heritage, its real purpose, in this foolish football fever. That victory over one of the Big Three had done a great deal of harm. He was not the only one to think thus.

So there grew up a different outlook in the college, just as there did in the town. It seemed as though the passing of the Boltons had brought a new era and values were changing. Football was frowned upon; scholastic achievement became everything, athletic prowess nothing. There was no happy medium.

That the game continued to exist at all was due mainly to the dogged efforts of the old families, such as the Dearings, Hunekers and Blackstocks. There were no longer any funds, college or otherwise, for football, except such as the supporters raised themselves. The growth of general apathy and indifference was slow but sure, and just as surely the attendance began to drop off and consequent prosperity with it.

"We can't exist without fees," said Tony Dearing bitterly, "and fees can't exist without students. Who'd come here now if they could go anywhere else? We may have given a president to the United States, but we haven't given a star to the gridiron since 'Humph' Bolton's day, and that's what really counts. 'Bubbles' "—this was the irreverent name for Doremus—"may blow as he likes, but it's an age of advertising, and advertising pays. The football team is the college."

Certain it was, whatever the truth of this, that prep-school stars no longer thought of coming to Bolton. The famous team of '96 had for successors a mere parody of themselves who were beaten regularly, year after year, by feebler and feebler opponents. Nobody seemed to mind except the representatives of the Old Guard, who fought forlornly to recapture something of the ancient glory. Nobody, with few exceptions, saw the tragedy as they saw it.

The town itself had changed, or part

of it. The selling of the Bolton estate had opened a virgin tract, now known as North Bolton, which had become the abode of the new rich. Like the buyer of Bolton Hall, they sought to acquire breeding and pedigree by contact with the ancient soil.

But privately they sneered at the old gray college on the hill, especially when they could not penetrate the inner circle. Its traditions were not theirs, and anyway, it was a silly old place run by silly old men for silly old families. They should never think of sending *their* boys there. Mercy, no! It was away behind the times, fit only to preserve as a museum. But the owner of Bolton Hall, Adolphus Steen, thought otherwise. The ground would make fine building sites and, at the proper time, he would buy the whole shooting match and make a handsome profit, as he had from the Bolton property.

Mr. Steen did not care for Bolton other than in a financial sense. He had come to patronize and remained to hate. A widower now in the late fifties, he was a veteran of two wars and had served with great success in both. That is, he had sold poor beef to the boys in Cuba, and paper uniforms to the boys in Flanders. He called himself a contractor and he undertook to sell anything in which there was a substantial profit. When he purchased Bolton Hall he was just getting over the title of "Embalmed Beef," and he offered the college a certain sum on condition that they rename one of the buildings Steen Hall. The offer was refused. That was another Bolton tradition. It did not sell honorary degrees, however camouflaged, nor accept what the newspapers of the day called tainted money. There was no question that in this instance the proffered sum was very highly odorous indeed.

The college grew poorer and poorer; poorer in men, money and character. Retrenchment had to be made time and again, and the staff cut; virile teachers went elsewhere, of necessity or choice, and Doremus gathered round him a little band of formalists and doctrinaires. Doctor Sturges, now dean of the faculty, headed the few members of the old régime who did not believe in the new policy, but his influence was strictly limited and he had all he could do to survive the intrigues aimed at his removal.

Doremus and his clique continued to blow beautiful bubbles, apparently oblivious of the fact that the soap was running out. The board continued to yawn and muddle. The town laughed or shrugged. The college was on the skids, and nearly everybody had a different explanation; but the easiest and most general seemed to be that it was inevitable, a law of nature. The new town was becoming fashionable and rich; the old college had served its turn and was only in the way. Progress would claim its victim.

Everybody was resigned or indifferent except the new generation of the Old Guard; and one person, at least, was happy. Adolphus Steen chuckled and rubbed his moist palms every time he looked out of the window at the old clock tower in the quadrangle on the hill. It had stood for years and years, four square to the winds of heaven, but some day it should come a proper cropper.

That old ivy-clad tower was symbolic to Mr. Steen of the stuck-up pride of Bolton and the bar of the dollar sign. Its fall should satisfy both his pocket and his heart. Adolphus always put the pocket first. No, that day for which he had waited long and patiently and cheerfully, could not now be far off.

And then Doremus died suddenly—and Judith Dearing saw Martin Gary play football in Higgins' pasture.

CHAPTER IV.

JUDY REPORTS.

THE three musketeers"—accent on the second syllable—sat on the porch of Alpha Delta Phi, the old chapter house that had been given by a Bolton, with the bells in the chapel—its carillon was famous—when the college was young.

Ad Steen had dubbed them that in juvenile days, when his education was no better than his father's, and the appellation had stuck. Not only were they inseparable, but their physical architecture was similar. They had never put on beef and brawn like Adolphus, the second—one of them had not even put on height—and a hint of derision had crept into the collective nickname when voiced by the lusty heir to the Steen fortune. But then the same masked derision was present when he spoke of the college at all. Already he had inherited much from his father. The three musketeers were Tony "Runty" Dearing, Joe "Slivers" Blackstock, and Rex "Snow" Huneker. They were the present and most important representatives of the Old Guard, letter men and, though only entering their junior year, the head and front, backbone, blood and sinew of the decrepit football team, and all for which it tried to stand. Dearing was quarter back and manager, Blackstock, captain and right end, Huneker, secretary, man of all work and left end.

These positions had become obligatory because of characteristics physical and otherwise. It was their heritage to carry on the forlorn fight and keep alive the old spirit, for some relative or other had been a member of the famous team of '96.

Dearing was the richest, as well as the smallest, of the three, and thus it was inevitable that he should be quarter back and manager. The present generation could not remember when the team had not finished the season triumphantly in debt, and the manager was expected to make up out of his own pocket such deficit as could not be raised elsewhere. This was a recognized honor attaching to the office, and a Dearing had filled it since the passing of the Boltons.

Thanks to the unexpected demise of Doremus during the long vacation, and the installation of Sturges as president, the outlook of the football team, in one sense, was better than it had been for many a long year. A wet blanket had been suddenly removed. In the past the passive sympathy of Sturges, or such help as he dared give, had not been negligible, and it was a foregone conclusion that, given a free hand, athletics should once more be made obligatory at Bolton and football come into its own.

But there was no money, and Sturges had come into a hard, thankless office; he had been virtually offered it because no one else wanted it. The rats were beginning to desert the sinking ship. Sturges had taken it because he loved Bolton. Had he not loved the old gray town and college he would have resigned long ago. None but he knew the lucrative posts he had sacrificed by remaining, or what slights and humiliations he had suffered during the Doremus régime. The representatives of the Old Guard were not confined to the student body.

"It's highly questionable if the wet blanket hasn't been removed too late, the victim smothered," said Tony Dearing to his two friends. "However, it's a lot better than nothing, and never say die. We can't do any worse than finish this season last again. If we've got no money nor material, 'Prexy'—Sturges—"is with us."

"I never saw such a bunch of shorthorns as this class," said Joe Blackstock who generally talked like the last

book he read. At present he was wallowing in Western literature. "They sure are a scrap herd of mavericks. A typical Doremus gathering—notwithstanding *nil nisi bonum*. Our backfield will be so far back this season—but what's the use of going over it all again? If Traynor digs up anything worth while in that crowd, he sure is some digger." Blackstock had a long, thin face, as well as body and legs, and, when most cheerful, looked the saddest.

"You don't know what may turn up," said Ray Huneker, the optimist, whose only kingly physical attribute was a crop of tow hair, so white that it might be called ermine. "Ransom's playing this year, and there's us and good old reliable 'Fatty.' It might be a lot worse. And something may turn up."

"Nothing ever turns up but your nose," said Blackstock gloomily.

They had just come from North Field, that ancient arena whose grand stand and bleachers were weather stained and patched like the college buildings, where the candidates—many were conscripts—for the team had been pawed over. The task of these three was familiar to past Boltonians, that of trying to make something out of nothing, of finding a diamond in a heap of rubbish. This year's entering class was undeniably the poorest in quantity and football quality, whatever its mental equipment.

They themselves and Fatty Beach, who played center, were all that remained of the past season's team, which had been nothing to brag about. Still, it had managed to scramble one victory in the schedule, which fact shone like a penny dip in Stygian darkness. Fatty Beach was good and they were good, as goodness went in Bolton these days; the line as a whole promised to be good because there was husky, if ignorant, material for guards and tackle. And above all, because Jack Ransom was now a sophomore.

Ransom was one of the few who had come to Bolton in these decadent times with something of a football reputation. He had no associations with the town. He was poor, and he had selected the college because it afforded the cheapest means of securing a first-class education. That fact was Bolton's main drawing card now. Ransom had captained his high school to victory, and on the past season's scrub had outplayed his varsity opponent at tackle.

Now that he was eligible to play, it strengthened the line immensely, filled a glaring hole; over half its members were veterans and at least as good as any opponent in their now modest schedule. Certain colleges they must play, time-honored rivals like Merton and Stevenson Tech, but they no longer figured in the menu of the big universities. They had ceased to be even appetizers.

They had also secured the services of a professional coach, Dearing having done this the moment it became apparent that Sturges was to be president. "Pug" Traynor, the new man, was no Yost, but Yosts cost a lot of money, and Traynor was all they could afford. He had played on the scrub, and as first substitute on a famous university eleven, and the price of his services would produce a big hole in the volunteer football fund. Dearing had personally guaranteed the amount, and considered he had got the best value possible for the money.

And so, in several respects, the outlook was brighter than it had been for years, but in another far darker. The great gloomy spot was the backfield. It had always been their weakness, and they had never played a really good back since Humph Bolton's day, but this year it was worse than ever.

Dearing was the only man behind

the line who knew anything and, like most quarter backs, he had his limitations. He was a good general and strategist, a sure handler of the pigskin and plucky tackler of the biggest beef; but he was no De Saulles. There was no man to build the backfield around. Nor did there seem the remotest possibility of finding one.

It is not for nothing that the three backfield men enjoy the honor and prestige they do. Even granting that by virtue of their positions they get all the spectacular work to do, while the linesmen must perform the obscure but necessary spade work, the fact remains that they have the ability to do it. And that ability is rarer, the qualities demanded more complex, than that required for service in the line.

"We've got to find six men somehow, three for the backfield; that's the simple task that confronts us this season," said Dearing. "And that's not counting subs, of course. Those three chaps, Cummack, Scott and Nelson, seem to be the best material for the backfield. They know at least the rudiments of the game. If Traynor—oh, Lord! here comes Steen. Remember everythin's O. K. and fine as silk. We never started a season better."

Steen lounged up the street and paused at the frat house. He had the height and breadth his father lacked, and all the other's self-esteem. And he had reason to be vain of more than his looks or riches, for he was spoken of as one of the football finds of the year. It was this fact that rankled in the breasts of the three on the steps, not anything connected with his parentage. For that matter Adolphus, Sr., had taken his social rebuffs with seemingly good grace, and apparently the college had no more fervent well-wisher.

No doubt in due time Bolton would have assimilated Embalmed Beef as it had assimilated other questionable products, and certainly the children of the Old Guard had made no distinction as to Adolphus the second. They were prepared to like him for himself, in spite of his money or father.

He had attended the same prep school as Dearing, Huneker and Blackstock, had sat at their tables, welcomed like any other of their friends.

This consideration, however, his father had misunderstood; he thought it a tribute to his money. Nor could he forget the irritating slowness of his own social progress. He lumped all the old families together with the college, calling them privately poverty-stricken snobs. Later he learned the amazing truth, which he could not forgive, that there are apparently people and things that money cannot buy.

So far, then, as young Steen was concerned, he was regarded in due time as a Boltonian by adoption if not heritage, one who loved the old town and had imbibed its traditions. If he could never be a Bolton, he could be a worthy successor on the gridiron to the original owners of the Hall, for he had developed into a brilliant half back at prep school. That he should enter the college was assumed as a matter of course; nor had he ever suggested anything to the contrary; and his help to the team was counted upon. It should be enormous. And then had come the bombshell.

"Oh, I'm entering State University," he said casually. "Didn't you know that?"

That was what the three on the stoop could not forgive him, though they tried to look at it in a generous light. After all, he was *not* a Boltonian, and, granting that, why should he sacrifice anything for the old college? State University was his logical place. He had money, and he should have a brilliant football career. What inducements could Bolton offer, to one of his outlook, compared with the Uni-

versity? But, at least, if he had never intended entering Bolton, he should not let the contrary have been inferred until the eleventh hour. The three on the stoop felt that the college had been betrayed, that they themselves had been played with for years. But it was the effect on the former that they felt most.

Steen had gone to State, and during the past season, his sophomore year, proved the football find of many years. He had gone to help swell the already swollen football army of the University while Bolton lacked even a rudimentary backfield. That was what they could not forget or forgive.

"'Lo, Tony. 'Lo, Slivers. 'Lo, Snow." Steen nodded to the three and sat down on the steps without waiting for an invitation. An attack of flu—or what passed for it—had delayed his return to State, though he had been convalescing for some time in his eight-thousand-dollar roadster.

Like Steen the elder, the college apparently had no greater well-wisher than Steen the younger, and, if questioned, he would have expressed the utmost astonishment at the idea of any one ever thinking he had ever intended entering Bolton. Dearing, Blackstock and Huneker had never mentioned the matter and they tried to treat him as they always had. But the old friendship was gone, or going, and they no longer admitted him to their full confidence. Steen was now asking questions about the football team, and receiving highly fictitious answers, when Judith Dearing drove up. She had left Miss Burdet at the latter's home in North Bolton.

"I thought I should find you here at the wigwam," she said, taking a seat on the steps. "Hello, Ad. Thought you were going back to-day?"

"Couldn't make it. I'd some business to attend to," he replied. "Where have you been?"

"Higgins' pasture, if you know where that is. But you don't. Mercersville and Hightstown didn't play, Tony. There was a death in the family or something."

"Were you in Mercersville?" asked Steen, looking up. "What for?"

"Why, to scout the game. Hightstown's the first on our schedule this year."

"Oh," said Steen, and smiled faintly. He had a trick of smiling faintly when no one else could see the joke. Bolton was surely near the bottom of the ladder when it was reduced to playing a prep school like Hightstown High, incapable of tackling anything stronger early in the season. It hardly squared with the glowing reports he had just been hearing.

"I didn't know you really meant to go," said Dearing shortly to his sister. "I told you we didn't have to scout Hightstown. We're only playing them to give the subs practice and because Hightstown has been begging for a game." This was for Steen's benefit, though the girl did not know it, and was not strictly accurate. "If we had to scout," he added, "we'd have sent a regular one."

"Well," said Judy, coloring faintly, "I thought it wouldn't do any harm. I though there might be some new material we could get."

"Nothing we haven't heard of or want," said Tony with the lofty finality of a superior older brother. "Only a waste of time."

"No, it wasn't, Tony; it was the best time I ever spent. I've found the greatest all-round player I've ever seen! If we can only get him——"

"Dream on, my child," said Tony. "Where did you see him? In the Mercersville movies?"

"Well, you may laugh. But what would you think of a man who can throw a forward pass thirty yards straight as an arrow, kick goals from

the 48-yard line at any angle, straight-arm right and left like a battering-ram, hit the line like a cannon ball, run like a deer——"

"Howl like a wolf and laugh like a hyena," supplemented Steen indulgently. "Who was the star of the picture—Strongface, the Indian?"

Judy turned on him.

"He's a greater player than you, Ad Steen! Yes, he is. I may be only a girl, an irregular scout, but I know football. You can't say I don't, not one of you. You know you can't."

No, they could not—not with truth. Judith Dearing had inherited her full share of the family tradition, and her crying grievance was that she had not been born a male. Bolton had never been coeducational, and its female adherents could take no part in the college life proper. The local academy that the girlhood of Bolton attended had no more than a sympathetic bond with the college. Judy had done what she could; and perhaps none but she realized—certainly not her brother—all the suffering her limitations imposed on her. She could only hold pep rallies, lead a cheering section, help raise money, when she was dying to fight with tooth and claw for the old gray towers on the hill. She was only a gangling girl of fifteen, patronized or tolerated, derided or indulged, but the spirit of Bolton flamed in her as strongly as in any of its greatest sons.

Perhaps Joe Blackstock, whose gloomy and dull exterior was no index to the light within, was the first now to realize this, for he asked very soberly for further particulars of the wonderful unknown.

"His name's Martin Gary and he lives in Mercersville," said Judy. "No, he doesn't attend the academy; that's why we've never heard of him. He—he works in a garage."

"Oh, said Steen with a faint smile. "That would be something new for Bolton, wouldn't it? Hardly what you'd call frat material. And where does the honest blacksmith play football?"

"I said he works in a garage. He plays for the Comet Athletic Club of Mercersville."

"Oh," said Steen again, "a professional."

"No, not a professional. But he can play like one." She began to describe the game. "Oh, I wish you could have seen it! It was so funny in a way. Here were twenty-two men playing a friendly game to see who were the best to meet the common enemy, and they fought so hard that I doubt if there's enough left to make a team. It was like the Kilkenny cats. And Gary was the whole show. You should have seen him! He——"

"A bunch of sandlotters!" scoffed Steen. Anybody can play star stuff if there's nothing to play against."

"If you saw those sandlotters," said Judy, "you'd change your ideas about them like I did. Yes, you would. There's a whole lot about football they don't know, Gary excepted, but State has nothing on them in physique and courage. They're *men,* not boys, and they don't know what a soft game is. Sandlotters made baseball, didn't they? Well, why shouldn't they turn out football stars, too?"

"Oh, for the professional game, maybe," said Steen. "But I didn't know that Bolton ever played a ringer. Even if the honest blacksmith is all you say—well, they don't teach horseshoeing here, or whatever it is he does. Of course there are scholarships and scholarships——"

"The scholarships here are genuine," said Dearing quietly. "They always were, and they always will be while they exist at all. You'd know that, Ad, if you were a Boltonian. It's more than can be said of a lot of colleges—and some universities."

"Well," remarked Steen, "they say virtue is its own reward. But let us hear some further particulars of the great unknown. Did you see him after the game, Judy?"

"No, you see——" And she told of the tragic interruption. "His mother was killed by a road hog who never even stopped to see what damage he'd done. It was terrible."

Judy became conscious at this point that her brother was signaling with his eyes, that for some reason he and Blackstock and Huneker did not wish her to pursue the subject of Gary.

"But of course they'll get the person responsible," said Steen. "They must know the car or license number. Somebody saw it, didn't they?"

"No, it happened in a side road. They say Mrs. Gary was found by a chance passer-by, and she only lived long enough to tell what had happened. Of course it was an accident, but it's terrible that people can be so careless and callous."

"It's what brings us decent motorists into disrepute," said Steen. "But about this fellow Gary——"

"I don't know anything more about him," said Judy shortly.

The matter was resumed later, among the four, Judith, Tony, Blackstock and Huneker, in the privacy of the Dearing home.

"Even if there's nothing in it, sis, it's just as well not to discuss this chap Gary before Ad Steen," said Tony. "He's not entitled to know what's going on here, all our private affairs."

"Why not?" asked Judy. "You can't forgive him, can you, because he went to State? Oh, I've seen that you and Joe and Rex haven't been quite the same to him. But is that fair? He never said he was coming here, and he had to go wherever his father sent him. Bolton is his home, and I'm sure he thinks——"

"You don't know what anybody really thinks," broke in Tony with all the worldly experience of twenty years. "And when you're as old as we are, you won't be sure of things either. Bolton may be his home but he isn't a Boltonian."

"We've a feeling," said Blackstock, "that he isn't such a friend of the college as he tries to make out. And maybe his father isn't, either. It isn't the mere fact that he elected to go to State, nor even the way he went."

"This being picked as first back for State hasn't done his modesty any good," said the outspoken Huneker. "And he was always inclined to be a bit too big for his clothes. He's trying to patronize us and Bolton as much as he dare. That's a fact, Judy. You heard him make that crack about ringers and scholarships. No, maybe he didn't mean anything, and maybe we are a bit too sensitive, but it isn't the first time he has said such things. We've an idea that if he likes to hear all our troubles it isn't for the purpose of trying to help us out of them."

"This needn't make any difference in your old friendship with Ad Steen, but I don't want you to discuss intimate college affairs with him," said Tony, pronouncing a brotherly ukase. "I didn't want to say anything to you before, but now it's time I did. You're growing up. And you're in a position to hear far more than any other girl; you're not only my sister but you've appointed yourself a sort of mascot, sub-manager, and I don't know what, to the team. Well, that position, even if unauthorized, carries with it certain definite responsibilities."

"I never blabbed anything," said Judy hotly. "I'd die first. You know I would."

"I'm not saying you ever did, or would knowingly," replied her brother. "I'm just telling you about Ad Steen. He'd spread it all over that we meant

to play a ringer—not that there's anything in this supposed find of yours."

"There's everything in it," declared Judy, waiving the other point. "You must believe that Martin Gary is all I said. Really and truly he is. You must make every effort to get him here before he's snapped up by some other college. It's the chance of a lifetime."

Dearing, running true to brotherly form, considered it his duty to pooh-pooh everything his sister said.

"But even if he was all you claim," he added, "it wouldn't matter. That isn't the point. If all we had to do was to get star players by hook or by crook, we'd have had a winning team long ago. Lord knows, I wish sometimes we weren't so strict about ringers and all that——"

"Now wait a minute," broke in Judy. "It has nothing to do with ringers. I found out a good deal about Gary. Of course, it was no time for scouting him, but I met a man, a Mr. Higgins, who's his neighbor."

Higgins, the owner of the pasture, was the bleary-eyed old man who had talked "fitball" with Judy.

"Gary wants to go to college," she said, "and he would have gone long ago if it hadn't been for his mother. He's not the roughneck you may think. He never had the chance of much regular schooling because his father died and he had to go to work. He has always worked, worked hard. His mother was a semi-invalid, and he was her only support. It was his ambition to go to college, but he had to sacrifice that ambition."

"Sounds a fine type," commented Blackstock.

"Idealized," said Tony.

"Mr. Higgins doesn't idealize anything or anybody," retorted Judy. "And you can't live in a place like Mercersville without people having a pretty good idea of you. Gary studied at night, taught himself, and they say he's the best motor mechanic in the county. They say he's well educated, too. Well, there's the Humphry Bolton scholarship in the School of Mines. And it's still open this term."

"It's competitive," said her brother shortly. "You know that. We couldn't change the conditions for the best man living. It has to be won, and won fairly."

"I'm not suggesting anything different," replied Judy. "But it wouldn't be stretching any great point to let it be tried for now. I'm sure Prexy would if he knew the circumstances."

Tony laughed.

"You think this motor mechanic could get by when high-school grads have flunked?"

"At least he could try," said Judy. "You can teach yourself more than you can learn in high school, or even college, if you want to. I'm sure Gary could pass the ordinary entrance exams anyway. And, if he hasn't the money, he could work his way. We could find him jobs, make them if necessary. It's no time for hairsplitting. We've got to get him. I tell you, it's the chance of a lifetime." She was walking the veranda, gesticulating excitedly. "It's a hunch. If I hadn't gone to Mercersville, if I hadn't thought you'd filled the gas tank—oh, don't you see how everything seems to have been planned for us? If Gary's mother hadn't been killed he couldn't go to college. And now if he can't play for the Comets this season——"

"He couldn't play here either for a year," reminded Huneker.

"There's the scrub," said Judy. "He isn't only a great player, he's a great coach and leader. He taught that scrub team to whip the regulars, and what he can do there he can do here. I tell you, we've got to get him before he's snapped up, before he knows how good he is. The big universities would offer him all sorts of inducements. I

tell you he's better than Ad Steen. You've got to go down there, Tony, as soon as it's decent, and get him. You *must* get him. It's the chance of a lifetime. Even his name is a hunch. They call him Bolt because he hits the line like one. Bolt—and Bolton! It's a hunch. You *must* get him."

"All right all right," said her brother indulgently. "Calm yourself, my child. I shall have an interview with the hero of your romantic adventure. I suppose he's tall, dark and handsome—like an ice-cream man. Did Marie try to vamp him?"

"I—I don't know what he looks like, and I don't care," said Judy, flushing hotly. "You're beastly, Tony. If you'd like to know, he called me Johnny and said I was a bonehead. But he may call me anything he likes if he'll only come to Bolton. We need him bad."

"We'll see this hombre, and darned glad, too," said Blackstock. "You're a great scout, Judy. You sure are. And some day, when I'm rich, I'll buy you a real varsity sweater for your own. I sure will."

"Good!" said Tony. "Then maybe I'll get a chance to wear mine."

Even granting that his sister knew football—and Dearing had a brotherly opinion of her knowledge—it by no means followed that Gary was half as good as she claimed. Judy was given to enthusiasms, had a weakness for football players, and was nearing the romantic age. Nor did what he learned from Marie Burdet tend to change Dearing's opinion. Marie laughed at the idea of Gary being a star, of coming to Bolton at all. She pictured him as a crude, mercenary hayseed. Even at this age Marie was something of a "college widow," and her opinion had more weight with Tony than Judy's. It is possible that but for Blackstock he might not have gone to Mercersville.

"Apart from all else," he said, "he isn't the type we want at Bolton. Marie says so. What if she didn't see him play? She's older than Judy, got more sense. This fellow's mean; he shook 'em down for a dollar. You know the type. All right, I suppose we'd better go and have a look at him. But you leave the business to me."

Dearing, being fully aware of the honor that Bolton had the power to confer on this sandlotter, and having no desire to commit himself, hit on the idea of having a puncture. He could size Gary up while it was being fixed. Mercersville was not prodigal in garages, and Judy had learned the location of the one where Gary worked. It was called the Empire and was on the inevitable Main Street. They would call on him there.

To be continued in the next issue, October 1st.

MISSING MEN

SEVEN missing men are missing no longer. For the last nine years the United States has been conducting a thorough search of the European battlefields in an effort to check up on all the American soldiers reported missing during the World War. And just the other day the searchers made one of their most successful finds—the bodies of a lieutenant and six enlisted men. They had all been placed in one grave, a shell hole, and the interment had apparently been done by the enemy. Each body bore two identification tags, so there was no trouble whatever on that score.

The relatives have been notified and the bodies are being held in France until their families decide what disposition is to be made of them.

You Get *What* You Give

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Points West," "For the Good of the Service," Etc.

A stagecoach driver locates in town, because of a heavy snowfall, and plays the good Samaritan to the orphaned daughter of the town washerwoman, but finds that, in this case, at least, the old helping-hand stuff is the bunk!

THOSE of you who know Casey Ryan now in his mellower middle age may be inclined to doubt this story of his hard-driving, hard-hitting, sometimes tumultuous and altogether ungodly past. He always was soft hearted as now, and his readiness to lend a hand always got him into trouble, just as it does now.

But experiences such as this one I'm going to tell do not come so often as they used to do, because Casey has learned discretion. That is, he no longer believes that lie about doing evil that good may come. If you ask him now, he will probably give you a queer look and then stare off into space for a minute, with his pale-gray eyes asquint. He'll tell you that you get what you give in this world—and sometimes you get it "hot off the griddle."

If you are sitting with a campfire between you, and the stars are edging closer and closer as dusk slides into dark, he may tell you that he knows what he's talking about, and prove it by telling some of the devious ways in which he gained that knowledge.

A terrific blizzard had swept through the mountains and buried the pines branch-deep in snow. On the summit of Wildcat Pass, where the stage road crosses, the drifts were twenty feet high and growing inches every hour. The stage itself stood forlorn in the yard of the Meadow Valley livery stable, its

canvas curtains buckled down and bulging with chill gusts of wind that sifted fine snow in miniature drifts upon its crackly seat cushions. From the look of things, Meadow Valley was snowed in for two or three weeks, and Casey Ryan, driver of the stage, might be counted almost a resident of the little hamlet, instead of the weekly affliction he became in summer.

On this day, when Casey unwittingly set in motion the relentless wheel that forever turns in its karmic circle and brings back to you the things you have yourself placed upon it, a doctor counting pulses in the Palace Hotel bar would have announced an epidemic of heart disease in Meadow Valley. There, where the men of Meadow Valley forgathered to spend the idle hours in ways that they shouldn't, Casey Ryan's pulse was the craziest in town. After seven hours of unremitting bad luck, he held in his two hands four cards of a royal flush in diamonds. Casey was due for a little excitement.

For two full minutes Casey sat studying that hand, a cigarette balanced precariously in the corner of his sardonically humorous mouth—less deeply lined than now—his gray eyes mere shining slits between his squinted lids. Tom Murphy, on the one side, and Jimmie Miller, on the other, waited with what patience was left to them, each sending an occasional glance toward Casey's remaining three chips—one blue and two red. Finally, Casey languidly pressed his cigarette stub against the edge of the table and tossed the limp fragment toward the big brass receptacle over by the bar.

"One," he drawled indifferently, and laid a card face down on the table, pushing his three chips forward with the next motion. Lady Luck, he thought, was smiling over his shoulder just then; she would hand him the ten of diamonds—a straight royal flush would go down to posterity in Meadow Valley as the luck of Casey Ryan—or at any rate a diamond——

It was the deuce of clubs he got instead. Though he felt pretty sick inside, Casey grinned, pushed his hat forward over his right eyebrow with a purely mechanical motion signifying that he didn't give a darn, yawned and got up from the table. Even his enemies—and they were many in those days—never called Casey a whiner.

"Guess I'll go see what the weather looks like," he observed, and sauntered out, nonchalantly jingling a harness snap and a trunk key in his pants pocket and hoping they sounded to the others like the clink of coins.

While he rolled a fresh cigarette, Casey stood on the Palace steps and glanced absently up at the sullen clouds that hung over Wildcat Pass.

When the cigarette was sending a thin wisp of smoke up to join the white breath from his nostrils, Casey thrust his hands once more deep in his pockets and watched the slow drops freeze upon the side of an icicle beside him. He was not thinking of the icicle, however, nor even of the weather. He was wondering whether he dared borrow money once more on his lucky piece, which was a gold nugget worth fifteen dollars as raw gold and fifteen times that much to Casey, who had carried it through a good many adventures from which he had escaped alive—through the magic of that nugget, as he secretly believed. It was roughly shaped like a horseshoe, and it had a history which Casey never told when he was sober.

Money borrowed on that nugget had always brought luck with it—or almost always, when you came right down to facts. But if he used it now as security for a loan, it would be the thirteenth time in his improvident career—and even Casey's notorious optimism hesitated to tempt Providence.

A girl was coming down the steep, narrow path cut through waist-high

drifts in the roadway; and because she was the only moving object in the field of his vision, Casey's eyes dwelt upon her, while his mind took a hasty census of his borrowable contacts in the town. A week ago they had been better. Even yesterday he could have borrowed—and he had—from the proprietor of the Palace. It was the last of that money that had gone to swell the pot he had foolishly dreamed of raking in with a royal flush. He shrewdly suspected that some security would be demanded if he asked for another loan to-day—his lucky piece, for instance. Casey shook his head at the thought.

Jimmie Miller—he had lent Jimmie five dollars only a week ago, when he had been flush and generous. But there had been an argument over the exact location of the Balkans—yes, and whether the word meant people, country or just mountains—and he had twitted Jimmie with the loan. Jimmie had counted out five dollars in silver on the table and told him to take his darn money. Casey did not feel like asking Jimmie for a loan now. Anyway, money was not an absolute necessity just yet. He had a shack over on a winding side street, and he had plenty of grub. He could eat and sleep and ask no favors of any man.

Dull-eyed, heavy-footed, the girl continued to plod down the shoveled path toward the Palace. Casey recognized her as Hulda Jorgensen, orphaned daughter of Meadow Valley's lately deceased laundress. Mary Jorgensen, the mother, had been a bitter-tongued woman, but she had sewed on buttons and mended torn garments without extra charge, and so had had all the work she could do; until pneumonia caught her out bareheaded one day, hanging wet and freezing clothes on an ice-fringed line. Meadow Valley gathered in its own wash and buried Mary Jorgensen.

Hulda was sixteen and large for her age. Especially her feet. She had wispy blond hair slicked back from a bald forehead. From the look of her wide, drooping mouth, she wept easily. She was a good girl and honest; but she was terribly unattractive to Casey, who had once remarked that Hulda Jorgensen reminded him of something he was trying to forget.

Now, with an ugly plaid shawl over her head and pinned under her chin, and with her elbows bent outward with the bundle in her arms, she looked so like her mother carrying a wash home that Casey's thoughts were pulled to her in spite of his own problem.

"Huh! That girl here yet?" he registered irritably, as if he had trouble enough on his mind without having to look at Hulda Jorgensen.

At that moment a boy, with his cap pulled down over his ears and his body tightly buttoned into a coat too small for him, came from a steamy-roofed, tar-paper shack and spied Hulda. What it was he called gibingly after the girl, Casey did not hear, his attention being only half given to the two.

"You shod opp!" Hulda retorted heavily, turning to glare before she started on.

"Shod opp yourself!" yelled the boy, and hastily scooped snow, pressed it hard within his palms and threw the ball with the deadly precision of such boys.

Hulda flung up an arm to shield her face with the plaid shawl, but the missile caught her on the side of her head and almost knocked her down. She started to run blindly, failed to see the twist in the deep trail where it avoided a tree, and went sprawling into the snow, while the boy slapped his mittened hands upon his thighs and laughed with shrill whoops of impish glee.

Casey flung his cigarette away as he leaped from the porch and ran down the little side trail that led to the shack. With one vicious grab he popped the buttons off the boy's coat and plunged

him neck deep into a drift; brought him up and shook him, then drove him in again to his shoulders and left him there kicking. Casey was floundering across to the weeping girl, when the boy came up, blubbering with rage.

"You git into the house!" barked Casey, whirling upon him.

The boy "got." Casey waded over and helped Hulda to her feet, brushing off the snow from her shawl much as he would curry a horse, with swift downward strokes. He dug her bundle out of the drift and would have slapped it against his leg to free it of clinging snow, but the protesting howl from the girl stopped him.

"It is maw's clock! If it is broke I don't know vot I should do!"

Casey looked at her, his pale, straight-lidded stare shrewdly scrutinizing. There was a pinched look, a certain expression in Hulda's dull eyes that Casey knew.

"When did you eat last?" he demanded bluntly.

The sluggish blood crept into Hulda's face, but she had been taught to speak when she was spoken to and to tell the truth and shame the devil—which was one of Mary Jorgensen's stern precepts.

"Two pancakes by my breakfast," she confessed, tears trickling anew down her pasty cheeks. "Bill Yackson, up at the Mountain View, he tells me I should not vork by him no more. Yust because I stubs my foot and falls on top of plates and six is broke, I bin fired. So he gives me no dinner ven I am not vorking by him."

"Huh. Where you headed now?"

"I vos taking maw's clock by Mis' Pederson. Maybe I shall stay by her if she shall buy the clock."

"Huh!" Casey gazed reflectively into the snow. "What's the matter of that shack of your mother's? She owned it, she told me. Why don't you take in washing like she done? You're big as a skinned horse."

"Bill Yackson, he says it is his shack and maw don't pay the money. He rents it already to some mans, and he takes for himself maw's tub and boiler. I don't could do any vashing.

"Anyvay, maw's customers is gone by Mis' Murphy, and she vould be mad on me should I take them avay. It's her boy you licked. He jells at me for my freckles."

Casey turned and made his way back to the Palace, the girl following dumbly at his heels—the crunch of her feet in the snow somehow irritating him, placing upon his shoulders an unwanted burden of responsibility. At the porch, where the slush was already freezing with the chill of a setting sun, he turned and faced her.

"Say! Ain't you got any folks to go to?" Casey's tone was harsh because of a growing doubt of the Petersons, whom he knew.

"Yust my Aunt Olga by Sacramento, California. I could go by my Aunt Olga, should I have money for traveling so long vay."

"Can't you get a job here? Somebody might need a hired girl."

Hulda's eyes held a dull reproach while she shook her head dispiritedly. Did Casey Ryan think she had not tried to get work—wading from house to house, asking for a "yob" and being turned away with unthinking hardness. Somehow, it is difficult to realize that a homely, slow-witted person can suffer as keenly as ourselves. No one read the signs in Hulda's face as had Casey.

"Vomans does their vork by theirselves. Nobody has got room for keeping hired girl." She drew a knuckly, chapped hand across her eyes and turned to continue her plodding journey. Casey eyed her uncomfortably. Two pancakes that morning, and not a mouthful since! Casey thought of the stewed apples, the sour-dough bread, the kettle of salt pork and beans in his own cupboard a block away, and the thought car-

ried with it a sense of guilt, as if he had personally defrauded the girl of food.

"Say, how much will it take to get you to Sacramento?" Involuntarily his hand slid into his pocket where money sometimes did briefly repose, and clinked the harness strap and trunk key together, with a sound somewhat like silver coins. Hulda stopped abruptly and swung toward him, her eyes lighting with false hope.

"I could get a yob by Sacramento and pay you back. How much it takes I don't know, but I could find out. I be so thankful should you help me!" She lifted the plaid shawl and tucked in a wisp of colorless hair, eying Casey like a hungry dog at the first sound of a friendly voice.

"You find out how much it's going to take," Casey said vaguely. "And if they don't want you at Peterson's"—he hesitated, thought of the two pancakes, and plunged recklessly—"if they don't feed you, there's plenty of grub in my shack. Go help yourself. You don't have to go hungry, not while Casey Ryan's got bacon and beans."

"You are one awful good man, Mr. Casey. I don't know how I should thank you," said Hulda, and went her way considerably cheered..

Casey took a chew of tobacco and stared after her, with a queer expression on his face. He was wondering how he was going to pay Hulda Jorgensen's fare to Sacramento. Not even his lucky piece would help him meet this emergency, even if he decided to borrow money on it the unlucky thirteenth time. Sacramento was a long way off—a thundering long way when one hadn't the price of a ticket. The clink in his pocket no longer had the deceptive ring of silver coins; it sounded exactly like a harness snap and a trunk key knocking forlornly together, without so much as a dime to keep them company.

When she had passed from sight, Casey left the Palace porch and made his way to the shack where he "bached" whenever his funds were so low he could not afford to eat in the hotel dining room like a gentleman. The place was clammy with cold, and Casey hurried to start a fire in the cook stove.

"Bill Jackson oughta dig up the price of a ticket, by rights," he muttered carpingly, while he scooped up a bucket of snow outside and set it on the stove to melt. "Him grabbin' old Mary's washboiler and tubs, and turnin' the girl out to starve—it sure oughta come outa Bill Jackson's pocket!"

Casey had begun to grin when, the fire going briskly and the melted snow water heating for coffee, he rolled a cigarette, lighted it and went out into the bleak dusk. Three minutes later he breezed into the combination office and barroom of the Mountain View and slammed the door behind him, while he stamped the snow from his overshoes. Bill Jackson, a huge man whose head was perfectly flat in the back, turned ponderously from hanging a smoky oil lamp over the shabby pool table.

"Why, hello, Casey!" Bill greeted with a pur in his voice—the empty room possibly explaining the warmth of his greeting. Casey Ryan was a free spender, and as such to be welcomed by a man as grasping as Bill Jackson was reputed to be.

Casey swaggered up to the stove and spread his arms, embracing its warmth. They talked of the deep snow, of the blocked trails, of the wind that drifted the cuts full behind the snow shovelers up on the summit. Presently, when gossip focused upon Meadow Valley and its inhabitants, Casey gave Bill a knowing grin.

"I'm laying for that bunch that hangs out at the Palace," he said, lowering his voice to a confidential note and casting a wary glance toward the door. "Big game on; but my margin ain't quite big enough to make a cinch of it. That

bunch of tinhorns has got to be cleaned, and cleaned right. I got wise to their system, now. It's crooked. I caught signals and so on—but I never let on, Bill, and don't you yeep. Say, the minute I get hold of another twenty or so, I sure will clean 'em down to the last dime! You better come over when I start, Bill, and watch Casey Ryan put the fear uh the Lord into them would-be gamblers to a fare-ye-well!" Bill Jackson wouldn't go, as Casey knew well enough and counted upon. There was a feud between the rival hotels, which would take care of that mischance.

"I couldn't leave the office, here," Bill replied, licking his lips. "But, say! Let me stake yuh, Casey. Glad to help yuh out any time yuh run short. Yuh can pay it back any time. Here. Yuh take twenty-five, anyway—and come back and tell me how yuh made out. They're a pretty scaly bunch over there. Time somebody showed 'em up." Bill was peeling bank notes off his roll, which was of a size to make Casey's mouth water.

Casey swore afterward that it was the thought of Hulda Jorgensen and her breakfast of two pancakes that morning which turned his conscience face to the wall. The way Bill Jackson hurried into the trap merely struck Casey as a streak of luck. He had expected to strike Bill for a loan; to have the money thrust upon him was what he called Providence.

"Well—hadn't thought of throwin' the hooks into 'em to-night, but I guess the sooner the quicker, Bill. Thanks. I'll take it along. Might come in handy. And I won't forget this, Bill." Casey stuffed the money into his pants pocket —to the probable astonishment of the harness snap and the trunk key—and breezed out with a smile on his face.

Whistling shrill accompaniment to his satisfaction, he walked in his own tracks to his door and threw it open. And just there it sounded as if an invisible hand got him by the throat and cut the whistle short on an ascending note. He shut the door behind him and stood against it, swallowing his Adam's apple which wouldn't stay down. There sat Hulda Jorgensen, with her feet in Casey's oven and her plaid shawl slipped down to her shoulders. Slow tears trickled down her pallid cheeks.

"Mis' Pederson don't have room I shall stay by her," she announced woefully. "Her man is come home mad from shoveling snow on the summit. Shilblains he has got so bad he is swearing all the time. He says the bills for grub is too big already and I shall not stay. So I come here like you say."

Casey's mouth opened, but he did not say a word. The girl was half starved, by the look of her, and he went doggedly to work cooking supper for two instead of one. Not once did he look straight at Hulda as he would have looked at a man. He tried not to look at her at all, but in spite of himself his glance kept sliding slantwise toward her, wondering if any one had seen her come in.

"Set up and eat," he invited gruffly, at last, and poured strong black coffee for Hulda, pushing the sugar can toward her.

Casey had been hungry with a healthy man's appetite, but now he could not eat. He sat appalled before the repressed voraciousness of the girl. When he urged second and third helpings upon her, she took them with awkward shyness and ate with stealthy greed when she thought he was not looking. Casey got up and tried to force a twenty-inch stick of wood into a sixteen-inch fire box, which gave him a tangible excuse for swearing under his breath.

"You are an awful good man, Mr. Casey," Hulda blurted without warning, while she sopped half of her fourth biscuit in the gravy on her plate. "Yimmie Miller tells me I should be crazy for coming here. He's mad on me already that I should come."

"Jimmie Miller, huh?" Casey reached

up and rumpled the sandy hair on top of his head, as if he were pushing his hat forward—a motion born of his disgust with the whole situation.

"Ja. Yimmie Miller says, 'Where are you going, my pretty jung maid,' and I tell him it shall be none of his business but I am coming to tell Mr. Casey something. Always Yimmie Miller laughs and says something to make a yoke, but this time he acts mad and says I shall be crazy in the head."

Casey rose and reached for his hat.

"If you ain't got any other place to stay, you can use this shack and the grub," he said sourly. "I guess it won't poison you—and you can tell 'em I won't be back." Whereupon he went out and tramped off through the snow—but he did not whistle as he went.

Meadow Valley was at supper, and the Palace saloon was deserted by every living thing save a great Airedale, left by the stove to guard the place. But there were no strangers in Meadow Valley, and Jack McCord, the proprietor, considered the place as safe as if he were present. Ordinarily it would have been; but Casey Ryan was in no ordinary mood. He made straight for the show case, where cigars, pipes, tobacco, candy and playing cards were stacked with little regard for order, Jack McCord's habit being to reach in and paw around until he found what his customer wanted.

Casey helped himself to half a dozen decks of cards, scrawled a memorandum which said that Casey Ryan owed the Palace for cigars one dollar, put it where Jack would not be likely to find it too soon, and went out with a sag in his coat pocket.

He went from there to the stable, where his stage horses were growing sleek in sheltered idleness, lighted the lantern that hung just inside the door and shut himself into the feed room. A makeshift bunk was built against the wall, and there was an old stove, and a few boxes sometimes used for chairs. Casey put the lantern on a box, pulled another up beside the bunk, spread out the decks and went to work. The seals bothered him most, but the rest of it, though he swears he never had marked a card before in his life, was easy enough though exacting.

His fingers were numb when finally he slipped the last deck into its cover and carefully stuck the seal back in place. He had committed a crime, but he says he was justified. At least, when he thought of the starved look in Hulda Jorgensen's face, it seemed to him that Meadow Valley deserved all he could give it.

The Mountain View barroom showed a sprinkling of patrons when he entered. Two shaggy old prospectors, driven in by the storm, were blundering through a game of pool, and a pinochle quartet had taken possession of a card table. Casey went in and sat down at an empty table in the corner behind the stove, and presently Bill Jackson came over and leaned with his knuckles on the table.

"Make your killin' yet?" he asked in a discreet undertone, and jerked a thumb toward the Palace, down the street a block.

"Naw." Casey shuffled his new deck and dealt a layout of solitaire. "Jaspers I'm layin' for had quit playin'. I'll catch 'em to-morra, though." He turned up a black queen, laid it below a red king, looked the spread over with his half-shut eyes and began slipping the cards by threes off the deck in his hand.

"Want to try a little game of stud?" Bill considered solitaire a sheer waste of time.

"You'd be taking too long a chance, Bill." Casey cocked a humorous eye up at him. "I play nothing but marked cards, and I keep five aces in my sleeve, always."

"Yuh can have six, and I'll beat yuh to a jelly," said Bill, laughing. "I'm some card sharp m'self, Casey."

"All right, then. If you want to lose the shirt off your back, dig up some chips and come on." Casey grinned up at him provocatively, and Bill hastily lumbered over and got chips. With a grunt and a shake of the head, Casey held out the new deck, and Bill cut low and took the deal.

"Wait a minute! I forgot to tell you, Bill—they're marked," Casey warned him, over the making of a cigarette.

"If they ain't they will be," laughed Bill, his great body shaking at the joke. "My eyeteeth's full growed and hard to pull. They was cut while your maw was feelin' in yours for your first baby tooth." He laughed with so great a bellow that the pinochle game halted for a moment and the two prospectors wrangling at the pool table cackled in sympathy. Bill Jackson thought he could afford to laugh; for Casey Ryan was counted an honest man, though hard to get along with.

"All right; but I've got a grudge ag'inst you, Bill, and I'm sure going to cheat you blind. Don't beller around afterward that I never warned you," Casey persisted.

Whereupon Bill Jackson clapped hands to the table with a great "Haw! Haw!" before he started the deal. The pool game stopped abruptly, and the two prospectors came over to see what the joke was about. But by that time Casey had settled down to playing, with his hat canted over his right eyebrow and a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. The time for levity had passed, so far as he was concerned.

The luck seesawed for an hour. When Casey lost, which at first he did, Bill Jackson taunted him unmercifully. But when the audience drifted away to other pastime, Casey settled down to the grim business which had brought him there, and his luck turned.

Late that night, Casey let himself into the feed room, and by the light of the lantern he counted his winnings. They would have been more if Bill had not taken alarm after his third helping of chips. Still, Casey regarded with approval the heap of coins and crumpled bills on the box beside the lantern. He had exactly ninety-nine dollars and fifty cents, having won seventy-five dollars that night from Bill, and having treated Bill afterward at the bar.

He counted out seventy-five dollars for Hulda Jorgensen, mostly in bills which left a pleasant jingle in his pocket—a jingle that did not sound in the least like a harness snap and a trunk key knocking together.

After that he made his way to the Palace in the dark, let himself in at the door—which was never locked in winter—and returned to the show case all but two of the decks of cards he had purloined earlier in the evening. He hoped Jack McCord had not missed them. He still had certain plans that concerned several men in the town—he had not learned yet to let ill enough alone.

His last waking thought, as he lay huddled under horse blankets in the bunk in the feed room, was how he would get even with Jimmie Miller for what he had said to the Jorgensen girl.

He awoke late in the morning with a grin, remembering what price Bill Jackson had paid for two pancakes. Casey never had felt better satisfied with himself than when he waded through fresh-drifted snow to his shack, with the price of a ticket to Sacramento in his pocket. But when he opened the door, the grin was wiped off his face with one startled glance.

A disconcerting air of domesticity pervaded the little room—and Casey was not by nature domestic. The floor was still damp from scrubbing, the stove had been cleaned, the table was set for two, and the coffeepot steamed on the back of the stove. Hulda, sitting awkwardly on the edge of the bunk with her

toes turned in, was darning a pair of socks which Casey had thrown into a corner when they returned from Mrs. Murphy's with larger holes in the heels than when they had left. She looked up and smiled at Casey.

"Your breakfast has been vaiting from two hour," she said.

"I've et," lied Casey. "I just come to bring the money for that trip to Sacramento. Seventy-five dollars—that oughta cover it."

Hulda's eyes popped at the money he laid in her lap. Never in her life had she beheld seventy-five dollars all in one roll of bills. The sight held her gaze hypnotically.

"I think I shouldn't take so moch money by you," she stammered. "I could get a yob and pay you from vages, but you may need it to spend——"

At that moment some one rapped bare knuckles smartly against the door. Before Casey could more than move aside, the door was pushed open and a tall, square woman with a shawl over her head pushed in. The hair rose with a prickle on the back of Casey's neck, for this was Mrs. Murphy, bitter rival of the dead Mary Jorgensen, and certainly no friend to the girl.

"Excuse *me!*" Her eyes darted to the money in Hulda's hands, and clung there, fascinated. "I come over for the wash, but I think I'll be going at wance!" She backed out and slammed the door, with a threat which Casey knew as well as if she had shouted it at him.

Casey waited until she had time to enter her own shack—he was stubborn enough for that—and followed. He thought he could beat Mrs. Murphy to the neighbors and find some decent woman who would take the girl in until the road was opened; but he underestimated Mrs. Murphy.

He went to the Smiths. But Mrs. Murphy had already been there to borrow a cake of soap. From there she waded down the street to borrow a little bluing from Mary Schwab and a few clothespins from a Yankee widow. Always a door ahead of Casey Ryan, who found the social deck of Meadow Valley stacked against Hulda Jorgensen and himself.

Within an hour Casey had declared war on the town. He began by slapping a sly grin off the face of Mrs. Murphy's husband, and immediately there was trouble between two Irishmen. Murphy went home with one eye closed and a front tooth loose, but he left behind him an apology for the gossiping tongue of his wife. So there were high words that day under the Murphy roof.

With a dangerous gleam in his pale, straight-lidded eyes, Casey sat later at a card table in the Palace, playing Chinese solitaire, while he awaited further developments. His knuckles were skinned, and one eyebrow bristled with startling ferocity over the swelling caused by a glancing blow from Murphy's fist, but he had not weakened a hairbreadth in his purpose.

He did not play solitaire long. As the idle men of Meadow Valley drifted in, looking for distraction from the monotony of their snowbound existence, a row of chairs encircled the round table, and piles of chips in red, white and blue stood before each player.

Casey Ryan began to enjoy himself and to place more black marks against his name in the book where such things are written.

At breakfast time next morning, when the game broke up and the players gloomily waded off to their homes, Casey bethought him of Hulda, sitting alone all this while in the shack. The weather had turned cold again and she would probably be out of wood, and he didn't give a darn what the town biddies thought about it, the girl wasn't going to starve or freeze while she waited for open roads.

So, sunken eyed from loss of sleep,

but with triumphant stride and his pockets full of his winnings, Casey also waded over to the only place he could call home. And there again the grin froze upon his Irish face.

Hulda had her hair frizzed from eyebrows to ears. She wore a dark-red dress, all plaited and ruffled and looped intricately in an old, old-fashioned overskirt, and a bright-blue ribbon was tied in a bow under her chin. Around her flat waist was tied a starched white apron, ornamented at the hem with knitted lace six inches deep, a deer with antlers and staring holes for the eyes occupying each scallop.

"All day yesterday I been vorking hard," she told him, with a self-conscious smirk. "Mid some of the money I buy tub and boiler and I vash all your clothes and mend them yust so good as maw could do. Jimmie Miller sees me shop wood and is take the ax from me and shop a big pile and bring in——"

"He's got his nerve," growled Casey. "What's he snoopin' around here for, anyway?"

"Yust to make more yokes," Hulda blandly told him. "I vant my shest from Bill Yackson's shed, and Yimmie Miller should borry a sled and bring to me. I tell him you are so good for letting me stay by this place I could cry my eyes out."

"You needn't," Casey told her dryly. "Here's another twenty-five dollars. Don't go and spend it in this darn town. Keep it till you get to your sister's."

"It's my Aunt Olga," Hulda carefully corrected him.

"Well. And don't tell nobody I give you the money. There's enough tongues waggin' now."

"If I put it in maw's shest," said Olga slyly, "I shall say I take it from maw's shest and it don't be a lie. You been so good to me, Mr. Casey——"

"Aw, fergit it!" growled Casey, and went off to the Mountain View for breakfast, quite forgetting to chop wood as he had intended. Or perhaps he thought Jimmie Miller had cut enough to last another day. At any rate, he rented a room from Bill Jackson, repaid the twenty-five dollars Bill had lent him and won another thirty before he went off to bed. So his pockets still sagged with ill-gotten gains and his conscience still had its face turned to the wall and slept uncomfortably.

At dark, when he struggled back to consciousness, he made straight for the bar and took a stiff drink to drown the memory of the dream.

When he plowed through fresh-fallen snow to the Palace, the first man he met was Jimmie Miller, who wheeled from the show case with a startled look, gave an embarrassed laugh and invited Casey to have a drink with him. Since Jimmie had been one of the chief mourners at the poker game the night before, Casey wondered a little at this sudden friendliness; but having plans of his own he hid his astonishment and accepted, treating the house afterward as a matter of diplomacy and not because he liked the bunch.

"Who wants to try their luck at a little poker?" Jimmie asked cheerfully, his glance sliding toward Casey. "I feel like I can win back that fifty I lost—and as much more as there is in sight. 'Don Jo-ann,' wanta try me a whirl?"

Casey gave him an unwinking stare from his pale-gray eyes.

"Yeah," he assented ominously. "And when I'm through with the skinnin' I'm goin' to knock seven kinds of tar outa you for callin' names."

"Will, eh? That goes with me, old-timer. Bring us a new deck of cards, Jack. And everybody stay outa the game. This lays between me and Don Jo-ann exclusive. I play nothin' but marked cards, and I keep five aces up my sleeve. I got a grudge against Don Jo-ann here, and I'm going to cheat him blind. If he bellers around afterward, I'll lick him till he can't stand up."

"One more yip outa you and I won't wait till the game's over," Casey said darkly. But a distinct prickly sensation had crawled up Casey's spine. How had Jimmie Miller—but then he remembered the old prospectors and the pinochle players, who had listened to his boasting the other night, when he and Bill Jackson had begun to play at the Mountain View. Some one had repeated his words, and Jimmie Miller thought he could rattle him now by quoting them almost word for word. It didn't matter.

Casey cast an eye at the new deck Jack McCord laid upon the table between them, and a gleam of satisfaction lighted his eyes briefly. Jimmie Miller was due for the jolt of his life. Knowing what he knew, Casey rolled and lighted a fresh cigarette, while Jimmie tore open the package without so much as looking at the seal. A grinning, expectant ring formed around the table.

Half an hour later Casey's jaw had squared pugnaciously, and his cigarette dangled cold between his lips. The cards were not running as they should. What should have been a king was not a king, and more than one ace had somehow turned into a deuce or a trey when they fell face up. He remembered now that he had been cold and hurried in the harness room that first evening of his criminal career, and it looked as though he had been careless, too. So he called for a new deck, eying it sharply when it came. His facial muscles relaxed, and he reached for a match and relighted his cigarette. It was all right. He hadn't lost so much that he couldn't win it all back and more, too, he decided, while he counted his chips swiftly. One deck might be spoiled for his purpose, but certainly not two. He knew what he knew, and now he hitched his chair closer and settled down in grim earnest to play.

But presently a dazed glare came into his eyes. It became evident to his harried mind that he did not know what he knew. He dared not examine the cards too closely, with all those watchful eyes upon him, but he could have sworn that Jimmie's hole card was a queen, and it wasn't a queen at all but a jack, which gave Jimmie a full house against Casey's two pair, kings high. The mistake cost Casey dear. Little moist beads oozed out upon his face, though the room was not overwarm. But he continued to play, with a dogged persistence that drained his pockets, in spite of a third new deck and Casey's faith in his own evil cunning.

That night Casey did something he never had done before; he pulled his gold nugget, shaped crudely like a horseshoe, from his pocket, and pushed it into the pot, backing his belief that he still knew what he knew in spite of several lapses.

Jimmie Miller swiftly matched the bet with fifteen blue chips—since every one knew the value of Casey's lucky piece—and imperturbably flipped his hole card face up. It should have been a jack, but it wasn't. It was another ace, making three for Jimmie. Casey's full house, jacks high, meant nothing at all to Jimmie. As he reached out with both arms to rake in the pot, he thrust his face close to Casey's glowering visage, grinning derisively.

"You marked 'em all wrong, old-timer," he whispered gloatingly. "I ain't told a soul—yet. Let this be a lesson to you!"

Casey answered that taunt with his fist, as Jimmie might have known he would. Chips and nugget went flying to the far corners of the room as the table went over, and the men of Meadow Valley backed off and watched as wild a fight as ever had been staged in the Palace saloon. It did not last long.

Jimmie Miller had never fought in Meadow Valley before, and had there been any betting the money would all

have been against him when he tackled Casey Ryan. It would have been lost, however. Jimmie Miller proved to be a boxer well up toward the top of the amateur class, and Casey was licked with astonishing thoroughness.

They threw cold water on him and brought him to life, brought him a towel and obligingly found his hat for him, and Casey went weaving up the path to the Mountain View, dragged his aching body up the steep stairs and went to bed. As he crawled between the blankets the harness snap and the trunk key gave a forlorn clink.

For two days and two nights did Casey remain in seclusion, while his conscience mocked him and repeated senseless jingles that had to do with honesty and like virtues. Even Bill Jackson, climbing the stairs three times a day to proffer sympathy and hot food, seemed innocently bent on driving the lance of remorse deeper into his soul. Only the thought of the good he had done for Hulda Jorgensen held him back from utter self-disgust; for Casey Ryan was an honest man at heart.

Only for Hulda, he would have confessed to Bill Jackson and returned the money he had got by cheating. But the girl's plight restrained that impulse. Hadn't Bill Jackson cheated Hulda out of her mother's shack and the few sticks of furniture she possessed? Hadn't he turned the girl out, hungry and without a job in the dead of winter? Casey looked at the piggish eyes and heavy jowls of the man, and steeled his heart against reparation. Maybe he had cheated Bill—he admitted that he had —but, after all, he had only got back what Bill rightfully owed Hulda. And the girl needed the money more than any one Casey could think of.

That line of reasoning set him to thinking of the girl. He wondered if the grub was holding out. Hulda was what Casey would call a "heavy feeder." Maybe she was out of wood, too. It was not likely that Jimmie Miller would trouble himself again to go over and chop wood. He only did it that time to spite Casey, as he now saw very clearly. Wanted to pump the girl, too, about that money the Murphy woman had seen her holding. Casey dragged himself from bed, dressed and went to his shack.

Hulda, with a plumed hat on her head and a cheap astrakhan coat buttoned to her chin, was kneeling beside the big chest that had been her mother's, trying to press down the lid so that the hasp would slip over the staple.

"O-oh, I thought it vos Yimmie!" she cried, getting up to greet Casey. "I vant to tell you before I go, tanks for the house to stay in. Now I——"

"Before you go? Go where?" barked Casey.

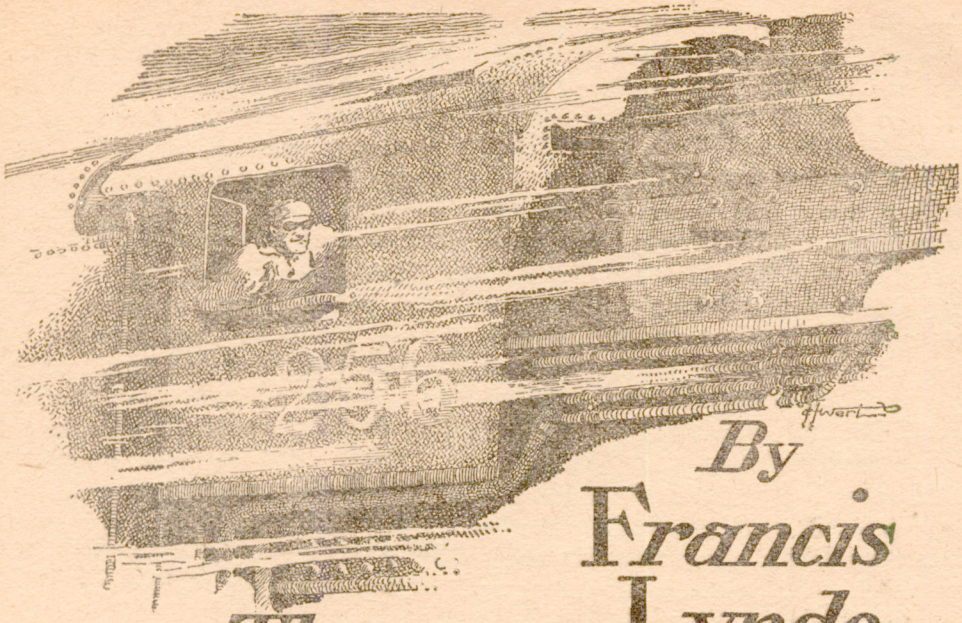
"I guess you don't know I yust been married to-day," she said bashfully. "Yimmie said vy should ve vait, so he goes by skis for license and minister, and ve get married from one hour ago. Look at vat Yimmie he give me for present! Such a big nugget! Yimmie says I shall have it made for breastpin."

"I thought you was so crazy to go to Sacramento," Casey said heavily, his eyes avoiding the nugget.

"Oh, I should tell you about the money. Yimmie don't know you give it to me. I think he should be too yealous if I tell him. So he says he should buy the barber shop down by the Palace and ve shall live there. But if you say I should give back the money——"

"Aw, keep the damn stuff!" said Casey, and went out and slammed the door.

No man need ever fear that Casey Ryan will mark a card or cheat his fellowmen, either for profit or revenge. Nor, if you take his word for it, will he ever go out of his way again to help widow or orphan. But that, I know, is a bluff; his heart is soft as ever—but his morals, in card playing, they are made of sterner stuff than before these events which I have just related.



By Francis Lynde

The Blue Envelope

By the author of "The Easy Mark," "The Split Canyon Holdup," Etc.

Roaring through mountain passes, across gaps, bridges, around deadly curves, he sped his engine, No. 256, the lives and money of men in his hands—while behind came another engine, steadily gaining. And he did what he did because of something in his past that he had to wipe out.

HOW he came to be known from end to end of the Ophir Division of the Short Line as "Ride 'Em, Cowboy" is a mystery, unless it got started from his well-known propensity to make up time when his train got off schedule. Out in the desert beyond Red Butte there is a flag station called Wood Lake, so named, the section boss on that part of the line will tell you, because there is neither a tree nor a body of water as big as a duck pond within a day's ride in any direction. It may be that Ride 'Em got his nickname on the same principle of negation, for it is a matter of record that he couldn't tell a horse from a mule. Incidentally, his pay-roll name was John Miggs; but that is negligible.

Barclay, route agent for the express company doing business over the Short Line, was a witness in the matter of the mule; or, rather, in the matter of Ride 'Em's inability to distinguish between a mule and a horse. Having frequent occasion to go back and forth over the Ophir Division, Barclay was riding in the engine cab one day when Ride 'Em's train was a few minutes behind time. Coming down the Grindstone Mountain grade a bunch of horses grazing on a slope above the right of way took fright and stampeded, and after racing the train for a hundred yards

or so, thundered down upon the track ahead.

Barclay said that Ride 'Em winked solemnly at him, did what he could to check the down-grade flight of the belated train, and shouted across the cab: "Bet I kill one of 'em in spite of hell and high water." And so he did—an animal that looked to Barclay very much like a remarkably fine specimen of a thoroughbred Norman Percheron draft horse.

But not so to Ride 'Em. When the train was halted to take account of the damages—animal and, possibly, mechanical—Ride 'Em climbed down from the cab to look the carcass of the gigantic thoroughbred over, with an appraising eye.

"I knowed he'd stay on till he got killed," he observed, in his slow Tennessee mountain drawl. "There ain't nothin' on top o' the green earth so ornery as a derned mule." And it was as a mule that he reported the killed animal.

It was only by chance that Barclay happened to be riding on the engine at the time of the accident on Grindstone; but it was not altogether by chance that he and Ride 'Em met in the division superintendent's office when the engineer was called in to explain the "mule." Superintendent Caldwell had learned that Barclay was a witness to the killing.

There was the sharpest possible contrast between master and man, as the two stood facing each other across the office railing. The superintendent was big and square shouldered, with a close-trimmed, iron-gray beard, a fighting jaw, and eyes that shot cold fire at a delinquent. As for Ride 'Em, the high altitudes had done nothing to change his appearance. Barclay, himself Tennessee born, knew the type—slender, wiry, slow moving save in emergencies, with a face that could be as blank as a dead wall at its owner's need, but which could also light up with an expression that was handsomely childlike when the occasion demanded.

"How about that Percheron of Byram's that you ran down and killed last week—the one you reported as a mule?" the superintendent barked out.

Ride 'Em looked up with a smile that would have softened any heart save that of a division tyrant.

"Now, who'all's been a-lyin' to you about that ornery old mule, Cap'n Caldwell? Er have they got out a new breed o' mules that they're a-callin' by that name you named?"

The superintendent tried to withstand the childlike smile and the honeyed appeal, tried to stand the offender in his proper place.

"It won't do, Miggs," he returned gruffly. "I can't have you killing stock right and left every time you take a train over the road. This time you've stuck the company for more money in damages than you'll earn in a year. That 'mule' of yours was an imported Norman stallion. Barclay, here, says you did what you could to keep from hitting it after the horses were on the track, and I'll take his word for it and let you off once more. But if you don't quit killing stock, you'll quit running an engine on this railroad. That's all there is about it."

After Ride 'Em had been dismissed, Barclay ventured to put in a good word for him with Caldwell.

"Oh, I understand all that," said the superintendent. "You can't tell me anything about Miggs as an engineer. He's a good runner, but he has two pretty bad failings; he will kill stock, and he will call 'em all 'mules' after the fact. In all my experience with him, he has never yet killed a horse—much less a thoroughbred. If he doesn't reform I shall have to make an example of him. They call him Cowboy, but I don't believe he'd know the difference between a broncho and a sheep."

The Nevada Short Line being one of the first of the railroads to adopt the personnel system, keeping a file, so far as was possible in a region where there

was much drift and not a few changed names and identities, of the personal records of its employees, Barclay called the moment propitious for a bit of digging into Ride 'Em's past.

"I suppose you have Miggs docketed and filed. What's his history?" he asked.

The superintendent laughed.

"You tell, if you can. I inherited him from the construction force. When we were building this line, Chief Ackerman had him running steel and material trains. The men say he is a Tennessee mountaineer—and further they don't say; can't say, I imagine. In spite of his easy-going, childlike ways, he is as close mouthed about himself and his past as he is about the 'mules' he is forever killing on the right of way."

"I asked because he is something of a puzzle to me," Barclay went on.

"On which side?"

"All around, you might say, but chiefly on the money side. Do you happen to know what he does with his wages?"

The division tyrant shook his head.

"Blows 'em at the Gold Hill gambling shops, like the majority of them, I suppose?"

"Not at all," said the route agent. "Every pay day he hands me what, I take it, must be the greater part of his pay and has me express it, in my own name, to a little town in the Tennessee mountains."

"H'm—he does, eh? Keeping up the old folks at home, would you say?"

"I thought so at first, but later I began to doubt it. He is too punctilious about it. The express order is always made payable to a man named Abel Johnson. I asked him once who Johnson was, and he said he was the 'squire.'"

"Humph! that's odd. Not much like the majority of 'em, saving his money that way. Now that you speak of it, I've noticed that he never takes a layoff, and he is keener than any Yankee to get in all the overtime he can. I wonder what he is paying for?"

"I have wondered, too," Barclay put in. "Whatever it is, it is keeping him with his nose to the grindstone. And it must be pretty binding, because I believe it is the only thing that is keeping him from getting married."

"Married? Miggs? Who is the girl?"

"Pat Branagan's daughter—the little coffee shooter at the lunch counter in Red Butte."

"So? Well, I'll give him credit for having an eye for good looks."

"It's more than a pretty face in Kittie's case. She's a girl that will make some young fellow a mighty good wife," said Barclay warmly, as he got up to go. He added: "I'm loyal enough to my old home section to hope that Miggs wins out. It's good stock, the Tennessee mountain blood, about as cleanly American as anything we have in these days."

"You may be right, at that," the superintendent conceded. "But if Miggs wants to win out and keep his job, he's got to quit killing Byram's blooded horses under the impression that they are no-account army mules. He has had his warning, and the next thing will be the blue envelope."

It so happened that Barclay's business took him off the Ophir Division for the next fortnight; and when he returned the Brewster-Red Butte train was late and he missed his connection for Ophir at the junction station. Getting a bedtime cup of coffee at one of the little tables in the station lunch room before going to the hotel to put up for the night, he observed that Kittie Branagan served him hastily and mechanically, going quickly back behind the counter to resume her talk with the only late luncher, a man hunched up on one of the high stools opposite the coffee urn.

It was not until he overheard the slow drawl of the man at the counter

that Barclay recognized him as Ride 'Em. Though the two were talking in low tones, the route agent could scarcely help overhearing a part of what was said.

"Don't you think you ought to be telling me, John?" he heard Kittie say, in a tone that was all loving sympathy. "Sure, don't I know that, whatever it is, 'tis worrying the heart out of you?"

"I cayn't tell nobody, Kittie—most of all, not you. I reckon I'd ought to be choked for makin' you care."

"But I do care, and well you know it. Is it—is it another girl, John? "Somebody back there where you came from?"

"No, it isn't that; it's something a heap worse than that—something that'll hold me back from ever askin' a good woman to marry me, Kittie. I've done told you that before."

Silence for a little time, broken only by the clatter and clash of cars in the yard where the night crew was making up the freight, which, as Barclay gathered, was the train Ride 'Em was slated to take out. When the girl spoke again her voice was little more than a murmur, but the route agent heard.

"'Tis breaking the heart of me you are, John, and that's the truth. 'Tis little a woman can't overlook in her man. Have you lived this long without knowing that?"

"I've lived long enough to know that I ain't never goin' to make you face what I've got to face some o' these days, Kittie, girl," was the low-toned reply that Barclay caught. Then: "I reckon you'll know, some day, and then you'll be thankin' Heaven the longest day you live."

It was just then that Ride 'Em's fireman stuck his head in at the door to say that No. 7 was made up and ready to pull out; and a few minutes later Barclay heard the stertorous exhaust blasts of Ride 'Em's big mogul starting the train for its night run to Ophir. He noticed that Kittie Branagan did not come to ask him if he wanted anything else, and when he paid for his cup of coffee at the counter, he saw that her pretty Irish eyes were swimming.

In the matter of "mule" killing, Superintendent Caldwell was not quite as good as his word. It was perhaps a couple of weeks after the midnight episode in the Red Butte lunch room that Barclay came upon Ride 'Em, lounging in the public room of the Miners' Hotel in Ophir; lounging and smoking a corncob pipe, and looking more like a lost dog than like a man taking his ease in his inn.

"Hello, Ride 'Em," he said. "Having your lay-off at this end of the run now?"

The expatriated Tennessean smiled joylessly.

"'Nother one o' them derned mules o' Seth Byram's. Seems like I cayn't take a train over Grindstone nowadays 'thout killin' some o' them."

"Oho! So it's a vacation without pay, is it?'

"Yep; thirty days. Reckoned I might as well wear 'em out up here as down yonder at the Butte."

If Barclay had not chanced to overhear the talk in the Red Butte lunch room two weeks earlier, he might have marveled at the fact that Ride 'Em was voluntarily spending an idle month at a distance of a hundred-odd miles from the girl of his heart. But enough had been said on that occasion to make him understand. The young mountaineer didn't dare to put in the idle month in a town where he would be seeing Kittie Branagan every day. His isolation in the mining town was a more or less heroic sacrifice to whatever it was that was keeping him from marrying.

The autumn frosts were yellowing the aspens on the great hills when Ride 'Em took his run again. Business was rushing on the Ophir Division. A new gold strike in the gulch above the terminus camp was bringing an influx of prospectors, miners and speculators; and

with the industrial army came its camp followers, carrion birds and birds of prey—the irredeemable drift of flotsam and jetsam that the more or less law-abiding East tosses up on the shores of the sparsely policed West.

The men of the transportation line, rejoicing in crowded trains and well-loaded express cars, called it an era of prosperity, paying the cost in sleepless nights and unresting days as best they might. But among all the hungerers and thirsters after overtime and the swollen pay envelope, none was more avid than Ride 'Em. "First in, first out," was the train crew rule on the Short Line, and he never missed a call, not even at times when the working pressure rose to thirty-six continuous hours out of the forty-eight.

It was in the white heat of the mining-excitement rush that he got his blue envelope. In that day and time the Short Line had not yet adopted the practice of paying by check; it was still paying in gold and silver coin from the window of the pay car, catching the employees wherever they were to be found; and it so happened that Ride 'Em got his pay and the fatal envelope at the Ophir end of his run.

Barclay never knew why the young Tennesseean came to him with his grief, but he did; and the look in his eyes was that of a man suddenly stricken down at the moment of potential triumph.

"The super thinks a heap of you, Misteh Barclay; don't you reckon you could get him to take me on again, just for another month?" he pleaded gently. And then, with a curious tremble in his voice: "I'm a-needin' that other month's pay mighty bad, and it's all I'm askin'."

The route agent explained that his influence with the railroad superintendent was only that of a friendly outsider; but Ride 'Em begged so hard that he finally consented to do what he could when he should next see Caldwell.

"Thank yuh mighty kindly," Ride 'Em cut in eagerly. "Yuh can see him right now! He came up in the pay wagon with Misteh Sanders."

Thereupon Barclay went in search of the superintendent. Apart from the young engineer's matter, he was anxious to see Caldwell on his own account and to confer with him. The mine managers at the new gold strike had been foolishly storing their clean-up in the Ophir bank—and thereby putting a premium on a train holdup—until now there was in the bank's vault something like half a million dollars in gold bars and bullion, awaiting safe carriage out of the mountains, and it was to arrange for the shipment of this gold that the route agent had come to Ophir.

Ordinarily, or if the shipment had not been so tremendously valuable, no special arrangement would have been necessary. But within the past few weeks there had been two holdups of trains on the main line by a large and well-organized band of train robbers, and though there was no hint of the presence of the brigands in Ophir, the express company was disposed to be wary.

Arrived at the pay car, which was standing on the station spur, Barclay found the superintendent and Sanders, the paymaster, with the president of the bank in which the gold was stored; and in conference with them there was a stranger who was introduced to Barclay rather indefinitely as Mr. Grigsby, a government man.

"You're the very person we've been waiting for," said Caldwell, adding that he had just sent one of the truck drivers to look for the route agent. "About this gold shipment: Of course, it is the express company's business, but the railroad company stands ready to do anything you may suggest on the side of safety. Mr. Barr, here"—indicating the bank president—"favors the regular train and an armed guard. What is your idea about it?"

Barclay did not hesitate.

"My notion is that secrecy, if we can

manage it, is better than a show of force," he answered promptly. "I have been to see the sheriff, and he says that a guard of such deputies as he could swear in at short notice could not be relied upon at all if there should be a holdup."

The government man nodded his agreement with this, and the bank president asked for Barclay's suggestion as to the means of securing secrecy.

"I'll admit that it is open to certain objections," Barclay began; "and, first of all, it depends upon Mr. Sanders' willingness to help out. It is generally known here in Ophir that this is the end of the pay car's run, and that the car goes back to Brewster from here with no booty in it large enough to tempt the bandits if they are out for the gold shipment. My suggestion is this: As I take it, the pay car will run special in any event; why not make a bluff at loading the bullion on the regular train, and let the pay car follow with the real thing?"

The objections materialized at once. If the bandits were in Ophir, with spies out, the bullion could never be moved from the bank without their knowing it. So said the bank president. But the paymaster demurred because he said he had his wife and sister in the car—they had been visiting in Ophir, and he had arranged to take them home with him on the return run. Even the government man thought the plan would be extra hazardous. The superintendent capped the climax of protest by saying:

"As it happens, it simply can't be done, Barclay. I was just telling Sanders that we'd have to put his car in the regular train for the run as far as Red Butte. We are shy an engineer at this end."

"Miggs?" Barclay queried.

Caldwell nodded.

"He killed another of Byram's pet Normans and I had to let him go."

Here was Barclay's opportunity—and Ride 'Em's.

"Can't you give him another chance?" he said.

The superintendent thought not.

"It would be subversive of all discipline," was his wording of his refusal.

"Yes, I know," Barclay interposed. "But at the same time, he is the man for this emergency. It is quite possible that the undertaking may ask for a good bit of cold nerve, and I'll back a Tennessee moonshiner against the world for that?"

"A what?" said Grigsby, the government man, sharply.

Barclay laughed and corrected himself.

"I said 'moonshiner' when I meant to say 'mountaineer.' Ride 'Em—Miggs—is a Tennesseean, from my own part of the State."

Grigsby drew a notebook from his pocket and began to turn the leaves. The others dropped him out of the discussion, and, by means of a little special pleading, Barclay won his point. The paymaster withdrew his objection; the president of the bank admitted that there might be maybe one chance in a dozen of moving the gold secretly from the bank vaults to the car; and Caldwell sent the pay-car porter with a message to Ride 'Em, directing him to report at once for duty as engineer of the pay car.

With the regular passenger train making ready to leave, the four men were in the midst of the train-time station bustle on the platform when the negro porter came back with Ride 'Em in tow. For once in a way Ride 'Em's no-color eyes had lost their baffling blankness—a heritage from forbears, trained for generations to draw the curtain upon the emotions—and his wiry figure seemed to have taken on a soldierly alertness.

"I allow I ain't nev' goin' to forgit this, Misteh Caldwell——" he began, in his soft, slow drawl.

But the superintendent cut him off brusquely:

"Never mind that. I said I'd discharge you if you killed any more stock, and I did. But I didn't say that I wouldn't hire you over again. Get Engine No. 256 around here on the spur and make her up with the pay car to run special to Red Butte following No. 4. The dispatcher will give you your orders."

Engine No. 256 was standing on a siding in the nearer yards, and Ride 'Em ran to obey. Presently he was backing the light eight-wheeler up to a coupling with the pay car, and, after the coupling was made, Barclay saw him swing down from the fireman's gangway and go to climb the stair to the dispatcher's office to get his running orders.

About that time the regular train pulled out and the platform began to clear of its loungers, and when Ride 'Em came down with his clearance slip in hand and went to climb back on the engine, Grigsby sauntered leisurely after him, and a moment later Barclay saw the government man talking to Ride 'Em as the engineer squatted in the gangway to face him. When Grigsby rejoined the others, he was smiling sardonically.

"You are entirely right," he said to Barclay. "Your fellow Tennesseean is the man for your money. He has just been telling me that he is in need of another month's pay, and I have taken the liberty of assuring him that the express company will see to it that he gets it if he pulls through on this run without—er—let us say, without killing any horses or cattle." And before Barclay could enter any disclaimer to this unauthorized bargaining away of the express company's money, Grigsby turned his back and spoke to Caldwell, saying: "If you don't object, I think I'll make one in your little picnic party down the line."

The plan decided upon for transferring the gold from the bank vaults to the car was not a very brilliant one, but it seemed to be the best that could be devised upon the spur of the moment.

The pay car was a made-over Pullman, fitted up with an office in one end, four staterooms or sleeping compartments, and a kitchen. Sanders, the paymaster, was something of an epicure, and it was a standing joke on the road that he took in supplies for the pay-car kitchen and larder at every stop. Hence, when the covered delivery wagon of a well-known firm of grocers came down to the spur track with hampers for the pay-car kitchen, there was nothing in the proceeding to excite suspicion.

At least, that was what Caldwell and Barclay hoped, and it was what they believed when the transfer of the hampers was safely made, and No. 256, with Ride 'Em at the throttle, was picking her way out of the Ophir yards and preening herself for the circuitous flight down the mountain toward the still more circuitous windings of the track in Tourmaline Canyon. When the flight began, the paymaster was in the central compartment of the car with his wife and sister; the superintendent, who was acting as conductor, was on the engine; and Grigsby and Barclay were standing under the umbrella roof on the observation platform.

"Well, it seems to be a success," Barclay was saying, not without a bit of prideful emphasis, since the plan of transfer had been his own. "If the bandits had any spies at the station, the loading of those boxes of lead ingots into the express car of the regular train was all that was needed to fool them; that and the temporary grounding of all the wires to the west so they couldn't send word ahead of No. 4."

"That remains to be seen," said the government man doubtfully. "Then: "How far is it to the canyon siding by the railroad?"

"It is a long, winding loop to overcome the grade," Barclay said. "Some four miles and a fraction, I believe."

"And by the wagon road?"

"A little more than a mile."

"Precisely." Grigsby pointed to a horseman in a wide, flapping sombrero,

who had just left the town behind and was galloping at breakneck speed down the wagon road which led by a steeper and direct route to the foot of the mountain. "A little more than a mile, you say. "So, if that fellow happens to be galloping to head us off, he can do it easily."

"Good Lord!" Barclay gasped. "You don't think——"

"No, I don't think; I am afraid I know. Five minutes ago, or maybe ten, that fellow was helping the driver of the grocery wagon to unload the—er—vegetables."

It was a moment for action, prompt and decisive, and Barclay was reaching for the bell cord which would call Caldwell back from the engine, when the car gave a sudden lunge and surge and the flight down the winding grade became a mad race.

"You needn't mind," said Grigsby coolly. "Caldwell has seen him."

With the superintendent on the engine and in command, there was nothing for any one else to do. As the descending track swerved away to the left to make the wide sweep that gave it distance—the distance needful to overcome the grade—the two on the observation platform lost sight of the wagon road and the hastening horseman, but there was little doubt in the mind of either as to the nature of his errand. When the wagon road once more came in sight, as it did at the moment when the one-car train was racing down the final mile of its roundabout descent to the canyon level, they saw the man again. There was a blind siding at the canyon portal, with a block-signal tower just below it, and on the siding was a westbound freight which had been held up on the block to let the pay car pass. When they saw the galloping horseman he had reached the canyon level and was racing his mount beside the standing freight, and he had his hat off and was waving it, as if in a signal to somebody on ahead. He had beaten the pay car in the race for the siding, though only by a narrow margin.

"It is well planned, an inside job, so far as their information was concerned," said Grigsby, as the pay car slid down the final incline to the canyon level. "By some means they found out that the gold was to be moved to-day, either on the regular train or some other way, and the bunch is right here at the siding waiting for it. They've already held up the freight, and it will be a miracle if they don't try to ditch us as we run past."

That, indeed, appeared to be the intention, as the two on the rear platform of the pay car could see when they leaned out to look ahead. There was a milling group of men around the freight engine, some of them dragging ties from a pile opposite the siding, with the evident purpose of obstructing the track over which the one-car train was rushing down upon them.

But the time proved to be all too short. Before the first pair of tie carriers could get around the end of the freight train with their burden, Ride 'Em had given the smart eight-wheeler all the power it would take, and the pay car sped past the menace to an accompaniment of scattering rifle shots, and thundered on into the mouth of the canyon.

Just as the lurching treasure car went shrilling around the first of the canyon curve beyond the signal tower, Grigsby and Barclay had a vanishing glimpse of the bandits climbing upon the engine of the waiting freight, evidently meaning to give chase. Grigsby stepped into the office compartment of the car, and came out with a rifle in his hands.

"You may ring up Caldwell now, if you want to," he said to Barclay, shouting to make himself heard above the thunderous drumming of the wheels. "The fight will be at our end of the string from this time on."

They could see the freight engine, black with the figures of men clustering

wherever there were foot and hand-holds, shooting out upon the straight line in hot pursuit.

A mile or so farther on, Caldwell and the paymaster came out upon the hooded platform. The superintendent was cool and grim, and Sanders pale to the ears with very natural alarm.

"Dear me, we didn't fool them at all!" he said, striving, like the brave little man that he was, to speak calmly. "I—I'm very much afraid we are in for it."

"It looks very much that way," said Caldwell. "It probably means a non-stop race all the way to Red Butte—or it would if we could make it. As you all know, there isn't a station this side of the Butte where we could pull up and raise even a corporal's guard to help us make a fight."

"You know both engines," Barclay said. "Can't No. 256, even with the handicap of the car, run away from that heavy freight machine?"

The superintendent shook his head.

"With Miggs driving, and a chance to take water at Tyree or Arroyo, she could do it easily, of course. But with the canyon grades to help, those fellows will most likely push us so hard that we shan't dare stop for water. And as No. 510 carries two gallons of water to our one, our tank will go dry somewhere on the Grindstone Mountain grades."

"But the wires," Barclay broke in. "The alarm will go down the line, and surely some station operator will have wit enough to run out and throw a switch and ditch that following engine!"

Again the superintendent shook his head.

"We may as well look it squarely in the face, Barclay. These bandits are bigger fools than I take them to be if they haven't already dropped a man off to cut the wires."

The Tourmaline Canyon is a comparatively short gorge, cutting a way for its small river through one of the spur ranges of the eastern Timanyonis; and the railroad track, issuing from its lower portal, traverses a parklike valley on its way to the climbing grades of Grindstone Mountain. In this valley there was nothing to obstruct the backward view, and the four men on the rear platform of the pay car were disheartened to see the bandit-laden freight engine shoot out of the canyon mouth only a few brief minutes after the pay car had left it behind.

There were stations in the valley, three of them at wide intervals; and at their passing the superintendent did his best to signal to the telegraph operators on duty. Nothing came of his efforts at the first two; but at Tyree the operator, who had come out upon the station platform at the prolonged blast of the pay-car engine's whistle, seemed to understand what Caldwell's frantic arm wavings meant. At all events, they saw him run for the switch of his single sidetrack, saw him reach the switch and try to unlock and throw it ahead of the onrushing freight engine.

It was a brave attempt, but it failed. Before the man could disengage the lock and turn the switch, the watchers on the pay-car platform heard the distant crack of a rifle and saw the operator stagger backward and roll into the ditch.

Caldwell swore savagely.

"That shows us what we may expect when our time comes!" he rasped.

And Barclay said:

"My Lord! And we have women aboard!"

The superintendent nodded and said:

"Yes, and I've covered that as well as I could. Before I left the engine I gave Miggs his orders. He is to make Summit Siding on Grindstone, if his supply of water will take him that far; and if it comes to the worst, we'll put the women on the engine, cut it loose, and let Miggs take them out of harm's way. As for the rest of us, we'll stay with the car—or, at least, I shall."

There were three affirmatives to go with that vote—Sanders' quavering a

bit. Nevertheless, the little paymaster stumbled into the car to bring out more rifles and ammunition. In those hard-money days the pay car always went well provided with arms.

"Those fellows have got at least one man who knows how to get the most out of an engine," Grigsby remarked, fingering his rifle like a soldier enamored of battle. "If I could only get a fair sight at him——"

The chance came in the doubling of the next gulch head. Ride 'Em had made the turn at the head of the gorge, and the pay-car train was climbing the reverse grade when the freight engine was racing along the other leg of the track toward the doubling curve. Grigsby stood clear of the handrail, and his rifle flicked to his face. The figure of the man who was driving the freight engine was in plain sight across the gorge; he was hanging halfway out of the cab window for the longer look ahead.

Grigsby waited coolly until the engine and the pay-car train, racing now in opposite directions on the opposing slopes of the gorge, came even with each other. At the critical instant the rifle cracked; but instead of the engineer, one of the bandits perched upon the coal in the tender threw up his arms and pitched headlong into the depths of the gulch.

"I'm no good with the rifle any more," said the government man, as calmly as though he had merely taken a shot at a clay pigeon—one clay pigeon—and inadvertently hit another. "I guess we'll have to think up some other way of hindering them."

"If we could drop something on the track to ditch those devils," the paymaster suggested, "or even something that would delay them."

And thereupon the four, with the negro porter and the cook to help, became wreckers, stripping the interior of the pay car of everything that could be dropped upon the track from the rear platform.

As was natural, there was little in the furnishings and equipment of the made-over Pullman of sufficient size and weight to stop or derail a flying locomotive at least, nothing but the small, steel cash safe built into the office compartment. It was Sanders who thought of the safe, and immediately Caldwell smashed the glass of the box containing the accident tools, and with the ax thus obtained attacked the woodwork of the compartment to free the safe.

It did not take long to smash the wooden housing and to demolish the pay-window partition which was blocking the way to the rear door. Then, with six pairs of hands to lay hold of it, the safe was trundled out upon the observation platform, the rear gate was opened, and a pause was made to enable them to choose the most favorable moment for the heaving overboard of the solid-steel obstacle.

Barclay thought that one of the few tangents offered the best chance, arguing that if the safe were dropped on a curve it would be less likely to stay on the track. But the short tangents were few and far between, and it was now evident that the pursuing engine was gradually decreasing the distance between pursued and pursuer. In desperation, they finally pushed the safe overboard, regardless of tangents or curves, and were deeply chagrined to see it carom from the ties and go crashing off down the mountainside, leaving nothing save a couple of broken ties as a result.

"That's that," Caldwell commented briefly; "and we haven't anything else to heave at 'em, unless it's the hot stove in the cook's galley. If Miggs can keep going, we'll reach the summit in another fifteen minutes or so, and our business from this time on is to keep those devils back far enough to give us time to transfer the women at the siding."

Accordingly, when next the storming freight engine came in sight, a rattling

fusillade from the rifles played upon it. Promptly the fire was returned, but there were no casualties. When another chance came, Grigsby knelt on the platform, with Barclay crouching behind him to steady him. The single shot was apparently more effective than the scattering fusillade. Quite distinctly they all saw the glass shatter in one of the front windows of the freight engine's cab—the one on the engineer's side—and immediately the roaring exhausts of the pursuing machine stopped and the speed slackened.

"Great! I believe you got him that time!" said the superintendent, grittingly. "Maybe that will give us the lead we've got to have to make the stop at Summit Siding."

For a few minutes Caldwell's "maybe" seemed to be materializing into a reality. The pursuing engine did not stop, but it slowed down, and when they got their next sight of it coming on, it had dropped back a mile or more from its former position and was well out of rifle shot to the rear. At this, Caldwell turned to Barclay.

"Suppose you go up ahead, Clint, and see how our water is holding out," he rapped out. "That's our handicap, now."

Nodding acquiescence, the route agent entered the wrecked car and made his way forward. In the central compartment Sanders was telling the terrified women of the plan to send them ahead from Summit Siding on the engine, and the wife was pleading with the little man not to stay behind to be killed. Barclay hurried on, and was presently scrambling over the coal in the tender to slide down into the cab of No. 256. The fireman, a young fellow still in his teens, was nursing his fire as one who toils for dear life, and Ride 'Em was standing at his levers, his angular jaw set grimly and the sleepy eyes ablaze with a light that Barclay had never before seen in them. Coming close to Ride 'Em, the route agent shouted his question, bracing himself against the swaying and lurching of the laboring machine.

"How about the water?"

"Hit's plumb gone out o' the gauges, and the tank sucked dry four-five mile back," was the answering shout. Then the Tennesseean asked a question of his own: "How come them fellers've dropped back so fur?"

Barclay explained. The government man had taken a shot at their engineer, and it had evidently hit the mark.

"Say! Don't that beat a hog a-flyin'? Shootin' from a jumpin' train at another one jumpin' all ways for Sunday! But I reckon he's the man that could do it—if anybody could."

"You know him?" said Barclay.

"Done heard tell of him a time or two, back in the old State."

"The superintendent wants to know if you think you can make Summit Siding," the route agent pressed.

"I figger I'm goin' to make it if I have to burn the crown sheet out o' the old machine; and I reckon that's what's goin' to happen. Did the super give yuh any diff'rent orders for me?"

"No. You're to pull up at the siding, cut the car loose, and we'll get the women into the cab. When you get a start down the grade, Caldwell says you can dump your fire, and maybe save your dry boiler by letting it cool down. The grade will carry you halfway to the Butte."

"The super's aimin' for me to leave the car standin' there at the sidin'?'

"That's it—yes. We four will stay with it and make a fight."

"Shucks! There's men enough on that freight puller to eat you-all alive. Don't Misteh Caldwell know that?"

"There is nothing else to do," returned the route agent shortly; "not if we are to let the women get safely away."

Ride 'Em was silent while he was easing the laboring and overheated engine around a hazardous curve; and Barclay,

who knew the mountain line well, was passing the remaining miles to the summit in mental review. There were only a few of them now, and only one more of the deep gulch headings to be doubled around, with the summit sidetrack at the apex of the long climb just beyond the U-shaped doubling.

After the one-car train had flicked around the reverse curve at the gulch head and was climbing the final grade along the western shoulder of the gorge, Ride 'Em pointed across to the track over which they had just passed. Rounding the spur which was the beginning of the other leg of the U came the freight engine, storming the grade at undiminished speed. Ride 'Em pulled his throttle open to the last notch on the quadrant but he was shaking his head soberly.

"I reckon hit ain't no use," he said to Barclay. "We ain't goin' to have no time to transfer them wimmen at the sidin'." Then he spoke sharply to his fireman: "No more coal, Billy. I reckon she's about burned up, as it is."

Though Barclay was no engineer or mechanician, he knew enough about steam boilers to be well aware of the peril portending. If the overheated crown sheet in the fire box should give way suddenly, there would be an explosion that would most likely kill everybody within reach and wreck both engine and car. But the tense figure of the man at the throttle did not relax. As the one-car train shot up the final grade, and the summit cutting and sidetrack came in view, the pursuing locomotive was in plain sight on the opposite side of the gorge of approach. Ride 'Em shut off the steam and applied the brakes, shouting to his fireman as the speed slackened.

"Get a move, Billy!" he yelled; and the boy dropped from the step and raced ahead to throw the switch of the siding.

As Barclay learned afterward, the superintendent's order to Ride 'Em had been to make a flying switch at the summit—this to bring the car and engine side by side for the speedier transfer of the women to the cab. Caldwell was on the forward platform of the pay car, ready to uncouple the engine at the critical moment; but when the time came his nerve failed him, and he shouted to countermand his original order.

"Don't stop—go on!" he bellowed. "We can't make it—they're too near!"

But at this the man became the master.

"I know what-all I'm a-doin'!" the young Tennesseean yelled back, with a fierce oath to cap the assertion. "You break that couplin'!" And when the engine jerked the car for the kick switch it was the superintendent who obeyed.

The pay car, snapped into the siding by the quick jerk, had scarcely passed the clear post, when Ride 'Em sent his engine spinning backward into the cutting and brought it to a brake-shrieking stop.

"Misteh Barclay," he said, "the revenuer allowed you-all'd pay me another month's wages for this trip. You take that and this"—shoving the blue envelope with its unbroken rouleau of gold pieces into Barclay's hand—"and send all of it to Squire Johnson, like you been doin'. You tell him that squares him and me, and say I'll nev' trouble him no more. Now you git off—quick!"

"But you—what are you going to do?" Barclay burst out excitedly.

"I'm a-figgerin' to hit them hell-bent, murderin' holdups right about at the little bridge at the gulch head. Git off, will yuh!" And with that he shoved Barclay out of the fireman's gangway.

The route agent was half stunned by the fall from the engine, but he was still alive enough to spring up and run to see the final act in the grim tragedy. The storming freight engine had passed the bridge and was climbing the hither grade when Ride 'Em launched No. 256 like a stone from a catapult out of the summit cutting. There was a yell of terror from the bandit crew. A colli-

sion on the steep mountainside carried a promise of death for every man involved, and the only possible chance for escape lay in instant flight. The big freight puller buckled and heaved as the man at the levers stopped and reversed it; but the big engine had barely reached the little bridge in the hurried retreat when the flying passenger machine overtook it. There was a wild yell, a fleeting glimpse for Barclay of men flinging themselves into space to escape from their impending doom, a crash that rivaled the thunder of an exploding powder magazine, and the thing was done.

It was late in the afternoon, and the Red Butte wrecking crew had been toiling for hours in the tangle of twisted bridge girders and crushed and battered machinery at the head of the gulch, when they came upon what was left of John Miggs. Barclay and the government man were both among the toilers, and it was Grigsby who helped lift the inert body to the waiting stretcher.

"What's his story?" asked Barclay.

"You called him a moonshiner, and perhaps you spoke better than you knew," said Grigsby briefly. "He and three others, all young fellows, were running a moonshine still in the Tennessee mountains, and one day it was raided. There was a good bit of shooting, and this boy killed one of the officers. An old justice of the peace, Johnson by name, went on his bond, and he weakened at the last and ran away. For years he has been paying the bail bond, and that is how I finally located him."

"He knew you were after him?"

"Not until to-day, when I arrested him just as he was getting on the engine at Ophir. He begged for time to make this one run with the pay car—said he owed it to you; and he gave me his word to go back to Tennessee with me when he had served your turn and Mr. Caldwell's."

"And you trusted him that far?"

"Yes, for I was once a revenue officer in the Tennessee mountains myself, and I know the breed. It will kill a man at the drop of the hat, but it won't lie when it passes its word."

"Yet I don't understand why he didn't take his chance when he had it."

The government man smiled.

"Don't you see?" he said. "It's plain enough when you know the characteristics of the mountaineer. It was the blue envelope for him in either case, and he chose to take it here instead of in the electric chair in Tennessee. That's all."

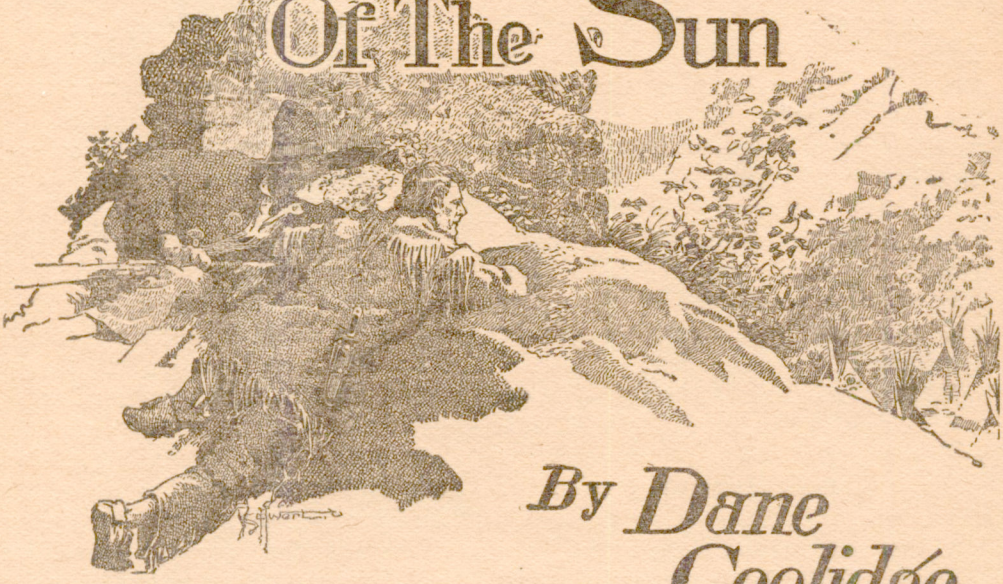
But for once in a way the astute and tireless government detective was wrong. Dipping deeply into his heritage —reserves of tough vitality to be tapped only by those whose race has lived and persisted where weaker strains would have perished—Ride 'Em, nursed in the Red Butte railroad hospital by a devoted Kittie Branagan, finally recovered, surrendered himself to Grigsby, and went back to Tennessee to face his fate.

But at his trial it was proved beyond a shadow of doubt that it was not his bullet which had slain the raiding deputy, and he was cleared by a jury which calmly disregarded the fact of his lawbreaking on other counts. Further, his job on the Ophir Division was waiting for him when he returned; and so was Kittie of the eloquent Irish eyes. It was a month or more after his wedding day, when, once again, Barclay, the route agent, rode down the western grades of Grindstone Mountain in the engine cab with him. As on more than one former occasion, a bunch of the Byram horses raced the train and finally swarmed upon the track ahead. Ride 'Em shouted across the cab to his guest.

"There's them derned mules o' Seth Byram's ag'in, a-layin' for me, same as ever. But this time"—slapping on the air—"I ain't a-goin' to hit nary mule, not if I have to make flat wheels under ever' last car in the string!"

And he didn't.

THE Gateway Of The Sun



By Dane Coolidge

IN FOUR PARTS—PART IV.

Author of "The Law West of the Pecos," Etc.

A magnificent fight—a handful of soldiers against hundreds of Comanches—and the glorious conclusion of Boone Helms' tireless quest for Luz Hautcœur.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BUGLES.

NOT since that fatal day when a pillar of fire had ascended from sacked Haut Cœur had Boone Helms gazed on its ruins. The walls of the Casa Grande stood gaunt and blackened still, but the long rows of adobe houses which surrounded the old plaza had been reroofed to make quarters for the troops. A sentry stood erect outside the front gate; there were glimpses of pacing troopers within; and, as Boone was led in to the officer of the guard, he saw that nothing had changed. D Troop had been molded to the will of a martinet—it was a reflex of Gildersleeve himself.

"This man says," interpreted Boone, "that he's found thousands and thousands of Comanches, right down in the Canadian bottoms. He wants to see Captain Gildersleeve."

"Yes! Yes!" added the Mexican. "And the *niña*, Luz, is there! Tell him that I, Ramon Baca, say that."

"Come with me," said the lieutenant, rising up with a jerk.

A few moments later they stood before the captain.

"What does this man want?" he demanded shortly, as Baca tried to pour out his tale. Once more Boone became his interpreter.

"He says," he explained, "that there's a big camp of Comanches, down on the Canadian where he took his sheep. And while he was watching them he saw a white woman come out whom he thinks is Luz Hautcœur."

"My Lord!" exclaimed Gildersleeve, suddenly rising from his chair, and, without questioning Baca further, he began to shout orders, meanwhile beckoning the Mexican to wait. Out in the plaza the bugles were blowing shrilly, officers and sergeants rushed to and fro, and when all had been put in motion for a hurried departure the captain turned abruptly on Boone.

"Helms," he said, "you're a deserter from the scouts, and by rights should be placed under arrest. But your services are needed as interpreter and guide, so your desertion will be overlooked."

"Desertion—hell!" scoffed Boone. "Did I sign any papers? Colonel Latimer put me down as a government scout so I could serve as a guide for the troops."

"Your name was on the roster," responded Gildersleeve severely, "and technically you are under arrest. But this is a great emergency, and all I ask is your coöperation. The other affair can wait."

"Do you think," inquired Boone, "that this Mexican is telling the truth? He says he saw tepees—and no war party of Comanches would bring along their women and camp."

"Pero si!" protested the sheep owner. "Many tepees, many *Indios!* I see white woman—leetle woman—jes' like Luz Hautcœur! I think thees Espejo, sure!"

"It is my duty," rapped out Gildersleeve, "to investigate this report. And if this Mexican can lead us to the camp of Espejo you may tell him I will pay him liberally!"

He hurried away, and Boone turned to the Mexican, who from the first had regarded him resentfully.

"He says," he began, "if you lead him to Espejo's camp he will pay you, and pay you well. But listen, amigo; if you will take *me* to Luz Hautcœur I will give you a thousand dollars!"

"In gold?" inquired the sheep owner, his eyes gleaming covetously.

Boone nodded, though his face was grim.

"But I do not believe," he added, "that you saw any Comanches. Did you notice any pictures on their tents?"

"Yes—one!" exclaimed Baca. "On the biggest tent of all. It was an eagle, with both wings outspread."

"An eagle!" echoed Boone, and like a flash it came over him that the Mexican might be telling the truth. For the eagle was the totem that Espejo had on his shield when he had marched to the attack on Haut Cœur. Yet why should Espejo, with all the wilderness to hide in, make his camp almost at their door? For in one night Boone and his trappers could ride down the Canadian and attack him at the peep of dawn. Yet why not—for Espejo had never shown fear; and some madness, some jealous rage against the man that Luz still loved, might tempt him to ride in and strike. They were indeed in danger, if this Mexican spoke the truth, and there were only eight men at the fort.

"Captain Gildersleeve," he began, as the captain returned, "I begin to think this Mexican has really seen Espejo's camp. He may be right, after all, and——"

"Of course he's right," cut in Gildersleeve. "You were a fool to ever doubt it. Espejo has come back to wipe out this garrison and march up the canyon to attack Taos. But D Troop was stationed here to prevent just such a catastrophe. We'll march on his camp in two hours."

"Two hours!" repeated Boone, and then he smiled bitterly. "If you'd marched that way before, when I rode down to Fort Hancock——"

"Mr. Helms," spoke up Gildersleeve, "kindly remember your position and refrain from criticizing your superiors. You are only a government scout.

Please confine yourself to your duty, which is to find out what this Mexican knows."

"Very good, sir!" mocked Boone, snapping into a salute; and with the Mexican in his charge he led the way to the kitchen, where he fed him and quizzed him at once.

"But *you* know me," protested the sheep owner, now eager to please. "I am Ramon Andrade Baca, the big sheepman of Mora, and all that I have told you is true. I lay hid among the bushes and looked down into this bottom land, where, but for the grace of Heaven, I might have driven all my sheep. But I am a careful man, you understand, taking nothing for granted; and while my herders followed behind I rode ahead on my burro to look out the land for a camp.

"But suddenly on the wind, which was blowing from the south, I caught the smell of an Indian camp. I smelled the smoke, I smelled the meat, I smelled the Indians themselves; yet I could not believe it was so. Only a week before I had ridden past this spot and had seen nothing but a few bull buffalo. But now I hid my burro and crept down an arroyo until I came to the edge of the bluff. There was the camp, hundreds of tepees, with women and children everywhere, and down the river, eating the grass that I had intended for my sheep, were thousands and thousands of horses.

"I can forgive you now for not believing me at first, for hardly could I believe it myself. As I lay there watching, I saw this white woman come out and look around as she went down to the river. It was Luz Hartcœur, I know, though she was dressed like an Indian. She was little, like her father, and when she walked it was different —like one who had known the feel of shoes."

"Ramon," burst out Boone, "I ask ten thousand pardons for ever doubting your word. You have a stout heart and a keen eye, and if you lead me to this place I shall always count you my friend."

"But the thousand dollars, in gold!" cried Ramon, in dismay. "Surely the señor has not forgotten his promise so soon!"

"I will pay you," answered Boone, and smiled.

Here was a man after his own heart for an errand of this kind, for he thought more of the money than of the dangers that he faced—and he had promised to lead him to Luz. Galloping back to the fort, Boone rushed into his bare room where he kept his saddles and weapons, and from the wall above his bed he snatched down the spadroon, the long sword that had belonged to Hautcœur. Then, with two pistols in his saddle holsters, two more in his belt, his rifle under his knee and the sword on his hip, he rode back to the Casa Grande, for the hour of vengeance was at hand. But as he dashed up the road there was a clatter behind him and Arapahoe came up on the run.

"D'ye reckon," he gasped, "I could git tuk on as a scout? I shore hate that cap'n; but, Boone, you know me —I got to be in on this fight."

He followed Boone in, standing humbly, hat in hand, in the presence of Captain Gildersleeve; and after a few brusque words he was signed up as a scout, just as the column was ready to start. Honey ran out of the fort, waving good-by as they passed, and Arapahoe swung down for a last kiss before he galloped to his place up in front. Then, as a mist closed down over the chill and silent plains, they disappeared into the east.

Their route, on account of the supply wagons which followed in the rear, was down the north side of the Cimarron River, where a road had been made by the hide hunters. As dusk

fell Boone was startled by a bugle call behind—the troop had come to a halt.

Barely ten miles had been covered, the horses and men were fresh, and a night ride would have put them upon the enemy; but orders were orders—they were in the army now—and they were compelled to camp for the night.

At dawn the quick notes of the reveille rang out, rousing Arapahoe from his blankets with a curse so blasphemous that even the trumpeter took notice.

"Say, lookee hyer, boy!" Arapahoe called. "They ain't none of us deef. Don't jam so much wind down that spit-shooter of yourn, or the Comanches will be riding our necks."

A subdued laugh went up as the men in the camp heard Arapahoe arguing with the sergeant, and then Captain Gildersleeve stepped out of his tent and summoned them into his presence.

"That ain't right, cap'n," protested Arapahoe. "I don't care what you say. These danged Injuns have got ears, and if they once hear that bugle——"

"Brown," broke in the captain, "you're not in command here. I will attend to the bugle calls. You return to your post and attend to your duties as scout."

"All right, cap'n," grumbled Arapahoe, making a mocking salute. "You be'n out hyer a year and ain't caught an Injun yet, but——"

"Go back to your post!" ordered Gildersleeve peremptorily.

All that day the bugle sounded its calls. But a low fog, thick and clinging, covered the landscape until noon, and as it cleared a keen north wind swept the trumpet notes away, so that no Indians discovered their presence. The sandy bottoms through which they toiled, dragging the wagons when they stuck, were empty of human life; and to Boone, scouting ahead, it seemed almost impossible that a big band of Comanches was near.

"Pero sí!" insisted the Mexican, for the twentieth time. "They are there, not ten miles away. Here are the tracks of my sheep where I drove them back to Mora before any were lost."

"Captain Gildersleeve," reported Boone, riding back to the head of the column, "this Mexican says the Indians are close now—not ten miles away, at the most."

"Ride ahead, then," ordered Gildersleeve, "and reconnoiter their position. But be careful not to expose yourself or make them aware of our presence. I plan to attack them at dawn."

"Very good, sir," saluted Boone, and rode off, well pleased.

The seriousness of the position did not seem to alarm the captain. He rode in the lead with his orderly and the trumpeter, his head held as straight as on parade. Yet it was known that, for all his insistence on strict army discipline, he had never passed the test of battle; and his grim-faced top sergeant, passing covertly to and fro, muttered a warning to his men to be prepared. For Indian warfare does not follow the rules laid down for battle. Surprise attacks and treacherous ambushes are more to their liking, and any moment might bring a wild charge.

The air became electric with premonitions of disaster. Sergeant Doyle and the file closers nearly jumped out of their skins when the bugle sounded the halt.

"Holy Moses!" muttered the sergeant, wiping the cold drops from his brow.

Arapahoe nodded significantly.

"I told ye," he warned.

But Captain Gildersleeve never faltered as he directed the laying out of camp. His high, hooked nose had become more aggressive than ever, his eyes showed their dangerous whites; and with a strange, frightened hush

the men stacked their rifles and stripped off their saddle bags and rolls. But Arapahoe slipped away and lay down behind a hilltop, where he could watch for the Indian scouts.

Far ahead, in an arroyo that led down to the Canadian, Boone Helms had dropped down as if he had been shot when the bugle call smote his ears. Wriggling forward through the brush, he took shelter behind a cut bank, and there, for an hour, while the Mexican hid behind him, he watched the sharp outline of the bluff. But no stealthy head rose up over the top to survey the wind-swept plain, and at last he turned away in disgust.

"Baca," he said, "you're a dad-burned liar. There ain't any Injuns here."

"Sí, sí!" insisted the Mexican. "Down there—one mile. You come—I show you the camp." And he took the lead himself. Boone followed, half tempted to walk erect, but held back by the caution of years.

At last, as the shadows began to lengthen toward twilight, they crept out on the edge of the bluff. The Mexican looked once, then ducked his head low, and Boone glided up beside him. In the river bottom below them there was an immense camp of Indians, and in the center stood the eagle tent.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MUTINY.

LIKE a man frozen with fear, Boone lay peering through the twigs at this camp, so incredibly large. Hundreds of tepees in a double row lined the west bank of the river, set back in a swale against the very edge of a thicket, which ascended half up the bluff.

His first surprise past, Boone counted the Indian tepees. There were four hundred and eighty, which, with two warriors to a tent, would make nearly a thousand men. A moving mass, far down on the broad bottoms, marked the presence of the tribal herd; but not a horse had been picketed before the tepee of his master—it was winter and they looked only for peace. Yet Indian scouts even then might be scouring the mesa for the source of that far-flung bugle call.

With a swift, catlike caution, Boone and the Mexican writhed away and took shelter in the bottom of the gulch. Then, running through the dusk, they scurried back to their horses and rode like the wind for camp.

Sentries challenged them, almost firing before they could give the password. They were rushed back to the captain's tent; and there, while the sergeant and lieutenants stared, they gave their startling report. At least a thousand Comanches were camped within bugle call, yet the presence of the soldiers was not known.

Double sentries were thrown out, and the horses were kept in readiness, tied securely to the long picket line. Through the night, with hushed steps, the officer of the guard made the round of his anxious men. The word had gone out that they were to attack at dawn. And while the sentries paced their beats, Boone lay sleeping by cat naps and dreaming of the impending attack. Their little troop of cavalry consisted of sixty-four men, not counting the teamsters and Baca; and the Comanches, once mounted, were the wickedest fighters on the plains—only these, of course, would never reach their mounts.

The Indians were ten to one, perhaps even twenty to one; but they were asleep, they were afoot, and a Comanche dismounted was a whipped and baffled man. The soldiers would charge at dawn, then, rushing their horses down the pathways that had been worn up the slope of the bluff; and while the soldiers sabered the war-

riors as they fled from their tepees, Boone would head for the lodge of Espejo. It stood out from all the rest, and in the failing light of sunset he had seen the outspread eagle on its side.

There Luz would lie sleeping, unconscious of her lover and the troopers that waited for the dawn. But near her, ready to pounce like a tiger when she fled, Espejo would be waiting with his knife. It was to kill him first, before he could strike, that Boone planned to lead the van; for Rawhide could outrun them all. He was strong now and rested, and at the touch of the spurs he would rush like the wind down the trail. Boone dozed off again, only to be brought up standing by the first rousing notes of the reveille.

Men leaped up and rushed to arms, snatching carbines and sabers as they looked for the expected attack; but after the first "I-can't-get-'em-up!" the bugle lost its lilt and died out in a startled squawk. There was a sound of angry fighting, a muffled cursing that rose to a wail; and then against the sky line Arapahoe's tall form rose up and the bugle was snatched away.

"You crazy goat!" he cursed in a frenzy. "I knowed you'd be trying to blow that danged horn. Do you want to get killed, you whelp?"

"Captain's orders!" shrilled the trumpeter. "You give me back that bugle!" But Arapahoe stood his ground. Then the sergeant came running, and behind him Captain Gildersleeve, fully dressed and equipped for the fray.

"What do you mean," he demanded angrily, "by interfering with my trumpeter? I ordered him to blow the reveille!"

"He'll never do it," swore Arapahoe, "unless he kills me first! Them Injuns have got ears—and dogs!"

"By damn, yes!" gasped the sergeant. "That ain't good field practice—blowing the bugle within hearing of the enemy."

"Well, perhaps not," admitted Gildersleeve, after a moment of indecision. "I only thought, sergeant, it might serve to recall the sentries. You can order the men to come in."

"Yes, sir," saluted Doyle, but by the dim light of the moon Arapahoe could see he was shaken.

"The captain is skeered stiff!" he whispered harshly into the soldier's ears. "He's out of his head, d'ye hear?" But the sergeant only turned away. Disobedience to one's superiors in the presence of the enemy was the first crime in the military calendar. Men had been shot for less, and the traditions of the service had struck into Sergeant Doyle's bones. He was "first soldier" in the troop, an officer, yet not an officer, since he came from the ranks of the men; but twenty years on the frontier had taught him his duties, and he lined up his troopers for the fight.

A pale quarter moon had risen in the east, showing the time to be an hour before dawn; and, leaving a guard with the wagons, the thin line of soldiers advanced toward the edge of the bluffs. These rose up higher than the surrounding country, their brushy summits half covered with sand. In the swale behind the rim Gildersleeve halted his men, while he advanced to reconnoiter the camp. As scouts, Boone and Arapahoe led the way up the bank, where a cold wind whipped up the sand, while behind, accompanied by his sergeant and the lieutenants, Captain Gildersleeve followed in silence.

They came, stooping low, to the edge of the high bluff where an old Indian horse trail led down; and there for the first time the captain gazed on a hostile camp, showing dimly in the first glow of dawn. Nothing moved, but the tepees, in two long, orderly rows,

seemed to stretch on and on into infinity. Captain Gildersleeve gasped and drew back a pace, then turned and clutched his sergeant by the arm.

"We must retreat!" he whispered hoarsely. "My Lord, this is terrible!"

But Sergeant Doyle did not seem to hear.

"We've got 'em, sir!" he muttered, the thrill of battle in his voice. "Only handle this right, now, and we'll sweep the whole village." And he beckoned Boone up close.

"Where's the horse herd?" he demanded eagerly. "We'll stampede that first. Then we'll charge into the camp and cut 'em down with the saber. This is too good to be true!"

"I'll lead you down the trail," whispered back Boone; but, as he was pointing out the landmarks to the captain and his men, Gildersleeve shuddered and drew away.

"We're outnumbered!" he cried, as he beckoned them back. "Helms, why didn't you tell me? They're a hundred to one. The only thing to do is retreat."

"Retreat!" echoed Boone, after a moment of startled silence in which officers and men stood aghast. "What do you want to retreat for? They're asleep—they're afoot. I could take ten men and ride through the camp!"

"No, no!" protested Gildersleeve, as his lieutenants attempted to reason with him. "I'm in command here—I'm responsible for my men." And while his officers, struck dumb, followed reluctantly at his heels, he hurried back to the troop.

"Trumpeter," he ordered, "sound the reteat at once." And a silence fell in the ranks.

"The retreat, sir!" faltered the trumpeter; but a soldier must obey, and he raised his bugle to his lips.

"Wait!" challenged a voice, and, as the trumpeter hesitated, Boone knocked his bugle into the dirt. "You crazy fool!" he cursed, whirling on Gildersleeve. "Do you want to bring the Indians on our neck? You're a coward, that's what's the matter with you! I'd charge through the camp with ten men!"

"Arrest that man!" bellowed Gildersleeve; but before a soldier could move, Boone whipped out a pistol in each hand.

"There'll be no arresting done," he said, speaking quietly, "unless some of you boys want to die. Because the first gun that's fired will bring a thousand Indians on top of us—and Espejo has fought soldiers before.

"Now, men," he went on, "I'm only a scout. But we've come out here, as you know, to save a woman from these Indians, and our only hopes lie in a surprise. The minute he knows we're here, Espejo will kill Luz Hautcœur. That's why I knocked away that bugle."

"Do you presume," demanded Gildersleeve, suddenly advancing upon him, "to take charge of my troop, of my soldiers? We will see, then, here and now, who is in command of this column. Trumpeter, blow the retreat!"

He turned on the trumpeter, who stood in a daze; but the force of discipline had made him an automaton, and mechanically he raised his instrument.

"Now hyer," rasped out a harsh voice, "this has gone far enough!" And, shooting out his long arm, Arapahoe snatched away the bugle and smashed it against a wagon wheel.

"Captain Gildersleeve," he said, as the captain started toward him, "you can arrest me if you want to, but I want to say right hyer you're a disgrace to the army."

Arapahoe rose up to his full height and looked down the line of men, their faces showing ghostlike in the dawn; then, turning on their captain, he

waved a threatening finger while he said in measured tones:

"You coward of a goat!" he spat. "You're afraid to charge that camp! But if these men want to go and help save a white woman, you keep out, understand, or I'll kill ye!"

"This is mutiny!" exclaimed Gildersleeve, turning angrily to his lieutenants. But their world had fallen about their heads. The captain was their superior, they were sworn to obey his orders; but the scouts, on the other hand, were so obviously in the right that they stood at attention and said nothing.

"Mutiny or not," spoke up Boone, "I'm willing to take the consequences. We've come out here, as you all know, to try to save Luz Hautcœur, a prisoner in that camp below. I'm going to ride down there if I have to go alone, but if I had ten good men behind me I could whip the whole village and bring her back alive. Who'll go with me? Hold up your hands, you who will!"

There was a long moment of waiting—then a boyish hand shot up and a red-headed recruit stepped forward. Three others followed quickly, a fourth came after a pause, and Arapahoe lined up with Boone.

"Men," warned Gildersleeve, his voice trembling with helpless anger, "this is mutiny in the face of the enemy. The penalty of your crime is death. Take your posts. Get back into the ranks!"

He waved his hand imperiously, but not a man stirred. The die had been cast, there was for them no retreat, and they stood, grim faced, by their mounts.

"All right, boys," said Boone, "we can do it with five. I'd rather die fighting than hang back like a coward!" And he cast a scornful glance at Gildersleeve. But as he looked he met the eyes of Top Sergeant Michael Doyle, who stepped forward as if drawn by a rope.

"I'm sorry, captain," he grinned, "but I can't miss this fight!" And, saluting, he ran for his horse.

They mounted quickly and were off, for day was almost breaking. At the top of the bluff they halted for a moment, but Arapahoe and the sergeant were gone on ahead. It was for them to start the battle by stampeding the horse herd and shooting down the Indian horse guards. Trembling with excitement, Boone and his soldiers were compelled to wait while in the east the day slowly dawned.

Boone glanced anxiously down the river and beckoned his men together, for the time had come to strike.

"Boys," he said, "we're in for it now—there's no use turning back. But if we whip these damned Indians and burn all their tepees, you don't need to fear the judge advocate. Ride in on 'em with the saber and they'll take to the brush like rabbits—they can't stand up to the long knives. I'll lead the way and take care of Espejo. You whirl into those tepees and ride the whole length of them, and don't stop fighting till they're licked!"

He threw off his overcoat and swung up on Rawhide, and as he looked over the bank he saw two puffs of white smoke down the canyon where the horse herd was held. The gunshots followed instantly, then the thunder of running feet and a high, Arapahoe war whoop. Arapahoe Brown and Doyle had shot down the horse guards, and already the stampede was on. The troopers mounted and sat waiting, their sabers slung to their wrists, their pistols and carbines ready; but Boone still held back and watched.

Espejo had appeared at the door of his tepee, and scores of warriors appeared suddenly before their tents. But Luz was nowhere in sight. Down the canyon the horses were pouring up

over the bluff; there were war whoops and a fusillade of shots, and then a tall horseman came in sight on a point, firing his pistol and waving a red blanket. It was Arapahoe, engaged in a one-man attempt to put the Comanches afoot. For a last moment, almost praying, Boone held back his charge—and then Luz ran out of the tepee. Her eyes were the first to see the soldiers on the bluff. At sight of her Boone shouted and charged.

"Come on, boys!" he yelled, turning his horse down the trail. Never looking back to see if he was followed, he jumped Rawhide down the bank. There was no sound now but the pounding of horses' feet, the clack of rocks and the wild stampede. As the soldiers bore down on the village, all the warriors turned at once and dived back into the tepees for their weapons.

Boone emptied his pistol into the midst of the startled Indians, then drew the sword of Hautcœur, and turned to wave his troopers on.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BATTLE.

ONE look was enough to send the Indians flying, for behind the charging scout they saw a blur of army blue, the flash of sabers, and horses racing down. One tepee after the other gave forth women and screaming children. A score of warriors, madly excited, fired their guns into the air as they turned and ran for the brush. And as Boone looked back, waving on his phantom army, he saw what the Indians had glimpsed. Along the edge of the western bluff, soldiers caps were bobbing everywhere—the troop had broken ranks to witness the charge.

"Come on, you cowardly whelps!" he shouted up, as he passed. "Come on! Are you afraid to fight?" And, flinging away his empty pistol, he swung his sword above his head and charged down on Espejo's lodge.

A group of warriors rose up before him, making a stand to save their women, but with one slash of his sword he put them to flight and rode on toward where Luz was running.

"Go with the women!" he yelled, beckoning her over into the thicket. "Look out!" And, whipping out a second pistol, he fired left-handed as he rode.

At the door of his tepee Espejo had seen Luz fleeing, had glimpsed the soldiers and Boone riding hard; then, with a swift, venomous movement, he had whipped up his rifle—but a bullet from Boone frustrated his aim. He flinched as it struck him, but held fast to his rifle, intent only on killing the woman. She was escaping him at last, fleeing wildly to her lover, who beckoned her frantically to hide; her eyes were fixed on him, there was a glad smile on her face, and she ran until Espejo shot her down.

Three times Boone had fired at the vengeful chief, and three times Espejo had staggered at the shot; but the hate that burned within him made the bullets no more than hailstones, and as Luz went down he charged. His long knife was out now, and his working face was distorted with a scowl of rage and pain. A pistol ball knocked him over, but he bounded to his feet again just as Boone swung his sword for the final stroke. Then, as he leaped toward his victim, the tempered blade descended and cut him down in full stride. Espejo went over backward, still holding to his knife, tearing the ground up with his strong, clutching hands; but with a single blow Boone dispatched him, and now charged on. Luz was shot, but she was avenged.

And now as the Indians closed in upon him, he struck out until eleven lay dead. Against the frenzy that possessed him none could hope to stand,

and with the soldiers close behind he swept down the line, driving the Comanches into the brush.

Down the canyon from the tepees a band of determined Indians were running after the horse herd, and as they saw the soldiers coming they turned back, shooting wildly, and in an instant they were fighting hand to hand. While the battle was at its height a lone soldier charged over the bluff and took the frightened Comanches in the rear. It was Sergeant Doyle, wild with the fire of battle which had tempted him to desert his chief. Hacking and thrusting, he cut his way through their midst and joined his panting men.

"Up and at 'em, b'ys!" he yelled, turning to harry the fleeing Comanches. "They're afoot, and we're horseback. Give 'em the point and follow me, while we burn their damned village to the ground!"

He rode a circle and came back at the head of his men, not one of whom had gone down. At the north end of the village, where the wind would get full sweep, he dropped down and ran into a lodge. Kicking the coals out of the fire hole, he scattered them among the clothing that lay around the wall of the tepee; and as his men joined him a red flame went roaring up, which brought the warriors out of the brush. The plunder of a lifetime —their food, their clothing, their blankets—was threatened by their desperate assault, and, seeing how few were the men who caused the destruction, they rallied for a counterattack.

Out they came from the heavy thicket where they had fled to escape the charge, and now with waspish fury some filled the air with arrows, while others tried to save their goods. But Doyle, drunk with valor, whirled and charged them alone, and his soldiers whipped in behind. Back into the brush the attacking party rushed, only to come out down below, where in frenzied haste other warriors were striking tents to check the flames. But the sergeant was ruthless as war itself, and he drove them away again. Two Indians ran up the bluff to look over the smoke and see how many they were, and with two shots from his carbine Sergeant Doyle killed them both. The racing flames cut off the rest.

On one side of the smoke a thousand warriors lay in hiding while six soldiers, darting in and out like devils, fired the tents to make their victory complete. But now they worked alone, for Boone had ridden to Luz, who lay swooning. The bullet had gone through her shoulder and neck, but her heart still beat, and as he bound up the wounds she sighed and raised her head. Boone ran to bring her water, and all the time, as he worked, his lips moved to muttered curses, for he feared he had come too late.

Now, as the fighting sprang up anew far down the line of tepees, Boone leaped up and lifted Luz to his horse.

She seemed so little now, so thin and worn and wasted. As he lifted her head she smiled at him faintly, while her lips moved to speak his name. On the bluff above, Boone could see the heads of soldiers, gazing down in awe on the wild work of their sergeant and the four men who rode at his back. It was a fight such as never had been fought before—seven desperate men giving battle to a thousand, while their officers and comrades looked on. But the mutineers had won, and, wild with victory, they dashed yelling through the flames, as implacable as devils.

While Boone rode up the trail, holding Luz in his arms, and Rawhide plodded soberly along, it seemed to him that never had her face been so sweet, though now it was a sweetness akin to death. The first agonies had passed, leaving her drawn face almost smiling, perhaps as the angels smile. He drew her to him gently as he took her back,

alone, and though many eyes were upon him he kissed her brow reverently, while the tears ran down his cheeks.

She was so dear, so distant, so unattainable for such as he, and yet he loved her more than life. Not a ball had touched him, not the stab of a lance or arrow; but even while she ran and Espejo stumbled before his shots, a bullet had laid her low. Now she lay, limp and wounded.

The men gathered quickly around, and suddenly, in their midst, Boone saw Gildersleeve.

"You may put her in the ambulance," he said, as Boone looked up.

A wild rage flared up in Boone's heart. Yet, though he hated the man, he knew the suggestion was good, and he turned back toward the covered wagon.

There was a wild yell behind him, and, up the trail from the fire, Sergeant Doyle and his troopers rode in. They were wildly disheveled, and, though some had arrows in their backs, every man was exultant over the great victory. The troop looked on with awe.

But, for the moment, the captain's thoughts were only for Luz, and he ran to the back of the ambulance.

"Give her to me," he directed, as Boone rode up to the wagon. In that moment Boone saw red. The woman whom he loved and had risked his life to save—was he to place her in Gildersleeve's arms?

"Here, boy!" he called to the red-headed recruit who had volunteered first of all. "Get down and take this lady and put her in the ambulance."

"What do you mean?" demanded Gildersleeve, stung to the quick by the covert insult.

With one blow Boone struck him to the ground.

"You cowardly dog!" he cursed. "You weren't man enough to fight for her. Make room for a boy that is a real man!"

"You have struck me—an officer!" cried Gildersleeve, scrambling up. "Very well—you are under arrest."

"You lay a hand on me and I'll kill you!" burst out Boone in a passion. "I'll surrender to Colonel Latimer, and they can court-martial me if they want to, but they'll never hang me for this."

"No, nor me for *that*," spoke up Doyle, with a grin, as he jerked his head toward the fire. "In the army there's one crime that's blacker than mutiny and that's cowardice in the face of the enemy. Let 'em court-martial! I know my rights well as any man, and I'll appeal to the president."

But Gildersleeve was still in command—he was an officer and their captain—and he pulled down his brows in a scowl.

"Very well," he said. "I shall prefer charges against all of you. Dismount, and surrender your arms."

"Not to you, sir, nor any man!" answered Sergeant Doyle grimly. "Take your men back to the fort, and take them back quick before the murdering Comanches are on you. I'll go with these brave b'ys to help run off the horse herd. Because if they ever get mounted—you're done for."

The first battle was over, but a thousand vengeful savages would soon be swarming on their trail.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BLACKEST CRIME.

WITH the smoke of the burning village still boiling up behind them, the troopers of Captain Gildersleeve turned back with strange forebodings, for Doyle had spoken the truth.

For D Troop and Captain Gildersleeve there still remained a chance to prove their mettle in battle; but the courage had gone out of them, and, disordered and bewildered, they continued their mad race for the fort. Forty

miles, through sand and swale, lay between them and safety, and the Indians were massing on their flank. Then suddenly, far up in front, they heard the notes of a bugle, and in an instant the Comanches were gone. Three guidons, moving rapidly, appeared against the distant sky line, and the soldiers gave a great cheer. It was the squadron from Fort Hancock, riding out to give them aid.

"Are we home?" murmured Luz, as she felt the jolting of the ambulance cease.

"Almost," he answered. "It's the soldiers from Fort Hancock. Can you rest now? We'll soon be in."

She sighed and closed her eyes. His heart clutched as he watched her breathing—so slow, so labored, so slight. Her strength was almost gone. Yet now she clung to life, for she had felt his arms about her as he held her while the wagon rocked and plunged. They had driven fast and hard; but there were bugle calls ahead—the danger of a fight was past. He dropped out of the ambulance and swung up on his horse, for now a greater danger was at hand.

He had refused to obey orders, he had incited a mutiny, and he had knocked Captain Gildersleeve down. But Colonel Latimer, riding in, knew nothing of their differences, for his face was beaming with pride.

"Captain," he cried, "you have done wonderfully—wonderfully! We passed Sergeant Doyle, driving the horse herd toward the fort, and he reported you had burned the whole village!"

"Yes, the village was burned," responded Gildersleeve lamely, but——"

"Not a word! Not a word!" exclaimed the colonel joyously. "This is the greatest victory we have won in years. And not a man killed!"

"I wish to report, however," began Gildersleeve gravely, "that Boone Helms, a government scout——"

"What—what? Is he injured?" demanded Latimer anxiously. "The sergeant reported that he killed Espejo alone and brought back Miss Hautcœur, the prisoner."

"Well, yes," admitted Gildersleeve, suddenly giving the matter up. "But Miss Hautcœur, I regret to say, was very seriously wounded. It seems Espejo attempted to kill her."

"A treacherous devil!" burst out the colonel vindictively. "He's made us more trouble than all the others combined. Why, here's Mr. Helms, unhurt!"

He reined in his horse to offer the scout his hand; but Boone shook his head and drew back.

"We've had trouble, colonel," he said. "I'm under arrest. But I thank you, all the same."

"Arrest?" repeated Latimer, raising his eyebrows as he glanced at Gildersleeve. "Well, I can't stop for that now. You can report at the fort." And, with his squadron of grinning troopers, he galloped off. A great battle had been won, and if there was dust on the palms of victory, it was a matter to be looked into later. The hostiles were fleeing afoot back toward the Canadian, and it was the duty of the fresh troops to follow.

D Troop toiled on, worn and spent by the long ride. Up in front Captain Gildersleeve still held his head high, riding as stiffly as if on dress parade. But his eyes were furtive now, for the cards were running against him. Unless he acted quickly his enemies would pull him down. Yet who would help him now? He glanced at his two lieutenants, but they avoided his eye; the troopers jogged, grim faced, behind. But as he caught sight of the ambulance where Luz and Boone rode, he smiled and showed the whites of his eyes.

It was late when they reached the fort, and in the excitement of the

home-coming the captain and his schemes were forgotten. Honey Brown came running out and gathered Luz into her arms and carried her in.

In the corral the Indian horses milled around with a noise like thunder. They were the money of the plains, the bank roll of Espejo and his band of Kwahari Comanches, and all night the exultant Arapahoe stood guard at the gate, lest the Indians lift them again.

Nothing was said now of the mutiny, and every eye swept the plain as they all awaited the colonel's return. But as Honey, smiling joyously as she glanced back at Luz, stepped out into her vacant living room, she beheld Gildersleeve standing at the door.

"May I ask," he began, "how Miss Hautcœur is this morning? I should like very much to see her."

"She's too sick!" snapped back Honey.

"Nevertheless," he said, "I must see her. It is a matter of great importance."

"She can't see any one," answered Honey flatly.

But Gildersleeve stepped in and closed the door.

"The business on which I come concerns you, also," he hinted. "May I tell you what it is?"

Honey eyed him suspiciously, but curiosity overcame her and she motioned him to a chair.

"As you know," he began, still standing erect, "your husband and Boone Helms have been guilty of inciting mutiny. I have drawn up these charges against them." He tapped a sheaf of paper tucked under his belt, and Honey stepped back and turned pale.

"But under certain conditions," he went on, with a thin smile, "I will agree not to press the charges. May I see Miss Hautcœur now?"

"Why—yes. No, you can't! It would be very bad for her. Couldn't you tell *me* what the conditions are?" she asked him, nervously.

"Why, certainly," acceded Gildersleeve. "There is nothing to conceal. If your husband will apologize for the language he has used and turn over the captured horses, I will not prefer these charges against him. But if he refuses—the penalty is death."

"Death!" echoed Honey, sinking back into a chair.

"But do not be alarmed," he soothed her. "I know that your husband was misled; he was a tool in the hands of Boone Helms. I am willing, to avoid trouble, to let his case drop; but Boone Helms was the leader of the mutiny. He not only incited my men to refuse to obey orders, but he struck me and broke down my discipline. Even the most lenient court could hardly refuse the death sentence, but—may I see Miss Hautcœur and explain?"

So, protesting, she led him in.

"I will excuse you now," he said, bowing meaningly to Honey; and, after a startled glance, she was gone.

He strode over to the bed where Luz lay staring up at him, and suddenly he dropped to his knees.

"Luz!" he exclaimed, as he reached out for her hand. "Can it be you have been saved—for me? You know I have always loved you. But you are weak now—I cannot stay—yet one thing is necessary. I must tell you about Boone Helms."

"Boone?" she repeated, suddenly lifting her head; but he pressed her back, with a smile.

"He has been guilty," he went on gravely, "of inciting mutiny in my troop. The crime is punishable by death. But do not be alarmed. Do you wish to save him? Then all you have to do is forget."

"Forget what?" she asked, with a puzzled frown.

"Forget him," he said. "I will try to make it easy. Do you remember

how happy we were? Then call Boone in and send him away, and I will tear up these charges against him. But if he is here when Colonel Latimer returns to the fort, there is nothing that can save him from death. Either death or imprisonment for life."

He talked long and earnestly to her.

"Is it too much?" he asked finally. "Is it too much—to save his life?"

And Luz turned her head and wept.

"I will send him away," she promised at last; and Gildersleeve rose up with a smile.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CORRECUERVO RETURNS.

THERE was a sound of weeping behind him as Boone stepped out the gateway, his saddle and guns in his hands; and old Rock frisked against him, unnoticed. He was numb; he could hardly see, and common things seemed unfamiliar, yet something impelled him to go. Luz had told him, and that was enough. She had kissed him—once—then turned her face away, and he had left the room in a daze.

Now, as he stood outside the gateway, he heard other sobbings.

"Oh, hurry, Boone!" implored Honey, running out of the patio. "They're going to arrest you—and if they do you'll be executed. Oh, isn't it terrible—terrible!"

"What are *you* crying for?" he demanded suspiciously; and for an answer she pointed to Arapahoe. He was standing before the gate of the closed corral, his long rifle across his arm; and over the walls, to the muffled thunder of milling feet, the dust of the horse herd drifted.

"He won't give 'em up!" she cried despairingly. "And if he don't Captain Gildersleeve is going to arrest him. And then I know he'll be executed!"

"Come over hyer!" yelled Arapahoe, waving his arm peremptorily; and two men answered the call. Boone came from the gate; and from his tent, quite nonchalantly, Captain Gildersleeve rode over with his orderly.

"Boone," began Arapahoe, "this cap'n claims all them hawses I tuk. And he's sneaked around behind me and done turned my wife agin' me. She's begging me to give 'em up."

"Oh, what are a few horses?" cried Honey in despair. "I wish you had never took 'em! But isn't it better to give them up now than it is to be arrested and hung?"

"I'll surrender 'em to the colonel," returned Arapahoe stoutly. "If he claims 'em—well and good! But this cap'n don't git nothing from *me*. I tuk 'em myse'f, at the risk of my life, without orders or assistance from no man, and I believe the darn goat jest figgers on selling 'em and keeping the money, himse'f."

Gildersleeve cleared his throat.

"Mr. Brown," he began, "I don't want any trouble——"

"Then you go on away from here!" flared up Arapahoe. "And stay away from my family. You darn rascal, you been telling Honey something. Never seen her like this before."

"He's been telling me," wailed Honey, "that you signed up for a scout, when you went off without telling me goodby. And when you took away that bugle and refused to obey orders, you committed mutiny in the face of the enemy."

"You see that dust?" demanded Arapahoe, pointing out across the plain. "There comes the colonel—I'll talk to him. But this goat can't tell me nothing, savvy? I'm burned out on him. I believe he's a crook!"

He looked Gildersleeve in the eye; but the officer looked back with easy insolence, for the high card still remained to be played.

"Very well, Brown," he said. "I'll prefer charges against you for mutiny

and insubordination. But you'll be tried by court-martial at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The colonel has nothing to do with it.'

"At Leavenworth!" repeated Arapahoe, and then he turned to Honey. "That's where they send them military prisoners," he whispered; and she laid her head against his breast.

"Oh, Arapahoe," she pleaded, "don't you love me, at all? Then give him back the horses, please!"

"Well—take 'em!" snapped Arapahoe, stepping away from the gate. Gildersleeve bowed and smiled mockingly. Then, drawing a paper from the sheaf in his belt, he tore it to pieces.

"Oh, there's Boone!" cried Honey, as she followed the captain's gaze. Arapahoe went over on the run.

"It's no use, pardner," he gasped, as he grabbed Boone's bridle and turned his horse to the south. "You git into Mexico as quick as you can and don't you never come back. We put our heads into the noose when we signed up for scouts. Now go—and keep going, savvy?"

He slapped Rawhide on the flank and sent him off at a gallop; but as Boone passed the camp where the soldiers were quartered he saw a group of men by the guard tent. It was Sergeant Michael Doyle and his four mutineers, disarmed and under arrest. Boone reined in abruptly—was it for him to run away while the men he had misled paid the penalty? Could he, who had incited them to mutiny against their officers, ride on into Mexico and leave them in the lurch, after all they had risked for his sake? He turned out of the trail, despite a yell from Arapahoe. When the sergeant saw him coming, he smiled.

"Ha, me brave b'y!" he cried. "Ye could not leave us, could ye, to let us face the court-martial alone? But keep a bold front and we'll win out yet!" And he crushed Boone's hand in his grip.

"I hope so," said Boone, as he shook hands all around; and then, dismounting, he laid his guns on the ground and surrendered himself to the guard. Nor had he long to wait, for, as the squadron rode in, they were summoned to the colonel's tent.

Captain Gildersleeve was there, his eyes rolling evilly as he laid his sheaf of charges on the table. As the colonel read them over he turned pale.

"Mr. Helms," he barked, "you are charged in these papers with inciting a mutiny in Troop D—a very serious charge, as you know. It is my duty to investigate the matter and state whether the charges can be sustained. Have you any statement to make?"

"Yes, colonel," he said, and, beginning at the beginning, he told the full story of the fight. "I admit," he ended, "that I called for volunteers, that I begged the men to mutiny and——"

"To mutiny!" roared the colonel, his face turning beet-red. "Since when has it been necessary for a loyal soldier to mutiny in order to attack the enemy?"

"Since you gave us this captain, colonel," answered Doyle, as he saluted. "He was afraid to charge the village, and while I hope I know my duty, I could not let them go alone. I mean these brave b'ys, sir. They're recruits, at that——"

"My Lord!" exclaimed the colonel, rolling his eyes toward Gildersleeve, and then he turned to Doyle.

"You may finish your statement, sergeant."

"Then, to be brief, sir," said Doyle, "what the scout says is true. And rather than see D Troop disgraced before the worrld, I went into the fight myself. We did well, sir, you must admit, and burned the village before their eyes, besides running off their horse herd and all. It was a grrand battle, colonel, with my b'ys yelling like devils and giving them the point when we met and——"

"It was wonderful—wonderful!" broke in the colonel, his eyes shining. "I shall mention it in my report to the war office. But, returning to Captain Gildersleeve——" he hinted.

"I charge him," declaimed Doyle, his voice quavering with emotion, "with cowardice in the face of the enemy. And I demand, sir, as a first sergeant, the right to appear against him. He forced me and my men to mutiny."

"Very good," nodded the colonel, making a note. Then he turned to Gildersleeve.

"Captain," he said, "you are under arrest. And in this case, while it is unusual, you will surrender your sword. You are charged, and, I believe, rightly, with cowardice."

Gildersleeve started and drew back, then reached slowly for his sword and laid it on the desk. The cards had gone against him—he had lost.

"You may retire to your tent," ordered the colonel sternly, and motioned the officers to go.

"Sergeant Doyle," he said, "I should like to shake hands with you. You have done your duty well under exceptional circumstances. These charges of mutiny will certainly be dropped."

He shook hands all around and dismissed them with a smile, then he turned to the government scout.

"Helms," he said, "you have saved by your courage the good name of my command—and Troop D. Our orders are to attack the hostiles wherever and whenever found, and to refuse to fight them is cowardice. No one regrets more than I that you have been unjustly accused; but will you allow me to make amends? Then accept for your partner the band of horses he ran off and—allow me to make this present to the bride."

He unfastened from his coat the silver eagle of a colonel and laid it in Boone's hand, then, patting him affectionately, he accompanied him to the door, and Boone looked out on another world. Men smiled now as he passed, Rawhide stamped his foot to go, old Rock came fawning to his feet; but he slipped away from them all and, at a beck from Honey, hurried in to kneel by Luz.

Months passed, and a general court-martial dismissed Gildersleeve from the army for cowardice in the face of the enemy. Arapahoe, rich in ponies, hurried hither and yon, trading them off while he told strange tales.

As spring came on and the tender grass started, a visitant almost forgotten returned. Boone and Luz stood alone on the wall of the fort, gazing off across the prairie to the south, when a fleck of green and gold appeared in the blue, and Luz clutched his hand and pointed.

"It is your medicine bird," she cried, beaming. "It is the little *correcuervo,* who made you so brave and strong. He is coming home to his nest."

The crow chaser circled doubtfully about the battered walls of the fort which had turned the Comanches' charge, then swung down to its perch on the marten pole and gazed at the lovers below.

"He is alone," whispered Luz, drawing closer to Boone as she scanned the southern sky; and then, winging wearily, a little bird flew in and lit beside her mate.

"Ah, now they are happy—they are home," she sighed; and Boone stooped to kiss her cheek. But his eyes were still fixed on the bird on the pole—the *correcuervo,* which had given him his medicine. The bird leaped up into the air now as an insect drifted by, and snapped his beak fiercely as he passed.

"My brother!" saluted Boone; and the crow chaser settled down to ruffle out his feathers in the sun.

THE END.

The Tiger Rider

Robert Welles Ritchie

Author of "Flendship Mo' Bettah," "Sargasso," Etc.

A masterful woman, ranch owner, fighter, who impressed one and all with her dominating will—and the tale of the way in which her will, via the heart, was conquered by the son whose life she tried to dictate.

FROM where we breathed our horses on the divide between north and south prong of Ten Sleep Creek, the far-distant sheep wagon, cut out against the lemon-yellow of a beginning October sunset, looked like a hencoop on the move—one of these individual affairs of triangled slats somebody gives Biddy in her first flurries of motherhood. A cloud of saffron-tinted dust, fanning out against the horizon in advance of this ambulatory capital "A," marked the migration of the sheep—ravening hundreds of them.

"That," said the old-timer, "will be 'Woolly Annie's' home-ranch band."

"Woolly Annie?" I repeated a little bemused by this addition to my anthology of the Big Country's odd names. "You've never told me about her—or is it a him with one of these jaw-cracking Basque names which you've simplified?"

"Son, it's a her. An' iffen there's more triple extract of she-woman packed into anything walkin' boot leather over Wyoming to-day——"

"This lady," I commenced my exploratory probing; "I suppose she played a part in the big trouble between the cattle outfits and sheep owners here in the Basin."

"You might say so," he replied.

"And being a woman, of course, she had her own peculiar ways of fighting fair?"

"Yes, till she come to fightin' her own flesh an' blood; there's where she got herself throwed for fair." Then, in a sudden switch of thought: "Son, didn't some ole Chinese poet once say —or did I read it in a drug-store almanac: 'He who rides a tiger can never dismount?' "

I had to deny knowledge of authority for the aphorism. Too often for the comfort of my self-pride this old range rider and one-time thief hunter launched at me some surprising tag from the classics, quite unfamiliar.

"This Woolly Annie, she done her tiger ridin', all right," the old-timer told himself. And that, for the time, was the end of it.

It was a week later that the old-timer and I were assaulting T-bones in the Bon Ton short-order house at Buffalo when an eye-filling figure moved down the aisle of tables with an elephantine majesty. She wore boots of the cow-country last, and a knee-length calico skirt. Her mighty waist was encompassed by a blue army shirt, across which an elk-hide waistcoat gaped open. A man's hat, almost white with alkali dust, perched precariously upon a great head. I could see the frayed strings of a reddy, sandy bob under the brim.

Surprisingly she stopped just abreast the old-timer, who had his back toward her approach, and clapped him a mighty thwack between the shoulders. Her Gargantuan mouth opened to vent an explosion.

"How's the ole stingin' lizard of the range?"

My companion's head jerked around like a striking snake's. When he saw the Amazon I caught again in his eyes that look of quizzical reminiscence I had noted the day the distant sheep wagon prompted him to mention Woolly Annie.

The old-timer introduced me. I think I paid little attention to the name, for of a sudden my sixth sense prompted that this was the sheep queen, Woolly Annie—"triple extract of she-woman."

Fascinated, I watched her face as she swapped commonplaces of the Big Country with my companion. It was the face of an old woman kept young by the resolution of a mastering will. Big and bulging like a school globe dyed saddle color; hint of sandy mustache on long upper lip; green eyes almost buried by fat lids—a face, I tell you, to proclaim a life played with no time out for hard knocks.

"How's 'Childe Harold' over to Green River?" The old-timer put the question as if in afterthought, as the sheep queen started to move away.

"Oh, he's just made me a nine times gran'maw, the li'le skeezicks!" playfully replied the lady in boots. "I'll have to make a sheepman outa this last dropping yet."

She went back into one of the curtained booths, and we fell to our slabs of pie. The quizzical humor in the old-timer's eyes did not pass. Meeting with Woolly Annie had revivified whatever secret cross reference to her lay buried in his files of lively years.

Once again in the saddle and out for the blue shadow of Pumpkin Butte, rising like the ghost of an iceberg above the yellow and lavenders of the plain——

"You gotta hand it to the ole she-buffalo—setting her heart on making a sheepman out of a baby grandson when her own son balked at that twenty years ago. She's taken a lot of punishment in her time, Woolly Annie."

I had but to sit quiet and wait. The tale that would not out with delving a week before now came unbidden.

"Twenty, twenty-five years ago this country is all tore up by bad blood between the last of the cattlemen claimin' unfenced range both sides of the Bighorns, an' the big sheep outfits beginnin' to sift up from Colorado to find grass that wasn't under fence line. You might say it was a case of last stand for the cattlemen.

"So when the sheep bands begin pourin' into the Basin, hoggin' an' foulin' the feed wherever found, the cowmen just sort of took the law into their own hands, like they've done other places where sheep invaded.

"Pretty lawless, say you? Well, now that I'm older and sort of mellowed down, maybe I'll agree with you. But back yonder, when it looked like a case of life or death for the cow business——

"All this skilletin' and cat-draggin' comes to a head with the killin' of a sheepman named Squires, over on north prong of No Wood Creek. He was called to the door of his sheep wagon in the white hour of dawn an' shot down. Behind him in that wagon are his wife an' four small kids.

"Well, sir, I reckon that killin' an' all the court ruckus, an' crooked jury fixin' to turn loose the men accused of murder, made a pretty mess. What's more, that widow woman who'd seen her husband killed sure went on the prod. She taken on her pay roll two New Mexican killers to go out with her wagon—tough birds who'd shoot anything wearin' hair—an' she herself practiced up with a carbine until she could shoot the eye out of the lady on the dollar.

"Then that Widow Squires went depredatin'. She took the band of a thousand her husband had left her an' her two killers an' her four youngsters, an' she ranged free an' wide on cattle lands an' off wherever her fancy an' good feed prompted. Yes, sir, she made it right unwholesome for the cowmen. An' as the years piled up, her band grew over there in the Basin—five thousand, ten thousand; three sheep wagons an' a tender to four an' a tender. Folks come to call her Woolly Annie from the Montana line to Cheyenne.

"Lots of time in those early years, when this Woolly Annie is goin' it alone on her own private warpath with feathers in her hair an' her scalplock roached, I couldn't help myself from admirin' her for the downright grit she showed—she buckin' the whole cattle layout with her lone hand. But I taken a sight of thought, too, on those youngsters of hers—what all this pull-haulin' an' war medicine meant to them. Since this story touches on them, leastwise on one of 'em especial, I'll specify.

"Three girls, not one of 'em thicker'n two pancakes an' ugly as sin like their maw; three girls an' a boy, the youngest of the whole b'ilin'. This Childe Harold—which Woolly Annie must have caught his name out of a mail-order catalogue like with her girls, who were Perugia and Constantina an' I don't rightly remember the other—this Childe Harold was the pindlin'est sprig of salt weed you ever did see. Both as a child an' when he lengthened out some. Always reckoned the blats from the sheep sorta struck in on him worst of the four.

"Me, I often cogitated just how much those strays paid for their maw's ridin' a tiger. For, son, that's what she was doin', like the Chinaman poet says. One big idea cinched and saddled, an' that was to make the cow outfits pay for the killin' of her man. You seen her face back there in the eating joint; maybe, seein' her that a way, you can figure how Woolly Annie goes through with any notion, come hell and high water.

"So this family on wheels grows up wild as a buck antelope—leastwise, the

girls. Which it's neither here nor there to this story how, one by one, they slope out of that sheep wagon with the first ornery thing wearing chaps to come along. Leavin' only this pore pindlin' Childe Harold to be his maw's pet. An' how she dotes on him!

"Because he's loose gaited an' wind broken an' looks like he's wintered hard, because he's everything his old lady ain't, she nusses him an' coddles him an' wrops him up in affection. This fightin' ole she-buffalo, who's been rampagin' the range so many years trailin' kids after her like a drag slung under a chuck wagon, suddenly discovers she's a mother. It'd be funny if there wasn't something tragic about it.

"Me, I'm what the papers call the innocent bystander to all this, because I'm out of the cow business proper by this time an' workin' as special deputy for the railroad, discouragin' train robbers, like you might say. An' I make my headquarters in Runnin' Elk, where Woolly Annie's got herself a house to live in when she's not out with the sheep. One little thing added to another gets me to know the ole girl personal—she forgivin' me for once havin' been a cowman—an' Childe Harold in especial.

"Say he's risin' eighteen when him and I first make our peace medicine an' get sorta chummy, I all the time figurin' the pore, starved maverick has suffered from too much mother an' needs a little he-stuff in his mental feed. He bein' that timid of folks and sorta Miss Nancyfied even the girls of Runnin' Elk give him the laugh.

"He plays the violin, this Childe Harold; learned it off a Basco who herded sheep for Woolly Annie. And he loves music an' the color of blue bonnets springin' up on the prairie an' the sound of good poetry like I used to read him once in a while. Soft things—gentle things in life.

"And Woolly Annie was dead set on making him a sheepman. Get that.

"'I been raisin' sheep and children goin' on thirty years,' Woolly Annie says to me once, when I sorta hint Childe Harold ain't cut out for the sheep business. 'An' I reckon I know what's right for both kinds of critter.'

"Well, son, you with your perfessional writin' an' plot tinkerin' an' all that—you're goin' ask me right soon where the girl fits into all this. 'Cause from the little perfessional writin' that comes under my eyes, I reckon they's always got to be a girl.

"Well, I'm givin' you a real girl, none of these simperin' sisters you see drawed for some of the story papers. 'Brownie' Pallister, daughter of ole Steve Pallister of Circle Block over on Gray Bull, is as full of life as a silver poplar in a breeze an' as level headed as an ole hermit beaver. Littler'n the average run of girls but trim built as the Arabian strain in horses; smashin' brown eyes always on the laugh; hair the color of alder leaves in October—but, shucks! what business has an ole man like me rhapsodizin' on female beauty?

"The time I was all tied up on the business of the Wilcox train robbery, in saddle an' out over three States, Brownie Pallister comes home from college over to Lincoln—ole Steve Pallister havin' sold out his Circle Block an' moved in to Runnin' Elk to give the girl the advantages of town life. This is winter, and Childe Harold an' his old lady are in from the sheep range—only time of year that pore, starvelin' stray gets any comfort outa life.

"Reckon Childe Harold just naturally'd fell all over an' complete when he met up with Brownie Pallister. From what he told me, it was some

business of what you call an operetta about Queen Esther that brought them together, he leading the amateur orchestra with his violin. Anyway, when I get back to Runnin' Elk after a blind chase, there's Childe Harold 'bout as miserable as a boy can be an' still stay altogether in one piece. Not long before I am favored with his confidence.

"'Ole-timer,' says he one night, when he sifts over to borrow one of my poetry books; 'ole-timer, what was the name of that swineherd in the fairy books who dared fall in love with a queen?'

"Miserable, you see? An' markin' himself down lower than the dust. Him the son of Woolly Annie; him cut out to be a sheepman an' findin' himself worshipin' from afar—like you might say—the daughter of one of Wyoming's pioneer cattlemen. Worse than that: That time Childe Harold's dad was shot down, there's general talk about how some of the riders mixed up in that murder came from the Circle Block outfit, though nothing incriminatin' actually comes out in court trial.

"I think I sorta took Childe Harold in hand right then and there, an' told him iffen he felt like he was a swineherd, time had come for him to take a good strong pull at his boot straps.

"'But my maw,' says Childe Harold, sorta hushed, like he was talkin' out in church, 'she's dead set on makin' me a sheepman, an' I can't go back on her after all she's done for me.'

"'Your maw,' I come back at him—an' me, with never a chick nor child of my own, talkin' this a way, 'your maw done a service for you when she gave you life, but that don't mean she's holdin' a mortgage over you for all time, payable at her own terms. Iffen you want to stand well with Brownie Pallister, it's up to you to show her you got somethin' in you your maw don't hold a lien onto.'

"Which I admit was sure depredatin' on Woolly Annie's range—this tall talk of mine. But somebody had to!

"Well, son, you'll have to fill in a lot of this sentimental stuff for yourself. Me, I've had no truck with that whatsomever, bein' all my life a lone wolf always on the prowl outside the love business, but occasionally lookin' away off at the lights in the cottage windows, like you might say. Fill in, if you can, how Brownie Pallister come to see anything worth while in this pore, shrinkin' violet of a Childe Harold; my guess is 'twas pity first started her.

"First real practical results, as I see them, is Childe Harold gets it firm fixed in his mind he's got to go to college—not any college in general, mind you, but the one over in Lincoln where Brownie Pallister is fannin' the flame of knowledge. An' there's where his old lady clamped on the brakes again.

"'Haw!' she gives me one of her bass-drum laughs, when I'm incautious enough to mention the boy's college yearnin'. 'Does he figure he's got to talk Greek to a hundred thousand sheep of my Yellow-an'-Black outfit to fatten lambs for spring market an' run a heavy fleece on the ewes, come fall shearin'? If his paw an' his maw made a go of the sheep business with no college trimmin' and dewdabs of knowledge draped onto 'em, I reckon my boy can do that same.'

"See how it was? Old Woolly Annie firm on the back of her pet tiger an' can't dismount even for the good of the boy she loved so?

"Bound to the woollies he'd been, ever since he was hub high to a sheep wagon, an' now bound to ignorance. Fire of a hopeless love burnin' him. A poison humbleness in the sight of Brownie Pallister working on his soul. I tell you, that boy's war bag was packed tight with trouble.

"Just when he's the lowest, what with Brownie goin' back to Lincoln, I'm off on the trail of the Meeteetse bank robbers, which it taken me three-four months to follow 'em down the ole outlaw trail into Sonora and there put hobbles onto 'em. Day after I get back to Runnin' Elk, here comes one of Woolly Annie's herders with a note for me:

"My boy mortally shot by raiders from the JY outfit. Bring 'Doc' Hodges an' come a-runnin' yourself to catch these cowardly murderers for me. Money no object.

"Doc an' I sure made time out over the road to the big girl's place on No Wood Creek, gettin' there long after dark. There's Woolly Annie on a horse, waitin' for us at the forks; an' her tongue runs like a bell clapper. Childe Harold is goin' to die; an' if I can't make the responsible party swing for it, by the Eternal she'll oil up her .30-30 an' kill off every J Y puncher from foreman to cook!

"I get her calmed down while we're ridin' up over the rough breaks to her house. She'd been warned by the J Y outfit, says Woolly Annie, not to cross Poison Spider Creek; but she told the J Y to go buy the devil a hawg an' across she went with six hundred ewes. Yesterday she had to go back to the home ranch, so she left Childe Harold out there with two herders. In comes one of 'em, a-fannin', next morning, to say while him an' the boys is firing off their revolvers in the dark hours to scare coyotes away from the ewes—that bein' custom—somebody snuk up on the boy under cover of the shots an' plugged him.

"Well, when we come to the home ranch, there's the boy on a bunk of buffalo skins, mighty weak, but—says Doc Hodges after his examination—nowise mortal hurt lessen complications set in. Bullet has entered his stomach an'—this was the first thing struck me strange—come out again three inches from the enterin' wound. I didn't see the boy that night, an' told the old lady an' the doc not to tell him I was there.

"Next morning right after sunup Woolly Annie takes me out to the sheep camp where the shootin' took place to show me what she calls 'the evidence.' Which she's kept covered with tomato crates against somebody's mussin' 'em. Two prints in the blue mud near a little creek, about fifty feet from the sheep wagon where Childe Harold an' the two herders bunked—one of a horse an' tother a clean print of a man's boot.

"Also they's a flock of empty ca'tridges—.20-30—near the steps of the sheep wagon. That's where the boy was standin' when he's shootin' off his revolver to scare away the coyotes, what time he gets shot.

"First thing I do on the ground is to make a tracin' of the boot print in the mud. Then I look to that other print the sheepwoman's housed under a crate; clear as a glass of water a No. 2 shoe, without toe calks, an' with small half-worn mud calks on the prongs. They's two horses regular at this camp—the one the Basco herder rid back to the home ranch to tell of the boy's shootin' an' another. Both are unshod. Yet there's that fresh print of a shod horse within fifty feet of where Childe Harold stood when he was shot. I had to tell the sheep queen real pointed to go back to her boy an' leave me alone to make my medicine; she was so clatter jawed I couldn't think.

"Once the ground was cleared that a way, I tackled the two herders singly.

"Cagy foreigners, both. One says he's away over tother side of the flock when the young boss starts his shootin' an' he don't even know there's been trouble until next mornin'. Tother one—call him Pasquale—allows he's not

more'n a hundred yards off when he hears the young boss give a scream, an' comes a-runnin' to find him crumpled up at the foot of the sheep-wagon steps.

"'Was he standin' on top step of the flight when he was firin' off his gun, or on the ground?' You see I couldn't figure that wound goin' *downward,* nohow.

"'Quién sabe, señor? I was not there.'

"'Where is the gun he was usin'?'

"'There again, señor, I do not know.' See how cagy this Pasquale was?

"'But he must have had it in his hand when you found him or dropped it beside him when he was shot,' I come back at him. Up go his shoulders in that hunchin' which's enough to make a white man jump down the throats of the beggars.

"'Señor, though I search much, I do not find that gun—never.'

"This Pasquale is lyin' of course. But why?

"In the sheep wagon I do find a woolen shirt with two bullet holes through it an' stains all round them. I examine the holes with my little magnify glass to see if there's traces of powder burn—'cause you can see I must look at this case from all angles. Not a sign of powder grains, such as might be blowed into the cloth at short range.

"With that shirt and tracin's of the two prints—the boot track and the horse track—tied under my cantle, I ride twenty miles over to the J Y home ranch; which ole Bill Bowen, the foreman, and I rode trail together up from the Brazos in the '80s. Bill and his seven hands are eatin' dinner when I arrive.

"I'm not botherin' you with all the details of how I spent that afternoon at the J Y. There's eight cowmen all together—eight pairs of boots, if you care to reckon it that a way—and all the horses in Bill Bowen's string. After Bill and I has a little powwow, all I've got to do is set to work, him backin' me up every step.

"Son, here's the results in a nutshell: They's a horse there in the J Y corral whose right hind hoof fits the print of that hoof mark in the blue clay, back where Childe Harold was shot. They's a cow-punch there whose left boot gees, even to the nail marks, with my tracin' of that footprint the ole girl had covered with a tomato box.

"But not a .20-30 gun in the whole outfit, nor never was none—that being a caliber not favored by cowmen.

"Three days later when Woolly Annie's boy is stronger, I tell the old lady I got to have a talk with her boy—alone.

"'But tell me, old-timer, what've you got to tell my boy which I can't hear?'

"'Your son's got a right to know, exclusive, just what danger he stands in,' is the only answer I give her mysteriouslike.

"I go into the boy's room an' lock the door behind me. He's sure surprised to see me. Surprised and maybe just the least mite disturbed. Leastwise, that was the look I read in his eyes where he lie propped up in the bunk.

"'Why, what're you doing here, old-timer? I thought you were chasin' bank robbers down along the trail.'

"'I taken time off to come an' tell you you've a brave man, Childe Harold,' says I, an' I take off my coat an' vest. That boy's eyes jump out like a crab's. For there I'm standin' in a shirt with two bullet holes through it—his shirt, which it fits me mighty quick but sufficient.

"'Boy,' said I, 'it taken a sight of nerve for you to put that bullet through this shirt—you bein' all your life sorta timid an' like you might say gun shy on the harsh things of life.'

"'Why, what are you talkin' about —I puttin' a bullet through my own shirt?' His bluster fell mighty short of convincin'. He gets a big wink from me.

"'Li'le fella, let's s'pose for instance a man is all fired up and sorta desperate because he don't want to be a sheepman, and he does want to go to college where a brown-eyed young female is waitin' with a promise of her heart. S'pose this unfortunate young fella finds his heart's desires blocked by a maw who loves him but is mighty strong willed. Bein' blocked that a way, this aforementioned gets desperater an' desperater, until——'

"'Stop! Stop, old-timer!' There's Childe Harold with his hands over his eyes an' sobbin'.

"I wade right on, regardless:

"'When he's standin' on the top step of a sheep wagon with a .20-30 revolver held high over his head firin' to keep the coyotes away from the ewes, the thought suddenly bobs into his head that if his old lady thought the cowmen tried to kill him, she'd be scared for him an' she'd let him go to college—an' to Brownie. Even if it hurt to shoot himself—even if it killed him, this desperate young fella said to himself, things couldn't be worse than they were. So, with the gun still high over his head but pointed downward at his own body, this hero I'm specifyin' whams a bullet into himself. Then when an ole Basco who's known him since he was a baby, comes runnin' up, this boy, figurin' a .20-30 gun an' a .20-30 bullet hole wouldn't tie into a story that would wash with his maw, gives the gun to the Basco an' tells him to hide it out for good.'

"I didn't have the heart to go on any further, much less to tell him somethin' 'bout that shootin' he didn't even know himself. I just took the boy's hand an' said:

"Son, you've hit your maw in her weak spot. She'll give in all down the line iffen she thinks there's danger of her darling catching another brutal cowman's bullet.'

"And we'd both sized Woolly Annie right. Give in she did. Come autumn an' Childe Harold went to college in Lincoln. He an' Brownie Pallister got married before the year was out, an' now he's got a tidy little bank over to Green River, *an'*, by latest count, nine children!"

The old-timer began twisting tobacco into paper with the completion of his tale. His was the air of watchful detachment I had come to recognize as signal for a dénouement slurred or suppressed. That was his way to test a listener's interest, and put the calipers on the closeness of that listener's attention. I arose at once to the bait:

"But," I queried, "you said you found at the J Y Ranch a man and a horse to fit the fresh prints at the scene of Childe Harold's shooting. Where does that man figure?"

"Sho! I must have plumb forgot to put that in," he said in mock meekness. "S'pose I tell you the reckless young cow-punch whose boot track fit my tracin' broke down an' told me he was lyin' in the willers by the creek fifty feet away, when he seen Woolly Annie's boy step out of the lighted sheep wagon an', standin' on the top step, fire four shots into the air, wait a minute, an' then shoot a fifth one into himself. An' s'pose I add this young cow-puncher tells me—him actin' alone an' on his own responsibility —he's sightin' at Childe Harold along the barrel of his .45, with murder in the crook of his finger, when he sees the boy go down under his own hand. Of course, I escorts him to Runnin' Elk an' sees him on a train for Montana before I go back to Woolly Annie's home ranch."

A Chat With You

HOW do you like this number of POPULAR STORIES? Don't be afraid to speak out—one way or another. We are now at fifteen cents again. We have often heard it said that POPULAR was the best fiction magazine in America. Is it? We don't know. We try to make it so. There are other magazines claiming to carry the sort of story men like to read. Some of them cost twenty cents, some twenty-five. Try them and see. Read them and weep. This magazine is fifteen cents again. Also, it is a weekly from now on. It comes out on the news stands every Thursday. That's a lucky day. The name originally was "Thor's Day." Thor, in the mythology of our northern ancestors was very much of an outdoors, hard-hitting, straight-shooting divinity.

* * * *

FROM now on, the novels which open the magazine will be somewhat shorter. We will give you the same story, the same thrill, the same excitement, but we will try to save your time a little and make it snappier.

The old historians used to write about the age of iron, the age of brass, the age of gold and so on. Were they to write in similar language about this age, they would call it the age of speed. Things are moving faster now. While older folk are planning and wondering how it can be done within the next generation, one young American flies across the Atlantic between two sleeps. The great golfers of the last thirty years are still discussing strokes and how to play them, when another young American beats all their records at the home of golf—St. Andrews. For a thousand years men had been trying to swim the English Channel, and now there is more than one American girl who can turn the trick.

* * * *

IT is nice, in a way, to look back at the old, leisurely days, but most of us, put back there, would find ourselves bored and restless. We think that the writing of stories should reflect our mood and feeling. We think that most of the old masterpieces of fiction were much too long.

No one, we think, could write a much better narrative than Dumas, author of "Monte Cristo," "The Three Musketeers," and a lot of others. This may seem heresy to the worshipers of Dumas, but we say it without fear of successful contradiction that at least a third of his stuff might have been cut out and the stories would have been all the better for it. The same goes for Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens and George Eliot.

* * * *

WRITING, by a man of genius or talent, is something natural, like the flow of water, and it takes the easiest channel. The best book that Tolstoi ever wrote, "Anna Karenina," was written in the most singular manner. It came out day by day, a thousand or so words at a time in a newspaper. Then in the middle, Tolstoi got tired or the newspaper stopped—but, anyway Anna was left to her fate for a year or more. Later on, Tolstoi placidly resumed the story and finished it and Anna. That was all right for the dreamy Russians of the czarist days—but not here and now.

* * * *

WE have been giving you a two-dollar novel in every issue of THE POPULAR. We shall continue to do so, but it will be told in fewer words. You will

have the essence, the action, the thrill, the punch, all that you can get in fiction for two dollars, but within a smaller compass. Besides this, you will have, in each issue, the five best short stories of the week. Then there will be serials. There are some stories that cannot be compressed within the covers of any one magazine.

* * * *

WE are frank to say that it gives us a lot of pleasure to come back to the fifteen-cent price. Also, we are glad that we are going to be a weekly. Three times a month, twice a month, are more or less unnatural divisions. But every one knows when Sunday comes, and Saturday and Thursday—and Thursday is our day on the news stands from now on. Furthermore, we think that the greater frequency of issue brings us a little closer to our readers. The oftener you speak to a man, the better you know him. This is the first of the weekly POPULARS. The next will be out next Thursday. It might be just as well, if you like this one, to place your order with your news dealer now.

The Popular Stories

In the Next Number, October 1, 1927

Guaranteed Twin Service for Ambitious Men!

T *Training* — *Preparing you for a better job and a Raise in Pay - - - -*

E *Employment Service* — *Placing you in it, or money refunded!*

O. C. MILLER
Director Extension Work

The American School

is the first in the home-study field to recognize the need of guaranteeing its courses with a money-back contract, if the training fails to accomplish the benefits you expect. Thus all risk and doubt are eliminated — **either the training will help you to a better job and a raise in pay or it will cost you nothing.** To better carry out this important service, we maintain a **National** employment department which keeps in touch with the employers of Draftsmen all over the U. S. All this without extra charge to our students and graduates.

Professional Outfit Given!

You will naturally expect the American School to give you the best kind of instruments and tools with the best kind of training. This outfit is good enough to use professionally after you finish your training. Mail coupon for description.

Come into Drafting!

Learn drafting—how to *make* and *read* plans, and the doors of opportunity in all mechanical, building, and engineering lines swing open for you! There are more well-paid Drafting jobs open today than in any other one profession or trade. There's a variety, a fascination to Drafting that will grip you. No other work is so interesting, *so well paid*—no other field offers equal opportunities for quick promotion.

The Draftsman is the Boss of the Works!

Destroy blue-prints and *plans*, and the wheels of all Industry will stop until new ones can be made. Every move of every workman on the job is *controlled* by the Draftsman through his plans. Railroads, public works, buildings of a hundred sorts, machinery, electricity, automobiles—all manufacturing and construction *start* on the Drafting table! That's the kind of work to get into, friend. Where you have the same chance as anybody else to make a *quick success!*

If You Are Now Earning Less Than $40 a Week

I guarantee to *prepare* you for a fine drafting position, right in your home, in your spare time; then I guarantee to help you find such a position paying at least 50% *more than you earn today*, within 60 days after you complete this training, or I will refund small amount you pay for tuition. We make this agreement to prove this instruction *will* make you a *real Draftsman*. Back of this guarantee are the entire resources and reputation of this million dollar institution.

O. C. Miller

O. C. MILLER
Director Extension Work

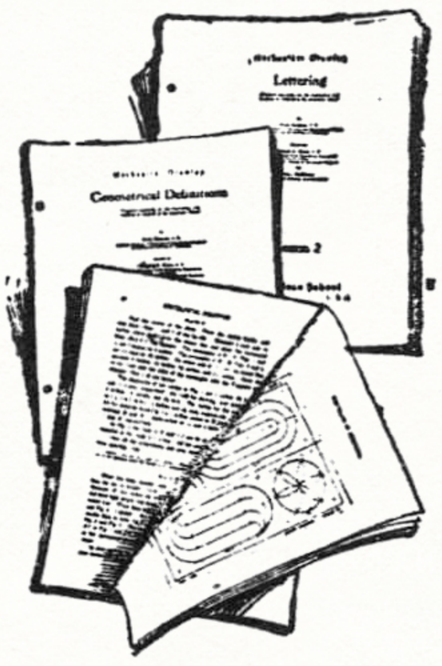
3 DRAFTING Lessons FREE!

—to prove you can learn at home in spare time!

You'll be surprised how *quickly* you can learn Drafting by our new one-step-at-a-time method. We start you off by doing actual Drafting room jobs from the very beginning. Before you know it, you are batting out professional plans like a veteran. Get the first three lessons--the coupon brings them. Do *them*. Test your ability to master Drafting at home. Without cost or obligation

The American School

Dept. D-6197, Drexel Ave. and 58th, Chicago



O. C. MILLER, Director Extension Work
American School, Dept. D-6197, Drexel Ave. and 58th St., Chicago.

Your offer to send me three lessons free and facts about the opportunities in Drafting and about your course, looks good to me. It is understood I am not obligated in any way in making this request.

Name .....

Address .....

Occupation ..... *Age* .....

Better be out of gas than out of Chesterfields

The natural tobacco taste of Chesterfield is proof that if tobaccos and blend are right, nothing need be (or should be) added.

LIGGETT & MYERS TOBACCO CO.