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Was to See That His Wife Got His Share of the Gold.

SNAKE BIT JONES  Dane Coolidge  16
(A Novelette)
It Was a Nice Question as to How Many Men Could Claim
Their Half of His Strike for Having Grubstaked
Snake Bit Jones.

COPS LEARN FAST  Robert Sidney Bowen  48
The Sergeant Belonged to the Old School—it's a Sign of
Weakness to Call for Help in Tackling
Less Than Five Toughs.

GREAT SCOUNDREL  Gordon Young  54
A Certain South Seas Captain Declared He Knew the Marks
of Leg Irons When He Saw Them—and Saw No Harm
in Cashing in on the Knowledge.

THE CHASE AFTER "LITTLE ALEC"  Karl Detzer  63
Some River Men Are Born Pilots, Some Learn the Trade,
and Some Don't—Though They Try Forty Years.

BEDROCK  Henry Herbert Knibbs  75
Swinging His Winchester Around and Firing Without Raising
It to His Shoulder—That Was What Bedrock
Called Turning the Other Cheek.
THE GEOGRAPHY EATER  Howard Brubaker  86
What Larry Had Against Automobiles, He Said, Was That
They Had Too Many Wheels, Too Many Cylinders
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THE LIGHT ON RAINBOW MOUNTAIN
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Dick Redshirt Knew the Secret of the Mine’s Location;
After That “Nose Dive from Saddle; Damfool
Horse Ran Away; Near Dead, Dam’”

OUT WITH THE WAGON
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ROUGH PASSAGE  Douglas Leach  132
Doc and Casaldy Stow Away in the China Seas.
A Very Perilous Pursuit at Best.

COVER—Benton Clark


Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.
One-Hand Guns for Six Centuries

When we think of man’s first firearm we go back to the early part of the fourteenth century, say about 1330 or 1340. These weapons, if they can be called weapons, were quite crude. They were nothing more than metal tubes, open at one end, that were bound to wooden sticks which passed for handles.

The charge of black powder, a powdered mixture of saltpeter, charcoal and sulphur, was poured into the tube or barrel of these guns with a projectile of stone or other material on top. They were fired by touching a lighted match to a small hole located towards the rear or breech end.

These guns are now called “Hand Cannons” and they were more valuable for frightening an enemy than for the actual damage they did. The terrifying effect of belching fire and smoke was almost overwhelming to a foe who was unfamiliar with the smoke-stick. The hand cannon was used in various parts of the world until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Next came the Matchlock which was probably invented sometime between 1350 and 1375, although the first record of the “serpentine” (hammer) dates early in the fifteenth century. The Matchlock was the first arm with a lock mechanism. The serpentine, which held a slow match, was brought into firing position by pulling the trigger. The slow match ignited the powder.

Guns, from the Matchlock to the Flintlock inclusive, had a small pan to contain a priming charge of powder which when ignited, by one method or another, would flash a hot flame through a small hole in the barrel to explode the main charge of powder and send the bullet on its way. Later examples of the Matchlock had what might be called a safety. It was a movable cover over the pan to keep the burning match from accidentally discharging the arm.

Matchlock hand arms were made in single barrel, double barrel and multi-barrel form.

Many of the early guns were highly decorated, and some examples of the Wheellock (next in the line of arms development) are really works of art. As a matter of fact, that is exactly why they are still in existence—they were preserved for their artistic beauty. Highly decorated examples far outnumber the plain ones!

The Wheellock was operated by a clock-like mechanism which rapidly turned the wheel’s roughened edge against a piece of iron pyrites which produces sparks to fire the gun.

The Wheellock was quite complicated and slow in use. Besides the chore of loading the weapon from the muzzle, the clock works had to be wound before it could be fired.

The next development in firearms is the pyrites-lock. It is one of the rarest of all guns and was in use for only a very short period. This mechanism consists of a cock (hammer) with a pair of jaws to hold a piece of pyrites arranged to strike a steel plate called the frizzen. This produced the sparks necessary for ignition.

The pyrites-lock is somewhat similar to the Snaphance which utilized flint instead of pyrites to produce the firing spark. The Snaphance was in use from about 1575 until about 1700.

The Miquelet Lock was the next firing mechanism. Locks before this one had hand operated pan covers. The Miquelet Lock had the frizzen (the portion of the steel to be struck by the flint) and the pan cover in one piece. Also, the mainspring was on the (Continued on page 6)
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outside of the lockplate. This arm was used from about 1625 until about 1825.

Various combinations of these early types of firing mechanisms, such as Matchlock and Wheelock, and Wheelock and Flintlock, were made up and used.

The true Flintlock came next and was used in various parts of the world from just before the middle of the 17th century until well into the last half of the 19th century. As a matter of fact, this type of weapon is still used in limited number in certain of the more backward sections of the world.

In principle, the Flintlock is similar to the Miquelet Lock, being essentially a redesign of that lock. The Kentucky pistols and rifles are practical examples of the Flintlock type of ignition. The Kentucky pistol is one of our most prized collector's items!

A very large variety of Flintlock handguns were made. Most everyone knows the Flintlock blunderbuss long-guns as pictured in paintings of the pilgrims. This same type of scatter-gun was made of large bore in pistol form. It was effective at only very short ranges.

The Hand Cannon
Man's First Firearm Developed in China During the 14th Century

In existence we have examples of Flintlock pistols with single, double and multi-barrels. Also, three to six shot revolvers. There are breech-loaders and even, so-called, hammerless Flintlocks. Some pistols have folding daggers for hand-to-hand combat. There are combinations, such as a pistol in the handle of a hunting knife, or in the handle of a sword. There are Flintlock pistols with as many as seven barrels arranged the same as those of a pepperbox or a Gatling gun. One of the very rare flint handguns is the Cookson repeating pistol. By operating a lever, the barrel chamber of this arm is reloaded with powder and ball and the pan recharged with priming powder.

Of course a great many duelling as well as martial flint pistols were designed and produced. The North and Cheney, made by Simon North in his factory at Berlin, Conn., is one of the very rare American martial Flintlock pistols that commands a high price.

Another interesting Flintlock pistol is one that is known as the "duckfoot." This gun was made with several barrels that fanned out like the toes of a duck's foot. All barrels fired at the same time and the shots spread over a large area. This defense weapon is also known as the "mob pistol." It was carried by use of a hook attached on one side of the gun.

The first American Flintlock revolver was invented by Elisha H. Collier at Boston, Mass., in 1809-10. Collier could not secure financial backing at home, so he took his invention to London, England, where production was started in 1818. The Collier is one of our most interesting revolvers and is so rare that it is found in but few arms collections.

Next we have a short transition period between the Flintlock and arms fired by the percussion cap.

Alexander Forsyth, a Scotch minister, discovered that fulminate of mercury could be used for firearms ignition in about 1807. This is one of the most important developments in the history of guns and is directly responsible for our modern cartridges.

Rev. Forsyth patented his first "detonating-lock," a very clever device for exploding loose fulminate of mercury (called detonating powder) by a hammer striking a small quantity in the flash pan of the arm. Later small pellets of this substance replaced the loose form. Recently I examined a perfect example of the Forsyth double barrel shotgun. This gun is in almost new condition and is a beautiful example of English gun making in the early part of the 19th century.

Several types of Forsyth handguns were produced and all are very rare items as far as the average collector is concerned.

(Continued on page 85)
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FANGED LIGHTNING

By
REGINALD C. BARKER

BRANT CORLISS was down on his knees, in the act of kindling a fire, when the fanged lightning struck him. An instant later, he was on his feet, with the blood draining from his lean, bronzed cheeks, and one of the thick-bodied, little horned rattlesnakes of the Mojave Desert hanging from his right wrist. In the deepening dusk the man had piled the sticks for his fire on top of the deadly reptile, as, after the manner of its kind, it lay buried in the sand.

Brant Corliss screamed once; a scream of deadly fear which lost itself in the immensity of the cactus-studded plain; then in sudden ungovernable fury, he wrenched the squirming thing from his wrist, and, too terror-stricken even to think of killing it, flung it from him. As the reptile struck the ground, it slithered a few yards with surprising speed and was gone.

Beads of perspiration popped out on the man's forehead, as his left hand fumbled at his belt. Blood spurted from his right wrist as the knife blade slashed across the double puncture left by the snake's poisonous curved fangs. A grimace contorted the muscles of the man's face as he sucked deeply at the wound, forgetful in his terror that his lips still were raw from the abrasion caused by the impact of Sam Busick's knuckles.

Then he tore a silk handkerchief from his throat, knotted it around his right arm, between elbow and wrist, and twisted it tight with a dry stick until the silk bit into his muscles like a hot wire.

To think that it should have happened to him, who all his life had hated snakes with the hatred that is born of a great fear. Struck by the fanged lightning of the Mojave at the very time he was on his way out of the desert with his share of the gold which he and Sam Busick had drywashed from the placers of the Funeral Range. Sam Busick, who had called him a quitter be-

(Continued on page 10)
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C. E. BRIDGES, Inventor
cause he had decided he had had enough of prospecting and was going back to the wife and baby he had left in the railroad town of Mojave; Sam Busick, a bearded giant with the strength of three men, who had knocked him down during a quarrel over the division of the gold.

A bully, Sam Busick. A man-handling brute with a poisonous tongue and the morals of a sidewinder, Brant Corliss had grub-staked him with his last funds, when Sam had returned to Mojave from Folsom Prison, where he had served a term for attempted murder. They had told Brant Corliss in Mojave that he was the biggest kind of a fool to trust Sam Busick; that he would live to regret the day. But Brant Corliss had needed money, and Sam Busick knew the desert as few men knew it. Also he and Brant Corliss had been schoolboys together.

Schoolboys together, and friends until Bernice Hollister had arrived in Mojave to teach school. Sam Busick and Brant Corliss had vied with others for her smiles. The girl, without the least idea of being coquettish, had smiled on them both alike until the night at the dance when Sam Busick had beaten one of her admirers almost to death. Sam Busick had been in prison a year when Bernice had married Brant Corliss.

Now, through a trick of Fate, Brant Corliss was dying.

He was sure of that. Already his right arm was swelled to double its size, and his lips were puffed and turning black from the effect of the rattlesnake venom. There was only one thing he could do; one thought which hammered at his slowly dulling brain. He must return with the gold to Sam Busick, and beg him to see that it reached Bernice. After that nothing mattered.

Five miles lay between Brant Corliss and the shack among the Funeral Mountains. Five miles; but he had to make it; five miles of hell!

Brant Corliss staggered over to where he had thrown the pack containing the gold. Two thousand dollars' worth of shining yellow dust which would help to keep want from his wife's door. Not much of anything at all of a load for a strong man; but to Brant Corliss, fighting against the venom that was slowly curdling his blood, it was a load that meant the difference between life and death.

Five miles. Only five miles. He thought he could make it if he discarded the gold; but he did not discard it; though his face was drawn with agony, and his heart was pounding like a trip-hammer against his ribs, as, guided by the north star he set his face toward the faint outlines of the Funeral Range. He had to exert, every atom of will power he possessed in an effort to reach the shack before the poison stilled his heart.

He never knew when he fell. He did not feel the cactus spines which punctured his hands and knees as on all fours he crawled over the last mile and pushed his way through the unlatched door of the shack in which Sam Busick lay snoring.

A lighted candle was flickering in a bottle when Brant Corliss opened his eyes. He was lying in his bunk, and Sam Busick was bending over him, with a strange expression in his black eyes, and his bearded lips twisted in a curiously sardonic grin.

"Rattler," Corliss's lips were so puffed that his partner could hardly make out what he said, "See that wife—gets gold."

Sam Busick glanced at his partner's arm. The swelling of the muscles had tightened the tourniquet, which should have been loosened every thirty seconds. Instinctively, Sam Busick knew that the arm was dead from the wrist up, but he made no effort to render aid. He just stood bending over his partner, staring at him in a detached manner, while through his brain raced thoughts of Brant Corliss's wife.

In the shack was a bottle of permanganate of potassium, such as few desert men are ever without. There was still a chance of saving Brant Corliss if aid were at once administered. Without it, the chances were good that the man would die, and his wife would be a widow.

"Tough luck," said Sam Busick. "I'll see that your wife gets the gold."

TOUGH luck for Brant Corliss, but good luck for Sam Busick. He could make the noble gesture; return to Brant's wife with (Continued on page 12).
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the gold, and a story of how he had done his best to save her husband’s life.

Suddenly a thought caused Sam Busick to frown. If he returned to Mojave with his own and his partner’s share of the gold, and a story of how Brant Corliss had died, none would believe him. He was an ex-convict with a bad reputation, and it might be thought that he had murdered his partner. Only one thing to do, which was to leave half the gold beside Brant Corliss; then return with the sheriff and the coroner. None could mistake death from rattlesnake bite for murder. But first, it might be better to remove the tourniquet, to lave the punctured wound with permanganate, which would leave the flesh stained in such a manner that none would accuse Sam Busick of having neglected to render his partner aid. It was too late anyhow; Sam Busick was sure of it. The venom had gained too strong a hold. Brant Corliss would die.

“Good scout,” Brant Corliss muttered, as his partner removed the tourniquet from his arm. “But too—too late. My wife—the gold.”

Sam Busick did not reply. Carefully he soaked his partner’s puffed lips and horrible-looking arm with the corrosive, which he made especially strong, so that it would leave a deep brown stain on the purple-mottled flesh. Then he left a cup of permanganate solution beside the bunk, and turned toward the pack containing the gold, which he had removed from the shoulders of Brant Corliss, and tossed upon the bunk.

In the pack was a hundred dollars’ worth more gold dust than in the share belonging to Sam Busick. It was the price of the grub-stake furnished by his partner. The grub-stake which had enabled them to strike it rich in the Funeral Range. Might as well have that extra hundred dollars. Neither the sheriff nor the coroner would know the difference; and Brant Corliss would be dead.

Again Sam Busick’s eyes wandered to his partner’s pack. No need to make up another. There was food in it, for Brant Corliss had not been away long enough to have made it necessary to eat. Food enough to last one man to Mojave—and two thousand dollars’ worth of gold.

Still, Sam Busick hated to leave his own share of the gold beneath the mattress of dry gramma grass upon which his partner lay muttering in the first throes of light-headedness. He wondered if he dare take all the gold with him; but gave up the idea. It wouldn’t matter anyway; he’d get all the gold in the end—and Brant Corliss’s wife.

Suddenly Brant Corliss raised his head, as a thought impinged on his consciousness through the inchoate maundrings which were besieging his brain. His eyes, wide with horror burned like coals into those of Sam Busick.

“Don’t leave me, Sam!” he muttered. “Won’t be long. . . .”

“Got to get a doctor.” His partner’s eyes avoided him. “Back soon as I can get here.”

He put out his hand; closed it on the pack of gold lying on the bunk; and the candle flickered and went out. Neither man saw a little horned rattlesnake slither from beneath the canvas flap of Brant Corliss’s pack, and disappear beneath the blankets on which he lay moaning.

Fumbling in the dark, Sam Busick slipped the straps of his partner’s pack over his huge shoulders. Stealthily, he reached for his rifle, where it leaned against a wall. Awkwardly, he stumbled over the lintel as he stepped over the threshold. Then he closed the door.

DAWN was breaking when Brant Corliss opened his eyes. Pain was tearing at every muscle of his body. His throat was parched with thirst, and there was a strange dimness to his vision. But he was still alive. Thanks to the strength of a constitution which never had failed him, and to the fact that immediately after having been struck by the rattler he had sucked most of the venom out of the fang punctures, he had survived the agonies of the night. He struggled out of the bunk only to have his knees give way beneath him. He crumpled to the floor, picked himself up, and staggered to the water bucket. He drank until he could hold no more; but he had no desire to eat.

Out into the pink desert dawn he staggered. Slumped down, with his back against

(Continued on page 14)
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the stone wall of the shack, he stared across the desert. Somewhere Sam was plodding across the sandy waste, on his way to his partner's wife, with two thousand dollars' worth of gold dust, and a message that would break her heart.

No way to stop the news reaching her; no way at all. Brant Corliss realized that he could not have traveled a mile.

At dusk Brant Corliss crept back into the shack. The pains in his body had diminished; his arm was not quite so swollen, and his lips had returned almost to their natural size; but still he felt no desire to eat.

His eyes, still haunted with fear, wandered around the shack; came to rest on the cup of permanganate solution his partner had left beside the bunk. Good scout, Sam; nothing he hadn't tried to do. Still, it was curious that he had not stayed until the end, though Brant Corliss had no recollection of having asked him to do so. Maybe Sam had thought him already dead. Sure, that was what Sam had thought.

Brant Corliss lay down on his bunk. Maybe by morning he would feel well enough to travel. Got to get back to Bernice; she would be half crazy with grief.

BRANT CORLISS'S eyes closed and he drifted off to sleep. He did not feel a slight stirring among the dried grass mattress beneath him; did not see the ugly triangular head of a horned rattlesnake lift itself above the blankets; did not see the reptile draw back and disappear from sight.

The glare of an electric torch in his eyes awoke Brant Corliss. A man, unseen behind the blinding beam, spoke harshly.

"What the hell, Sam? Your partner ain't dead!"

The light swerved away from Brant Corliss's eyes; and he recognized the sheriff of the county. Beside him stood two other men; the coroner and "Doc" Frisbie. Near them glowered Sam Busick.

"No, I ain't dead; thanks to Sam," said Brant Corliss. "Close call though."

He sat up, and the three men stared at his arm, still somewhat swollen, and stained a deep brown by the permanganate.

"Not much more I can do," said Doc Frisbie. "Unless it is to give you a drink."

"How did my wife take it, Sam?" Brant Corliss turned a haggard face toward his partner.

"Bound to come along," said the sheriff. "She's waiting outside in the car."

The sheriff was wrong.

Bernice Corliss burst into the shack. Her face was pale beneath her dark hair.

"Oh, Brant," she cried, throwing her arms around his neck, "I thought—I thought. . . ."

None saw the rattlesnake that glided from beneath Brant Corliss's pillow, hesitated a moment, then disappeared.

Brant Corliss slipped out of the bunk, stood with one arm around his wife's shoulders.

"Did Sam give you the gold, honey?"

"Sure, I give her the gold!" Sam Busick said hoarsely, "I ain't no thief."

"May as well be going," the sheriff said.

"What beats me," said the coroner, "is how come Sam thought Brant was dead?"

"He looked dead to me," said Sam, "Or I wouldn't have left him."

He turned toward the bunk.

"I left half the gold under the blankets," he said, and tossed them back. "Turn your light on here a minute, Sheriff."

He bent closer, and something whirred like a watch spring suddenly released. Frozen with horror, the sheriff and the coroner stared, as coiled and ready to strike, a horned rattlesnake raised its head within a foot of Sam Busick's bearded face.

The scream of a terrified woman echoed through the tiny room.

Then Brant Corliss shot out his left arm, and like a vise, his fingers closed around the reptile's body just behind the triangular head. With the memory of a night and a day of terror behind him, and the belief that he owed Sam Busick his life, his fear was submerged in a burst of fury which ended only when his clenched fingers had suffocated the life of the ugly, squirming thing in his grip. Then Brant tossed it through the open door, sank nervelessly onto the nearest stool, and dropped his face between his shaking hands.
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CHAPTER I

THE DEATH VALLEY TRAIL

A CLOUD of dust topped the summit of the Death Valley Trail and came streaking down the slope towards Bullfrog—where at Piper McSparron, the storekeeper, raised both hands to heaven and cursed.

"Always hurrying!" he complained. "You'd think there was a gold-rush! Whipping—spurring—galloping! And all over what? Nothing!"

He spat contemptuously, and from his seat in the shade Dusty Rhodes glanced up languidly.

"You'd think," he said, "he was out of whiskey and snake-bit. Or letting on he was snake-bit, to get the drinks. Eh, heh!"

Once more, while Dusty cackled, McSparron raised his fists to the sky. "Never," he swore, "so help me, will he get another drink off of me. Not even a drink of water if his tongue is hanging out! I'm through with him, the crazy fool!"

He pursed his tight lips and waited for the dust-streak to come up. It was Snake Bit Jones with his four big mules and fancy outfit—all paid for by somebody else. Burning up with excitement over some big strike—until he could make another touch! With hard, Scotch curses Piper sought to steel his soul, and Snake Bit read the hate in his eye.

"Well, what are you all swelled up about?" he demanded arrogantly; reining in his big black riding-mule. "Here, have a drink on me and wipe that dirty look off your mug."

He threw his last quarter into the dust and McSparron jumped to pick it up.

"That's the first and last quarter I'll ever get from you!" he said. "Go on, now! Bum your grub somewhere else."

Snake Bit Jones looked around and met the eyes of Dusty Rhodes, who responded with a frozen smile. He too had felt the touch for which Snake Bit was famous and was keeping himself well in hand.

"Hello, Dusty!" hailed Jones. "Have you been in that same chair ever since I came by last month? And call yourself a prospector!"

Tall and lean, full of the insolent strength of youth, Snake Bit gave himself over to a fit of laughter that finally roused old Dusty from his sloth.

"And you call yourself a prospector!" he mocked. "You couldn't get trusted for a quart of whiskey if you was snake bit. And then try to run it over me! Why don't you throw down that five dollars you owe me if you hold yourself so mighty high and mighty?"

SNake BIT turned his bronzed face towards Keno, the big mining-camp eight miles away, and ignored these cutting remarks.

"Will you take it?" he asked at last.

"Will I take it?" yelped Dusty, leaping up; and then he saw the big red automobile that was rushing out from town. "No, sir!" he declared, on a hunch. "I claim a grub-
staker’s interest in everything you find. Tell that to your millionaire friend!"

"How much do I owe you?" inquired Jones as the storekeeper ran out to look. But McSparron had got exactly the same hunch.

"You owe me nothing!" he stated. "Not a cent—do you understand? But if you ever locate a mine I claim half. That’s the law—I know my rights!"

"All right!" grinned Jones. "How’s my credit, then? Am I good for a couple of drinks? And set up a couple more for that drunken old lizard—herder that calls himself a prospector!"

"No, sir! Not a dime, not a dollar!" yapped McSparron. "You’re in on me now over six hundred dollars and—"

"Aw, keep your booze!" broke in Snake Bit, "and I’ll drink with a gentleman, when he comes. You old pinch-penny scrouge, charging two prices for everything! I’ll buy my stuff in town after this, where I’ll get a little respect. All you know is to raise the price of bacon and charge four-bits for a pair of socks!"

"Eh—eh!" bleated McSparron, shaking his long, bony finger; but before he could make answer the car thundered up and stopped. A colored chauffeur bounded out and plucked open the door and George Hathaway himself stepped forth. George Hathaway, the millionaire, still playing his system for getting control of every strike in Death Valley. There wasn’t a prospector in Southern Nevada who hadn’t been grubstaked by him sometime.

"Hello, Slim!" he hailed, reaching out his hand. "I hear you struck it rich."

"Richt!" echoed Jones. "This old hypothe-
cator here won’t trust me for the price of a drink."

"Well, I will," smiled Hathaway. "For
ten of them—or a hundred. How much does Slim owe you, Mr. McSparron? Make out your bill—I’ll pay it."

"He owes me nothing," snapped the storekeeper. "But I claim—"

"Then give me the drinks," responded the millionaire, genially. "And—ahem—have you got any soda-pop? On ice?"

HE TURNED towards the car and from its vellum recesses a lady stepped forth smiling. A very pretty lady—young, handsome, with velvet-black eyes and the charm of a Hollywood starlet.

"My daughter!" observed Hathaway with a vague sweep of the hand; and Death Valley Slim stood stunned. They came that way sometimes—tall, graceful, delightfully slender, with pancy-eyes and pearly teeth—but he had never had the pleasure of meeting one. He reached for his hat—changed his mind and yanked it on again—and McSparron brought out the drinks.

"Congratulations," said Hathaway, keeping his eye on Snake Bit; but Jones did not take the hint. His grubstake with the millionnaire had a run out a year ago—a year ago to a day.

"On what?" he asked. "Bumming a drink?"

"On making the greatest strike in the his-

When Snake Bit Jones Came in from Death Valley, Showing Every Indication of Having Made a Strike—the Whole Population Was on His Heels at Once
tory of Death Valley. One of my Indians just brought me the news.”

"Yes," broke in his daughter, smiling brightly. "He came racing into Keno with his horse all covered with foam and showed Daddy a piece of solid gold. And he said you had your mules loaded down with it. Won't you give me a little piece? I'd just love it!"

Snake Bit gazed at her narrowly, his lips drawn down and a fighting look in his eye.

"Why, certainly," he replied, bowing gallantly, and fetched out a jewelry specimen from his pocket. "Anyone else like a chunk?" he inquired, and flipped a healthy nugget at Rhodes. "There's that five dollars I owe you," he said. But Dusty broke the charm.

"No, sir!" he blared. "You can't fool me that way. I know you've found a mine and I claim half of it."

"How about you?" asked Jones, turning to the storekeeper. "I came in to pay you what I owe you. Last chance, now—take it or leave it!"

"Not me," declared McSparron; and Snake Bit glanced at Hathaway.

"I claim half this mine," declared the magnate, "under our grubstake agreement of a year ago. That contract is ended but I expect to prove in court that this discovery was made during its lifetime. Made and covered up, but I've had my men on your trail."

His dark eyes lit up with a tolerant smile and his black mustache, curling up, revealed his even white teeth. It was easy to see where his daughter had got her beauty, but "King George" had something else. He was a clean-strain fighting man, used to handling rough prospectors who tried to hold out on their strikes; but the velvet glove always covered the iron hand, and his voice was even kind.

"You're a smart boy, Slim," he said, "but I'm just a little smarter. I've had my experts on your trail and I know you've got a mine."

"Sure, I've got a mine," admitted Snake Bit, "but no expert has ever seen it. I picked up the float while I was working for you, but I found it on my own time. It was just a little pocket; but rich, you can see that. I loaded the whole works on my mules here, so you can't hardly call it a mine. I never even tried to locate it. There was no ore in place, to file on. Still, I spent a lot of your money rambling around, and I brought the metal in, to give you half."

"On the advice of my attorney," went on Hathaway, "I must refuse to accept any payment which might prejudice my claim to the mine. You've got one and I know it—a rich vein, full of gold. My Indian has kept me informed."

"Ye-es!" snarled Snake Bit, turning ugly, "it's too bad about that Indian and I predict he's going to come to a bad end. Especially," he added, "if he sneaks into my camp again and steals another piece of that particular ore."

"He is my agent," stated Hathaway, "and under my protection, I warn you not to molest him. Every move you have made in the last year has been reported. Are you willing to lead me to this mine?"

"Mine!" repeated Slim. "I haven't got any mine. A mine isn't a mine until it's staked and recorded. If you can find it you can have it all."

"Well, that's very kind and generous of you, Slim," smiled Hathaway. "And I'll do that—I'll take it all."

"If," observed Snake Bit, "you can find it." And he turned back up the Death Valley Trail.

CHAPTER II

THE CROESUS OF DEATH VALLEY

At the top of the divide Snake Bit pulled up to let his pack-mules breathe. Their loads were small, but incredibly heavy. It was gold—the pure quill—but no one would take it. Not even old Dusty Rhodes.

"Oh, hey!" he jeered as he sighted a cloud of dust trailing after him. "So old King George has turned loose his hellions to run me to the ground. And old Raise-the-Price-of-Bacon and Dusty Rhodes. All out to claim their half. Well, that's the way they work it, these grubstaking highbinders, but
they'll never get their hooks on my claim. No, by grab—I haven't got one."

He gazed down into the great Valley, half hidden in a haze of heat, and as his eyes sought out a tiny speck in its vastness they took on the fierce intentness of an eagle's. There lay his treasure, for any man to take who could find it. But it was far away from the hole where the ore had been dug—he was playing a system of his own. King George with his Indian spies, his scouts and his trailers! The man who took a grubstake from him signed away all his rights for life. But Death Valley Slim had another system that beat that all to hell.

He laughed as he headed down into the moving sand-dunes, the poisonous marshes, the painted hills and boulder-strewn washes that made up this Playground of Death. For months he had prepared, until every little thing was ready for this battle to come. Not every day or year did a man strike gold that ran four hundred thousand dollars to the ton. The richest ore that had ever been assayed in Goldfield. And this was to be divided half and half with every man who had loaned him a dollar! Snake Bit laughed again and as the night closed down he turned south and rode till dawn. Then at Tin Can Spring, he dug up two five-gallon oil-cans and they took a drink, all around.

That was an idea he had learned from the Yuma Indians. When the Apaches swooped down on them they fled into the desert—to places where, long before, their women had carried water and buried it in gum-sealed ollas. And when their enemies followed they found the remnants of broken jars, while the Yumas fled on and on. Slim dug in another spot and uncovered a sack of grain, from which he fed his hardy mules. Then they hid in a box-canyon where no one could slip up on them and slept until the sun was low.

Snake Bit woke up with a start, for he had had bad dreams and his lookout mule was snorting. Not even an Indian could see like old Good Eye; and at a dim dust, far away, he lowered his head and went:

"Pro-o-ow!"

"Moving day!" laughed Slim, and cinched on the packs of gold. Then, with the wide southern desert before him he rode forth out of the sink and, far up in Wingate Pass, he dug up cans of water and drank deep. Black buttes rose before him in the ghostly moonlight as he threaded his way between boulders which the summer cloudbursts had left. The sun was rising again when he rode out across Dry Lake and headed for Scarborough's Ranch. He had outdistanced all his enemies and won back to the railroad, where long trains went hooting past on their way to Los Angeles—and the drinks.

Snake Bit licked his lips as he gazed ahead at the mesquite thicket in which Morgan Scarborough's house lay hidden. It had once been the hide-out of a gang of Mexican horse-thieves, but old Morgan was on the square. He expected everybody else to be square, too; and, if not, made them hard to catch. Horses left with him were there when you came back. And Kate—she was on the square.

As Slim rounded the turn and came out into the great clearing she was riding off, alone. That was Kate—always riding—and there was little that went on that escaped her watchful eye. But she knew how to keep her mouth shut. The very girl that Snake Bit wanted to see, although she would never stop to talk. Kate was engaged to a bow-legged cowboy and, when he made enough money playing poker—but so far he was a loser at the game—expected to marry.

"Hello!" she said and as Snake Bit rode up closer she glanced at his packs and then at him.

"Kate," he began, "there's a bunch of yaps after me—they scouts of King George Hathaway. Do you reckon, if I leave these mules, they'll be here when I come back?"

"Yep," she returned. "Turn 'em into the big pasture."

"Hey, wait a minute!" he yelled as she spurred on past. "I've got something I want to leave with you."

"Oh, yes?" she called back. "Sack of gold or something? Well, put it behind the mineral case and I'll take care of it when I get home."

She was off then, like a shot, and Snake Bit grumbled to himself. Kate was not a pretty girl the first time you saw her, but Slim had been seeing her some time. There
was nothing flossy about her and she didn’t powder her nose, but up on a horse she was fine. She wore chaps like a man and was an all-round cowhand, but always in a hurry. Always riding off somewhere when he came in to the ranch and wanted to have a little talk. He had heard that Bill Hannigan, her bow-legged cowboy, objected to her having friends.

But the big city was calling, Kate would be here when he came back and—well, he didn’t need to tell her it was gold. The sacks were as safe with her as if they held low-grade ore, and nobody had heard of his strike. The strike that was going to set Los Angeles in an uproar when he blew in and flashed his roll! There was an ore-buyer down on Main Street who would give him quick action and no foolish questions asked. A good, honest soul who would do anything for money.

Slim shipped the ore to him and rode in on the same train. But nobody noticed him—yet.

That evening at the old Longstreet Hotel, where all the mining men gathered, Snake Bit ordered a round of drinks and laid a piece of ore on the bar. It was just a piece of gold with a little quartz stuck to it, but the crown jewels of England wouldn’t have created half the sensation.

Men grabbed him, they grabbed the specimen, they asked a thousand questions and set up ten thousand drinks. Everybody was drunk and they all wanted to stake him—to go in with him on this strike. When he woke up in the morning with his boots full of small change, Snake Bit Jones discovered he was famous.

Not famous for a day, like a great movie star or a millionaire with too many wives, but seriously and importantly, with men struggling to shake his hand—and they all wanted to get on his strike. It was the spirit of the times—with Tonopah, Goldfield and Keno all adding to the tales of men made Midas-rich in a day. Tales of dust-covered prospectors coming in off the desert with quartz that was rotten with gold. And Slim’s rock was almost pure gold.

Somebody stole the first specimen five minutes after he had flashed it, but he had plenty more in his poke. This was just what he had dreamed of in the wilds of Death Valley and he lapped it up like a kitten with warm milk. Then a newspaper called him the Croesus of Death Valley and Snake Bit’s chest very visibly went out.

“The Croesus of Death Valley!” he repeated, and they let it go at that. Croesus it was, the man with the Midas touch that turned all baser elements to gold; but on the third day of his triumph George Hathaway appeared, and his old, tolerant smile was still there.

“Well, Slim my boy,” he said, “roll ‘em high, while you’ve got a chance and before your last stake is gone. I’ve found your mine and I claim it all. It pays to be honest—with me.”

“Oh, it does, eh?” laughed Snake Bit.

“Well, I’ll tell you the truth, then—you’re a liar. You never found my mine because I never had a mine. Go ahead now and think up another one.”

“Well, we’re hot on your trail,” qualified Hathaway. “We found the hole where you dug up that gold and, mind you, I claim my half.”

“Oh! I thought you claimed it all,” roared Death Valley Slim. “So you’re George,” he went on. “The King of the Grub-Stakers! The man who has a placer on every mine in Nevada and clear across Death Valley into California. Well, go ahead, George and lay a placer on my mine. If you find it, you can have it all. Or anybody else! Go ahead and find it, boys; it ain’t located. Go ahead and get yours.”

The affable smile upon the face of King George was losing its first, fresh charm, and his teeth began to show like a wolf’s.

“I’ll get it,” he said, “or nobody will. Is that plain, Mr. Jones? I mean you!”

“Yeh!” jeered Slim. “I got you the first time. You don’t think I can do it, eh? Well, listen to me now—I’ll bet you a thousand dollars I can get another sack in a week.”

“A sack of ore—here?” checked Hathaway. “From your Death Valley mine? All right, put up your money with the bar-keep.”
CHAPTER III

X MARKS THE SPOT

FULL of gusty oaths and Los Angeles mixed drinks, the Croesus of Death Valley stepped off the train at Scarborough Flag station and hiked through the brush to the Scarborough ranch. It was quite a large order—a sack of gold in a week and with Hathaway’s men hot on his trail—but Slim set forth confidently, for he had an ace in the hole. That ragged ore-sack he had left with Kate. But why tip his hand at the start?

The old man was at home when he stepped out into the clearing and came up to the big adobe house, and Kate was in the kitchen cooking up something good for the cowboys sitting hungrily around.

"Howdy, Slim," greeted Scarborough. "Just in time for breakfast. Going back up the valley again?"

"Traveling by freight now, I see," observed a bow-legged cowboy. In fact, the bowlegged cowboy. Hers.

"Yeh," answered Snake Bit for them both, and sank into a brooding silence. As a cowhand, Bill Hannigan was the last word from Texas; but as a man, the way Slim looked at it, he left much to be desired. And the fresh way he horned in on the Old Man’s conversation showed he was just a big, overgrown kid. Still, that was not the place to tell him to close his bazoo, so Slim lingered around, catching his mules up and saddling them, until the cowboys rode off to work. But just as he was having a word with Kate a black shadow fell across the doorway. A long, slim shadow with a gun on one hip, and Snake Bit took the hint.

All he wanted to do was to tell her about his mine and find out if his gold was all right, but he had other things on hand beside calling down Texas cowboys and he headed north without looking back. He was crossing Dry Lake when in a mirage to the east he saw a ten-foot horse with a twenty-foot rider following along the edge of the hills. Those sharp, black buttes with the sand piled up against them that once had
been volcanic cones. There was one to the west with a column of smoke rising up on it. King George's desert scouts were making smoke-talk to signal the Indians up ahead.

At A spring, late that day, Slim stopped to grain his mules and take on a belly-full of water, and he could not but notice the scouts on the nearby buttes, sticking their heads up like chuckwalla lizards. Still he rode steadily on—for who would shoot him now, when he alone knew the secret of his mine? Their job was to follow him until he dug up that ore to make good his bet with King George—then nab him and take it away. He headed through Wingate Pass just as the sun went down at the end of a long, hot day; but an hour after dark he was heading back west again, leaving Death Valley to the scouts.

It was a wild country, a rough country, with nobody in it; but Slim had two cans of water buried close, and he slept till the scouts all got past. Then he turned up Panamint Valley and camped, deadbeat, an hour before the dawn. Wherever he camped, there was a tin-can spring and grain to feed his mules. He had planted them, long before, and the next night he rode on, until he looked down into the great Valley of Death. He was hidden in a high canyon when the sun came up, but they had spotted him—he could see their smokes.

He had thrown off his pursuers but the scouts had picked him up at this end—either that or they were just there and waiting. But night was coming—his friend. He rode down Emigrant Wash, turned out into the sandhills, cut a circle around a signal fire and edged in. No use—they were forewarned—the country swarmed with Indians and glowed with their signal-fires. He turned his mules towards the railroad and laughed. Two days later he showed up at Scarborough's ranch, slipping in through the mesquite trees just as the cowboys rode off, leaving Kate to wash the dishes.

She was a good girl—Kate. A hard worker and a hard rider, and simply wasted on that bow-legged Texan. Slim turned out his mules and was going up for a little talk when he saw her down at the gate.

"Hey!" he yelled, and she looked back laughing as she let her mount through the bars.

"Cook your own breakfast!" she hollered. "We're not running a hotel. I'm going out to Black Butte."

"No, but listen! Where's that sack of ore I gave you?"

"Just where you left it—behind the mineral cabinet. How's the mining business? Fine?"

"Fine as silk," he answered; and then to himself: "If some yap hasn't copped that ore."

He hurried into the living-room, which hadn't been swept since the last sandstorm; and there, half buried in dust, reposed his bag of solid gold.

"Keno!" he said and that very evening he set it down on the Longstreet bar.

"Where's King George?" he inquired of the grinning bar-keep—and when George Hathaway came rushing in Slim got a thousand dollars worth of laugh. A big, belly-laugh—and then the thousand dollars, which he laid on the bar for drinks.

"Fill 'em up!" he said. "Set 'em up all around. And then keep on setting 'em up until we have started a drunk to date time from."

He glanced over at King George, whose nose was beginning to twitch like a rabbit's—a very bad sign with the king.

"Where'd you get that ore?" he asked, pawing it over.

"Don't ask me!" mocked Slim. "Ask Hook-nose Miller, your chief scout. The famous desert-man who can trail a mosquito through hell."

"I'll admit," said Hathaway at last, "that my scouts have been fooled. I'll give you a thousand dollars more to show me where you got this, and take the money out of their pay."

"Nope, nope!" decided Snake Bit. "That wouldn't be sporting. Give them the thousand dollars if they ketch me, the next time I go out for more."

"Oh! You're going out again, eh?" murmured Hathaway; and suddenly his old smile came back. "Well, why not?" he said.
"I'm a sport myself. Don't you know, Mr. Jones, I'm beginning to like you? Won't you come out to my home and meet my wife and daughter? Nancy made me promise before she'd let me go."

Snake Bit had a dizzy spell, such as comes to occasional drinkers when they lap up the liquor too fast—or to roughneck prospectors when a millionaire invites them to meet his wife. And daughter! Slim let go all holds and came up with a grin on his face.

"Well—er—I'm dressed rather rough," he began; but King George had him half way to his car.

"Home, James!" he said; and at this well-worn phrase Slim laughed before he thought. But of course all millionaires said that to their chauffeurs—and when they got there he must give his hat to the butler, like they do in the picture-shows.

"We're just plain home-people," went on Hathaway, as if he had been reading his thoughts; "and my daughter, as you know, is perfectly fascinated with all that Death Valley country. Every time I go out there to attend to my interests she insists on going along, and she thinks more of that nugget you gave her than she would of a million dollars. But my wife—well, please be a little careful, at first. She's not used to our Western ways."

Snake Bit was in a great sweat when they drew up before a mansion on a high hill overlooking Hollywood. Hollywood, where all the pretty girls come from—but none half so pretty as Nancy. Yes, that was her name and, almost before he knew it he found himself sitting with her—alone. King George had been called away on some urgent business and mother was busy answering the phone.

"Oh, goody!" smiled Nancy, moving closer. "Now please tell me, quick, how you came to get that gold when father's men were following you. Why, that Hook-nose Miller is just a wonderful scout—"

"Oh, fair—fair," pronounced Slim. "He can follow a burro if the trailing is good; but don't you know, I ran circles around him. Made a monkey out of him and his Shooshonnies, too. These Indians ain't as good as you'd think. They're pretty fair trackers, but when they're up against a gun—" He patted his hip and Nancy's dark eyes danced.

"Do you kill people?" she asked, speaking low.

"Well-no," he confessed. "Not unless they need killing. I'm a man of peace, savvy, until someone tries to rob me, and then I go on the warpath."

"Did you go on the warpath this time? And did the Indians and scouts shoot back?"

"Nary a shot—I travel at night and them scouts could never ketch up. Those mules of mine are the best in the country and I keep them fed up with grain. Yes, I have it buried here and there, with a few cans of water—"

"And when they come up—" she broke in.

"The water's gone," he said, and grinned.

"Why, how wonderful," she exclaimed. "Will you do something for me—please? I'm collecting autographs—of great people I've met—and I want yours, to begin a book. You see I've just filled one and I wouldn't start another until I could begin it with you."

She ran away over the soft rugs as active as a fawn and while her mother still telephoned she spread it out before him.

"Sign there," she said, and when she gave him the pen their hands touched. Slim had another sinking-spell and when he came out of it she was gazing up into his eyes.

"Make me a picture," she pleaded, "of where the mine is—the place where you dug up my gold."

She showed him her precious specimen, clutched tight in her dainty hand, and he drew a long line the length of the page—and another one, coming up the other side.

"Here's the Brieogle Buttes," he said, making two spots.

"Yes!" she breathed as he stopped to ponder, and in the tense silence that followed a voice spoke over the phone—a man's voice, and strangely familiar. His eyes stared at the page but the pen did not stir—it was Hathaway, calling up to talk to his wife.
"Yes, but where was the mine?" prompted Nancy impatiently; and he made a few more swift strokes. But as he traced the valley, going south from the buttes, Mrs. Hathaway spoke up sharply.

"Why no—certainly not," she said; and Nancy nudged Slim with her elbow.

"Hurry up!" she implored, "before mother comes back. Just make a cross where the ore was found, the way they do in the movies. Oh, if she knew I was getting this map—"

"All right," nodded Slim and with ponderous deliberation he sketched in—Tin Can Spring. The place where he had dug up two oil-cans of water and a sack of grain for his mules. But just as he made a cross there Nancy snatched the book away.

"Yes, mother," she answered. "Why no, of course not!"

Snake Bit rose up punctiliously as Mrs. Hathaway entered the room.

"No indeed," he added, without knowing what he was talking about; and Nancy gave him a swift look. Then he bowed himself out, before mother could ask any questions.

CHAPTER IV
THE KING'S ORDERS

Quick work on both sides—and Nancy had got her man. But who would think that a nice girl like her would try to whip saw an honest prospector? Asking a red-shirted miner who had been snake-bit twice to show her where his treasure was hid! Well, if two empty tin-cans and a gunny-sack were any good to King George he was welcome, but it was a cinch that Mother Hathaway was putting up the conscience for the family. Nancy and her father had been playing hand in glove, he calling up mother and holding her at the phone while his daughter gave Snake Bit the works.

Slim was still a little drunk when he got back to the hotel, but the perfidy of women had almost sobered him. A pretty girl like her, standing in with her old man to shake down a confiding prospector! He could see at a glance what a tough game he was up against in this battle for his lost mine. It called for a sober head or he would wake up some morning with a horse-laugh ringing in his ears. Or perhaps the lilting laughter of Nancy.

The thousand dollar debauch was well-started when Snake Bit pulled into the bar. Men were cruising in from everywhere, some merely to get the drinks but most to see the Croesus of Death Valley. He was a man of renown, with his picture in all the papers—but in that sea of beaming faces there was one that registered unsmilng hate. It was burned three shades darker than mahogany and Slim would know it anywhere by the nose. High—thin—on a battle-axe of a face! It was Hook Nose Miller, the desert scout. Not often did he show his visage among the pale-faced denizens of the city, but now there was blood in his eye. And as he stood head and shoulders above the rest Snake Bit read the signs of war at a glance.

"Call your house-cop," he whispered to the bar-keep, upon whom he had bestowed a chunk of gold, and waded boldly through the throng.

"Have a drink, Stranger?" he said. "The tarantula-juice is on me—or rather on King George Hathaway. And by the way—"

He paused, while like a dangerous rattlesnake Hook Nose Miller bared his fangs.

"Nah!" he spat. "You're a dod-blasted liar. For a nickel I'd push your face in flat and—"

"Make it a dime!" suggested Slim with a jovial smile. "I'd like to see the flunky taking orders from Grubstake George—who could—"

He flipped him a dime and as Miller wound up to strike a large gentleman frisked him from behind.

"That'll do, now," he said, backing off with two six-shooters; but Hook Nose was soused to the eyebrows and he went off like a jack-in-the-box. First he leapt up, trembling, then his fist shot out and Slim stopped it on the ear. But as he went over he started a hay-maker that caught Miller square on the chin. They clinched, just as the house-detective broke in, and Hook Nose stood locked in his arms.

"Another move," he warned, "and out you go. Now—what is it? Spake your piece."

"That man," declaimed Miller, "is a
dodrammed liar. He never found no mine. He never went out and got no ore. This bag he brought in he had hid out somewhere, to win that bet off of Mr. Hathaway!"

"Aha!" came back Slim. "I know what's biting him. He's been called down by the boss for his carelessness and negligence in letting me get back at all. What? Let a poor prospector come back alive? Well, well, this will have to be looked into! And in the meanwhile, Mr. Miller, you're docked a month's salary—"

"You never won that bet!" charged Hook Nose. "That ore never came out of Death Valley. I've followed your tracks from the railroad and back and you never dug up nothing."

"No!" agreed Snake Bit. "Did I ever say I did? I bet I'd be back in a week with another sack of that ore, and I'll leave it to the bar-keeper and these rum-hounds if I didn't do just that. But here—you're a sport—I'll bet you any money—"

"You come out into Death Valley again," broke in Miller "and I'll kill you too dead to skin!"

"That's a threat," warned Slim. "And another thing, Hook Nose. Who's going to find that mine for King George if you kill me before I go to it? Ah-harr!" And he backed off, laughing.

"I'll git you anyway!" yapped Miller at last.

"You try it," answered Snake Bit, "and I'll git you. Now listen, you heat-crazy fool. I'm going out there—savvy? I'm going out to my mine, if you want to call it a mine, and come back swag-bellied with gold. And you and your Injuns can't do a thing about it. I'm going to show you up, right!"

"Hah, yes!" sneered Hook Nose, wagging his head. "You're going to play hell. My orders are to git you, and by grab I'll do it. You just come—that's all I say!"

"All right—and thank you kindly," bowed Slim. "So it's the King's orders, eh—to git me?"

"No, sir," thundered a voice from the door, and Hathaway pushed to the front. "It's not my orders and no drunken desert-rat is going to stand here and misrepresent me. Miller, you're fired. I'm a man of peace—always. I stand for justice and law. And my rights! But no man can ever say that George Hathaway resorted to violence. You signed one of my grubstake agreements and poured out my money like water. Did I stop you? Did I deny you anything? But when you made a strike you filled up the hole and renigged, and that's one thing I never will stand."

H E PAUSED, swelling up like a chuck-awalla with self-righteous anger and pride, and Snake Bit regarded him fearfully.

"You ought to be a preacher," he said. "Full of hell and damnation for the enemies of the Lord—but there's where you make a mistake. You're not Gawd Almighty! You don't own Death Valley! You're just a black-leg lawyer, robbing prospectors of every mine they find. Once they sign up, you claim every strike they make, but here's one hombre you can't intimidate."

He thumped himself on the chest and laughed, and Hathaway's nose began to twitch.

"We will see, Mr. Jones," he said. "If you've got a mine my Indians will find it, and I'll hold it by due process of law."

"Where that mine is," came back Snake Bit, "they ain't no law. Step to it—the bridle is off."

"Yes, and don't forget me!" spoke up Miller, horning in. "You can fire me, Mr. Hathaway, and dock my pay, which you had no right to do; but I serve notice right now, if I ever find that hole I'll claim it for myself. I'll claim it and I'll hold it, and before you git to it I'll pack off every pound of loose ore."

"You try that," threatened Hathaway, "and I'll hire a man—"

"Ahr! You and your hired men! With ore like that nobody can hold it. The first man that finds it—it's gone."

The impact of this idea set the King back on his heels and brought a leer to Hook Nose's sinister eyes. But the loudest laugh of all came from Snake Bit Jones.

"You think you're smart," he said, "And you think you're smart. But I figured that all out six months ago—and where do you get off, now? They ain't no mine, and they
ain't going to be any mine. And if anything happens to me—it's good-bye to all that gold."

And he laughed again.

CHAPTER V

THE HIDEOUT

IT WAS dark when Snake Bit Jones rode back into Death Valley, so dark that all the blackness of the desert night seemed to have slipped down and formed a pool. Nor was there a sound as his mules' hoofs clopped across the sink! The ground was as firm and resilient as rubber and their feet bounced blithely as they walked. They had come far but they were strong and as they left the poisonous marshes they followed a well-known way to the hills.

Above them, dimly seen against the stars, rose the peaks of the Funeral Range—those bare, jagged ridges painted black by caps of lava and white by the clay of extinct lakes. All the colors of the rainbow were hidden in the murk which closed down about them like a blanket, and still old Good Eye plodded on. Where no one else could see he knew every landmark, and Slim only watched his ears.

To Good Eye nothing was unknown in that vast wilderness of dark and silence, and as they left the rubber-ground he took up a ridge so hard and black that no track would ever show. Up and up they toiled for hours, Good Eye leading the way, Old Susie the bell-mare on a rope and the four pack-mules following behind. Wherever she went the mules would follow blindly. It was enough that their mother-horse led them—Slim need never look behind.

The earth opened up before them, they wound down into a well of blackness and stopped before the bars of a gate. In the silence of this lost valley there was a sound of water running and the snort of a mountain sheep as he fled. Here was the hide-out on which Snake Bit had counted to conceal him from all his enemies. The Shoshones of George Hathaway, the scouts of Hook Nose Miller, the envious prospectors who were looking for his gold. Months and months had been spent packing in huge loads of barley, cases of canned goods, sacks of jerked beef. There was wood, there was water, there was food for man and mules—and nobody knew the place but him.

BENEATH an overhanging ledge a house had been closed in, and storerooms full of the loot of abandoned mines—boxes of powder, bundles of steel, single-jacks and double-jacks, lengths of fuse and detonating caps. He stepped in cautiously holding a lighted match before him, and when a huge rattlesnake began to sing from the corner he herded him gently out. It was old Hungry Bill who by his mere presence kept away a horde of starving wood-rats.

On his high-spindle-legged snake-bed Slim spread out his blankets and slept deep, for he knew he was safe. In two years time no Indian had come near. If they knew of the spring, some superstitious fear kept them off that side of the mountain. It was a country even more terrifying than the great Valley of Death below, for in that men came and went. There were men there in the morning, when Slim climbed to his lookout and set up the tripod of his telescope. Where before, in Los Angeles, he had bought nothing but the drinks, now he had a pair of powerful binoculars and this long imported glass.

There were men there, yes—men so close he could count their guns, almost read the expression on their faces—and in the lead was Hook Nose Miller. The Shoshones were afoot, pointing down as they searched for tracks, circling far over the smooth stretch of rubber-ground and along the edge of the hills. They were still working together, though Miller had given notice he had quit; and down the long trail from Bullfrog and Keno there came more treasure-seekers, riding hard. Then they split up, every man for himself; they got together again; and quit. Snake Bit watched them day by day, laughing, until the last big laugh dwarfed the rest. A long, red car came gliding down the old borax road and a tall man, a slender woman, got out.

SLIM curled his lip as he spied the white paper—that map he had given to Nancy. And now, before his eyes though far away,
she sought the spot where his treasure was hid. Tin Can Spring, a spring in name only since the water had been drained from the cans, but they hunted for it as if it were gold. Then from every side white lines of dust led in as the others rushed to the spot—Hook Nose, the Shoshones, Piper McSparron and feeble old Dusty Rhodes. The big laugh—for Snake Bit—was when they found the spot and began to dig like mad.

When the sun went down they were still shoveling furiously, but at daylight all were gone. The barbed jest had penetrated, Nancy’s wiles had received their answer and King George had found himself mocked. Only Hook Nose Miller came back to search hopefully, until he at last galloped away. Their last clue was gone, Snake Bit had disappeared, and the Valley was a hundred miles long. A hundred miles, and shut in by twin balls of mountains. What a place to look for one man!

Slim rode down that same night, close on the heels of his pursuers when they were worn out, foot-sore, mad; and on the wings of the wind he galloped north in a sandstorm until the Breisogle Buttes came in view. Those two black buttes where that first lost prospector had found gold like his—almost pure. There was digging, the loading of mules, a long flight through the night and at dawn he looked down again, laughing. What a game, what a battle! And he had won again. Now for the last break to the railroad—one long, night ride and he was in.

At dusk he spurred ahead down the mountain, he crossed the marshes and rode south—on and on—but as he passed out through Wingate Pass a rifle spit fire in his face. Something bit his arm, he went off, tumbling, and Good Eye gave a snort and ran. They all ran—all the mules—but Old Susie stood. He still held her rope in one hand.

A harsh voice shouted close, armed riders dashed past, and in the silence Slim felt of his arm. It was pierced through and through, hot with dripping blood, hanging helpless—his good right arm. Without trying to bind the wound he crawled up on Susie and headed south with the rest. They were chasing the pack-mules, up over the rocky slopes, across the wash again, and on. No one had time to stop and look for him. It was the gold they were after—the gold!

Susie won out the Pass into the wide open spaces and turned her head toward the south. It was a way she knew—none better—the trail across the desert to the ranch. Snake Bit fumbled with his handkerchief, he tied it around his arm and drew it tight with his teeth; but as they pelted across the flats and his first weakness passed there was a rush of hoofs from behind. It rose to a thunder, the race stretched on and on; until at last, up the wind, there came a frenzied whinny and Susie threw up her head. Then she stopped, nearly throwing him off, and Good Eye came hammering up.

Slim caught him by the halter and stepped back into his saddle, and at another rush behind he gave him the spurs—and so on until up came the sun. Behind him followed Susie, Jack, old Pancho—all his mules following their bell-mare in. The sun was high when they strung in through the mesquite trees and halted at the windmill for a drink.

“Oh, hello!” hailed a voice from the house and Snake Bit took one look and fell off. It was Kate Scarborough, looking out the kitchen door—the very woman he wanted to see. She was smart and knew how to keep her mouth shut.

“Git them packs off the mules!” he shouted fiercely, “and put ’em behind the mineral case. I’m shot in the arm but never mind that. Get them sacks in—understand?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Kate, and when he fell flat she dragged him into the house—first.

CHAPTER VI

BAD BLOOD

“Kate,” said Snake Bit, when he came out of it and found her doctoring his arm, “you’re a good girl—understand? When I tell you to do something, you do it. Where’s them ore-sacks—behind the mineral case?”
"Yes, sir," replied Kate. "Like another drink of whiskey? It's some of dad's private stock."

"He's a good judge of whiskey," pronounced Slim, smacking his lips. "Say, have I been out of my head? Didn't tell you anything, did I, about my mine and all that?"

"Not a word," smiled Kate. "Only that you loved me and would like to have me for a wife."

"No!" exclaimed Snake Bit, sitting up. "Did I say that? Sure enough?"

"Surest thing," nodded Kate. "But I knew you didn't mean it. Kind of groggy from falling on your head."

"Well, it's a good thing," observed Slim, "that your cowboy wasn't here. What do you see in that hombre, Kate?"

"Oh, nothing much," she said. "Only I promised to marry him. Did I ever show you this?"

She flashed a ring with a large diamond in it and Slim opened his mouth, and drew it shut. He was going to tell her that the diamond was phoney, but that would be speaking out of turn. It was her business, not his, and if she wanted to marry a cowboy—but what a false alarm he was! Always spurring his horse to make it buck, so he could abuse it and put on a show. For her. But women were that way.

"You're a good girl, Kate," he said again. "And smart. You know how to keep your mouth shut. If you want to marry that Texan it's all right with me, but how are you fixed for money? Haven't got any, eh? And he'll be a poor provider. How'd you like to earn a little stake?"

"All right," answered Kate, "as long as it's honest. I'm kind of old-fashioned that way."

"Good! Good!" he said. "I like 'em honest. Now here's where you can help me, see? I've got a bum arm—got to get to a hospital—and here's four pack-loads of ore that can't be left laying around. What I want you to do is to ship that to my ore-buyers and take a receipt—understand? Or maybe to the smelter in El Paso—they won't be looking for it there. All right, to El Paso, and tell them you want your pay in big bills. You pull this off right and don't tip my hand and I'll give you a thousand dollars!"

He paused and opened his eyes up big, but Kate merely nodded her head. "All right," she agreed. "Now you take a little nap while I move that ore into my room. I'll keep it a few days until the excitement dies down, and ship some sacks of low-grade first."

"Kate," exclaimed Snake Bit, "you're wasted on this dump. You've got brains—savvy? Something very unusual in a woman."

"Yes, sir," she answered smiling; and Slim paused a moment to think.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked at last.

"Oh, nothing," she said. "But when you come back I'll have that money, right here."

IT WAS thirty days before Snake Bit came back and, sure enough, she had the money. Lots of money, all done up in neat little packages—with a statement from the smelter.

"A few people came out here—from El Paso," she said. "But they all got tired and went home."

"Good," grinned Slim. "What about Hook Nose Miller? See any bad Injuns around?"

"Oh, yes. They're out in the hills."

"Did a man come out here in a big red car with a hell of a pretty girl? Kind of a brunette, with large, dark eyes?"

Kate cocked her head sidewise as if trying to remember and Snake Bit blushed beneath her gaze.

"Oh, you know," he accused. "George Hathaway and his daughter. Did you ever hear about that map I gave them?"

"All a joke, eh?" observed Kate, and smiled wisely. "She had that piece of gold you gave her."

"Oh! Oh, sure," stammered Slim. "And that reminds me."

He took a thousand dollar bill from a sheaf of the same and placed it in her hand.

"Yours truly," he said. "Much obliged."

"Don't mention it," replied Kate; and that was all. She dodged into her room,
and when she came out she had on her chaps and spurs.

"Well, good luck!" she said and was gone. Her horse was all saddled, down in the little round corral; and when she rode off she never looked back.

"What's the matter?" barked Snake Bit after watching her out of sight. "Well, all right, if that's the way you feel. If you won't talk to me and you won't talk to anybody else, and give the whole snap away. But say now, that don't seem natural—and me giving her a thousand dollar bill!"

He rounded up his mules and saddled Good Eye, who was hog-fat from eating hay; but as he rode out on Dry Lake and saw her dust against Black Butte he looked after it and grumbled fretfully.

"Something funny, here," he said. "It ain't right—it ain't natural. She can't be mad, but there was something in her eye—well, whoever could understand a woman?"

He rode along sullenly, well aware of the Indian scouts who were watching his progress from the buttes. They were out to get him, this time—to trace him to his hiding-place, to follow him till they found his gold. To kill him, perhaps, though it didn't seem reasonable. There was nobody else who knew where that ore came from, yet some of these low-browed, half-Indian reprobates were short-sighted enough to shoot him. And in the night a bullet that went through his arm might just as easily go through his heart.

There was too much bad blood over this mine. Everybody was excited. They went out of their heads when they saw him coming and some were just crazy enough to shoot. Well, he had a little surprise for the next bunch of hold-ups—a sawed-off shotgun, cut down to a pistol-grip, and hung right handy on his saddle. Ready and waiting for the first crooked move, and then bla-am—both barrels.

Thirty days in the hospital with an arm that refused to heal had helped Slim to make up his mind. There was a hard gang on his trail—perhaps he had gone a little too far—but neither Hook Nose Miller nor anybody else could run him out of Death...
Valley. He had come back loaded for bear and he was going to shoot it out with the first man that crossed his trail. As for Wingate Pass, that was too narrow and confining for a man with so many enemies in the rocks. He passed it by in the night, and went up another canyon he could watch. That held them, and the next day he crossed over the Panamints and came out down Hungry Bill's canyon.

It was dusk when he looked out from the black, narrow gorge and saw, just across the poisonous sink of Death Valley, his own hide-out lost in the haze. Good Eye halted and snorted low as he raised his head to look, then he jumped like a buck and Slim went off, taking his sawedoff shot-gun with him. They had ambushed him again, burning Good Eye across the rump the first shot—and his rifle was on the saddle. He lay low, while the mules bashed their packs together and fought to get closer to Old Susie.

A long silence followed as they clattered away up the trail and out of the darkness a voice spoke from among the rocks. The same voice that had shouted when they jumped him from Wingate Pass.

"We got him!" it blared out harshly, and Snake Bit gave him both barrels. He had fired by sound, but the gun threw a wide pattern and the harsh voice was suddenly raised in foul curses. Then a bullet from nowhere bored Slim through and through and he fell down among the boulders. High up, through the left lung—he could feel the line of its passage burn and sting as the blood gushed out. Blood enough to drown him—to drain the last drop in his body. Snake Bit felt his senses reel and passed out like an Indian—without a groan, without a grunt, without a sign.

CHAPTER VII
THE OUTLAW CODE

SLIM was brought back to life by a high, whistling snort and the patter of hoofs up the trail. His mules were coming back, to go out by Death Valley, and as they smelled his hot blood they stopped. He raised himself up and, under the starlight, saw Old Susie; her head thrust out, edging closer and then drawing back. This man who had ruled her was too weak to walk now, but they knew his voice—he was alive.

"He-ere, Susie!" he coaxed, and as she dragged her rope close he crawled out and snatched at the slack. Then, from a rock, he stepped up on her back and started her down the gulch. There was little of life still in him when they had mounted the long trail and halted at Cimarron Spring.

With many a groaning he let down the bars and staggered in to his bed, and as he passed through the door Hungry Bill, his big rattlesnake, wound up and struck at his leg.

Slim leaped up on the snake-bed, too weak even to kill him, though the wish was in his heart. All the world was against him—even his rattlesnake took advantage of him to fang him in the boot. He roused up savagely, drew his pistol and shot its head off. Here was one enemy he could kill. When he woke up there was a face in the doorway, and the long barrel of a gun.

"Hlo!" said a voice, and Slim knew it was an Indian's. Some Shoshone, who had found his den. For a minute he stood staring, looking down at the dead snake and back at the man on the bed.

"You sick? Snake bite you?" he asked.

"Yes," grunted Snake Bit. "Ketchum whiskey? Gimme plenty!"

"No ketchum," replied the Indian at last.

"You see that bottle?" demanded Slim impatiently; and the Indian made a grab. Snake Bit heard a gurgle as he took a snort before handing over the rest—then he clutched at the bottle and drank deep.

"Who are you?" he asked, rising up; but the Shoshone only shoved out his gun.

"Never mind," he snarled, peeling his lips back savagely. "Pretty soon I kill you, too."

"Oh, no!" came back Slim. "Put that gun down—what's the matter? You hide now? You on the dodge?"

"Me-e hide," repeated the Indian; and there was a glint in his eyes very similar to that in the rattlesnake's.

"A-all right," proposed Snake Bit. "You hide here with me. I got plenty grub—no-
body ever comes here. You stay and take care of me, eh?"

"Maybe so," responded the Indian at last. "What name you? Callum Snake Bit?"

"That's me," admitted Slim. "Only this time I'm shot. You see this place? Through there."

"O-oh!" murmured the Indian, looking close. "All right—you call me Pete. Ash Meadows Pete—you know? Me kill three Injuns there."

"All right, all right," said Slim. "Some Injuns try to kill me. White men, too—everybody try to kill me. You stay—all right. Be friends."

"Good!" nodded Ash Meadows Pete, but even then he did not smile. All the smiles had been jarred out of his system by three killings and a long pursuit and as he pothered about the room Snake Bit knew what was in his mind. Here was food, water, guns, everything—why not kill this wounded white man and take possession? Slim drew out his pistol and cocked it.

"Listen here, Pete," he warned. "Don't get panicky now. You're in bad enough for killing those Injuns without starting anything with me. Because anything you start I'll finish—understand? Put that gun of yours right over here."

He patted the bed and Pete obeyed, though with a bad look in his eye.

"Now," said Slim, "any time you want it you can have it. I'm not going to kill you, because I need you to take care of me. And you need me just as bad. You stand a chance of getting out of this alive if you stay here and do what I say."

"All right! What do I do?"

"You go out and put up them bars and take the saddles off the mules. Then bring the packs in here and I'll show you where to find some medicine."

The Indian darted out and when Slim heard him rattling the bars he picked up his gun and looked it over. It was an old-fashioned single-shot Sharps—full cocked, and with a hair trigger, still set. A mere touch and the gun would go off. Slim let the hammer down and threw out the cartridge. Pete's nerves were on a hair trigger, too.

"What's the matter with this gun?" he demanded when the Indian staggered in with his packs.

"Don' know!" mumbled Pete, "All time go off. All time go off—maybe kill somebody. Maybe go kill my woman."

"Killed your woman, eh?" repeated Slim. "Well, lemme show you how it happened. You see this little trigger? Called hair trigger. You pull it and gun goes off easy. Too easy. No good for Injun—savvy?"

"Yes—savvy," answered Pete, after a long, dead-eyed silence. "Me-e stealum gun—stealum bottle of whiskey—get drunk. Then my wife he call me names—me pointum gun—go off. Killum wife—me killum two Piutes. No savvy how workum this trigger."

"Yes—too bad," nodded Snake Bit. "All my guns same way. You no touchum—go off—maybe kill you."

He piled them over behind him while this lesson sunk in, and Pete suddenly became docile and kind. Once more the superiority of the white man had been demonstrated and he recognized his dependence and need. He needed this wounded prospector to protect him from his enemies and get him out of the country alive, but now Slim was almost dead. When he lay down he could hardly get up again, and the bullet-hole was beginning to bleed.

Very humbly the Indian built a fire and heated some water, he opened up the big medicine-case; and when Snake Bit had doped his wound and fallen asleep he stood over him a long time, staring. Now was the time to kill him, if killing was still in his mind; but the cloud of black fury had left him and he saw that the white man was his friend. The only friend he had in all that vast wilderness where the Shoshones and Piutes still trailed him—and if he died! Slim woke to the smell of coffee and meat broth, and when Pete poured it out he smiled.

"You likum fresh meat?" he asked. "All time come to this spring, mountain sheep. You gimmme gun, me shootum."

"You betchee," agreed Slim, and gave him one cartridge. Then he set the trigger, just so, and they had meat. A week of broth,
a week of sleep, a week of fever and crazy dreams. Then his strength came back and he tried to get up, but Ash Meadows Pete held him back.

"Bimbev," he promised and as he promised he smiled. "Pretty soon, now. You eat this."

"What you see?" demanded Snake Bit. "Bad white men go by?"

"Go by," assented Pete. "Bad Injun, she come too. Shoshonnie—Piute—all hunt for Ash Meadows Pete. She come up here, me killum."

"You betchee," answered Slim. "Me killum, too. Everybody try to kill me, now me kill them. You like to go with me when I get well? You like to go with me, get gold? All right, pretty soon now. But listen, gold all mine."

"All right," agreed Pete. "Gold bad luck to Injun. You let me stay here—lo-ong time."

It was a long time before they saddled up the mules and rode away down the long trail to the sink, and Snake Bit rode with a rifle across his lap. He had learned the outlaw code and was out to kill—and Pete was out to kill. But first Slim must see who these wild men were who had fired without a word, and he doubled on his trail the first night. In the Playground of the Wind he led off across the sandhills, where ancient mesquite trees stood buried to the tips or lay prostrate with their roots in the air.

From Surveyors' Wells, where he first sighted his enemies, he swung west over the self-rising ground of the niter-fields and back to the mesquite-trees by dawn. Then he hid, and as the trailers came plodding back from their long search he let them pass, a hundred yards away. Two Shoshones that he knew, and that Ash Meadows knew, and a white man strange to them both. A long-haired man, with the broad hat of a plainsman and a gun held ready to shoot.

Snake Bit drew a fine bead on his ribs and pulled, and he went off rolling into the sand. He aimed again and his horse went down, again and there was nothing to shoot. Ash Meadows had fired twice and the Shoshones had disappeared.

"Me-e killum," he said, and his laugh was wild.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FLAGGED TRAIL

The Playground of the Wind had become the Playground of Death, but Ash Meadows Pete seemed to like it. He was all a-grin when he came back from the dead Shoshones with their gun-belts across his saddle-horn.

"Come on," he said. "Down here more Shoshonnies. We killum."

"He-ere," warned Snake Bit, "who's doing this, anyway? Come back here, Injun, before I slap your ears down. Now—you key down. Understand?"

Ash Meadows regarded him with those mean, unchanging eyes that looked so much like a rattlesnake's and reared up his head angrily. But when he met the gaze of the Dominant White he twisted his neck down and shrugged.

"Any killing that's done," went on Slim, "I'll do it. Don't go shooting these Shoshonnies just to see them kick. It might bring the whole bunch down on us."

"Shoshonnies no good," stated Pete. "Long time she chase me—try to kill."

"All the same," answered Snake Bit, "you do what I say or there'll be another dead Injun around here. You see that big Canyon? We go there. Get up on top—look down."

From the jagged cliffs of the Grapevine Mountains, Snake Bit Jones looked out over the Playground. Men were riding back and forth, the Shoshones had gathered like ravens and they were carrying off their dead in blankets. Who would have believed that so many men were here, where nobody passed for days? They had come down from the peaks and up the valley from Furnace Creek, and before them in the sand was a message from Snake Bit that the most illiterate could read. It was bad to follow his trail. He was bowed up and ready to shoot.

Slim watched them through his telescope as they stood looking at the cliff, and from their ranks a tall man stepped out—Hook Nose Miller. He pointed to the crags, he
waved them to come on; he went back and had a talk. Then two white men and two Indians joined him and they started up the long wash. Where it spread out over the sink it was a mile across, but as they neared the cleft portals where the cloudbursts had spewed out huge boulders they came to a flag and halted.

It was only a strip of Snake Bit’s shirt-tail but on the desert that was a sign. They were flagged—warned not to pass that mark—and the Indians shook their heads. Up on the high rampart of Grapevine Mountain Slim shoved his new, high powered rifle over the rim and squinted along through his telescope sights. The Shoshones turned back, the white scouts stood, Hook Nose Miller started up the trail. Slim pulled, and in the sand just ahead of him a jet of dust leaped up. Slim held closer, he pulled, but before the bullet struck Hook Nose whirled his horse and fled.

"Good," laughed Ash Meadows. "Now shootum Injun. No good—these Shooshonies—killum all."

**SNAKE BIT** jerked up another cartridge and swung the muzzle towards Pete.

"What kind of Injun, you?" he inquired carelessly; and Ash Meadows became very still. "Well!" pronounced Slim at last.

It was a bad sign, this evidence of a homicidal mania which was cropping out in Pete, and when they left there Slim sent him ahead. He was a very good scout—and for an Indian a crack shot—but this killing had gone to his head. About one more fight and he would go hog-wild and forget who was man and who was master. But with so many enemies on his trail Snake Bit could not afford to be particular, and already the Shoshones had quit. They seemed to know all about Pete, and the next morning they were gone.

The scouts’ camp at Surveyors’ Wells broke up after another big talk. With their glasses they could see Slim’s white flag on the cliff, and they knew it meant, not peace, but war. It was a dare, a challenge, and that night by devious ways Snake Bit came down and advanced on their camp. There was a fire, burning low, among the heavy mesquite trees and by it the form of a man.
"Me-e killum?" suggested Pete hopefully.

"No," snarled Slim. "You stay here, savvy?" And, leading Good Eye, he edged in on the camp. Then a burro jumped and snorted, the man poked up his fire and Snake Bit stepped boldly into the light. It was Dusty Rhodes, obviously very badly scared.

"That you, Slim?" he quavered. "I thought I might see you. Come in and sit by the fire."

"No," blared out Snake Bit. "I ain't got time to sit. What the hell are you doing, over here in ray country? Trying to find my mine? Trying to steal it?"

"Mine!" cackled Dusty. "You ain't got no mine. I've hunted these hills till I've give out and quit. What's the matter, Slim? You ain't mad."

"Oh, no," scoffed Slim. "Been shot twice in two months, but I ain't mad—yet. Oh, no!"

"Well, I'll tell you, Slim, there's a crazy man in this country. He sneaks up to camps and kills people. You give me quite a start, because I ain't got a gun. Never carry one—it's dangerous. A feller like you might think I was going to shoot and kill me before I could talk. But it's this crazy man that's doing it."

"So?" observed Snake Bit. "I'll crazy him if he comes around my camp. Or I ketch him following my trail. I'm going to clean up on these scouts and trackers that's throwing these crazy fits. So if you see a bunch of ravens out here in the morning you'll only need one guess what's happened. And by the way, Dusty, I may not see you again—how do you feel about that grub-stake claim of yours? You know—claiming half my strike for a measly five dollars I owe you?"

"Oh, that," spat out Dusty. "I never gave it a second thought. Ha, ha!"

"Good," said Slim. "Here's your five dollars, and don't let me ketch you here again. How does Piper McSparron feel about that six hundred I owe him? Reckon he'd like to get it back?"

"He'd be tickled to death. W'y, it was only last week he was saying to me—"

"Well, here it is, then," broke in Snake Bit. "And tell him from me if he accepts this money—"

"I'll tell him," promised Dusty. "Well, so long."

"So long," replied Slim. "And hit that trail in the morning. I'm getting kind of crazy myself, since I got that slug through the lungs—"

"I'll be going," said Dusty. "You bet!"

CHAPTER IX

SUNK SPRING

"NOW!" said Snake Bit, swinging up on Good Eye, and he went down the wind on the lope. The time had come, and before midnight his packs were loaded with ore. Then he drifted down the valley with the north wind that was blowing and got back to his hide-out before dawn. There was a sandstorm drifting in, a thousand feet high and still rising. Who would ever think that his tracks could be followed to where he had dug up his cache? But before the sun set five men rode in below and he handed the glasses to Pete.

He seemed to have calmed down, this wild Indian, and his murderous mood to have passed; but when he looked he peeled his lips in a snarl.

"You give me thirty-thirty," he said, "Me go down there—killum all."

"What for killum?" inquired Snake Bit casually. "You know these Indians?"

"Yes—knowum. Piute Injuns—come kill me. Wife's people—me knowum."

"Too bad," murmured Slim, observing the snaky look that had come into his helper's eyes; and right there he decided it was moving day for him as soon as the sun touched the peak.

"You give me gun?" demanded Ash Meadows.

"Sure," returned Snake Bit blithely. "Everybody come to kill me, too. Too many people—I go. You like to stay here—all right. Like to borrow gun—all right. But listen here boy, don't point no gun at me or I'll give you both barrels with this."

He patted the butt of his sawed-off shotgun and Ash Meadows Pete subsided.

"All right," he said and went down to
catch up the mules. Slim watched Pete over his shoulder when he rode away, until he topped out over the rim. Then he left there on the run. Like Hungry Bill, his defunct pet rattlesnake, Pete was ready to bite the hand that fed him. His fangs were out and dripping with venom. He had gone bad—it was time to go.

At Tin Can Spring Slim could see the little fire where the Piutes had made their camp. They had taken an oath to avenge their kinsmen’s death, and the death of Ash Meadows’ woman. He knew it, they knew it—they had come to get him. But if Snake Bit mixed in on any more feuds Death Valley would get too small for him. It would not hold him and his enemies now and he was leaving on the wings of the wind.

At the fork of the trail that led up Wingate Pass he stopped and looked both ways, and Good Eye snorted noisily. He remembered the hidden horsemen that had charged them the trip before, and Slim reined him the other way. Out into the desert, where the trail was no trail at all—just a desert trace from spring to spring. Good Eye took it with a sigh and led on. They were lost, and yet not lost, for when Scorpio hung low he stopped at Sunk Spring, all in.

Night and day, day and night, they had been racing and chasing, climbing mountains, crossing marshes, toiling through sand. It was time to camp, but when Slim groped through the dark towards the water he stirred up a rattlesnake which struck at him. He lit a torch and tried to find it, but it escaped into a thicket of thorns, still sounding its note of defiance. A dangerous place, too far away for the desert cattle to feed down the brush. Even the grass was harsh and rank and the screw-bean mesquites were too thick for him to tie his mules. A verminous spot, full of creeping and crawling things. Slim cut a pile of tules and stretched out on top of them, for lack of a better bed. A villainous place, full of evil portent—he shuddered and laid his gun close.

Then sleep seized him and dragged him deep, and as his head drooped he felt a sharp tweak at his ear. He stirred and fumbled for his sawed-off shotgun and something flung into his hair like a fury.

“Judas—Priest!” he gasped, fighting it off; and in the dim light of the stars he saw a many-striped skunk, spattering the earth, raising its tail like a plume. A hydrophobia skunk, too rabid to know fear, poisoning the air with its terrible effluvia! Slim whipped up his gun and gave it both barrels, nearly breaking his hand with the kick; and as he felt the drip of blood from his ear he burst out into a frenzy of curses. Worse than rattlesnakes’ bites or the guns of his enemies he fared this ultimate terror of the desert. Skunk-bit!

He wept weakly as he washed his ear and doped it with carbolic salve, he lay down and shuddered at the thought. Then he leaped up and threw the packs on his mules. Not until he reached the railroad did he cease cursing and complaining. There was a jinx on the country that no man could escape. It got them all, no matter who they were. Snake-bites, bullets, heat, poisonous spring water—and now he had come to this. His mules were loaded with gold, but all it would buy for him now was a Pasteur treatment. A shot in the arm with the serum of a rabid dog—and maybe that would be too late. He was burning up with a fever of fear when he reached Scarborough’s and flagged the train.

The engineer of that Express would not stop for him until he lay down across the rails, but when he threw on the brakes Slim leaped up quickly and hooked the blind baggage as it passed. But the train-crew were very kind when they found out what was the matter with him and made up time going over the pass. Then down to Los Angeles and a shot in the arm. After that all he could do was wait.

CHAPTER X

THE DOCTOR’S PRESCRIPTION

Waiting was the hardest thing Slim could do—next to telling the swarm of crazy reporters what it felt like to be bitten by a skunk. That was something he was trying to forget, for he carried it off with a flourish. To begin with, he announced, he was a tough hombre. Two rattlesnakes and
one skunk had bitten him and all of them had dropped dead. There was a bunch of second-rate scouts that were trying to kill him, too, and one of them coughed up buck-shot every time he tried to talk. It was all over his lost mine, of course, and King George knew who they were. Go ask him—George Hathaway, of Hollywood.

Snake Bit was running a few degrees of fever or he would not have added that last. It directed the unfavorable attention of the King upon him; and, right to the minute, the news came from Death Valley that five Piute scouts had been killed. Found dead—at the very spot where Snake Bit had dug up his gold. That brought King George and two deputy sheriffs, and Slim shut up like a clam.

No, he had not killed any Piutes that he knew of. When anybody shot at him he always shot back, but never went to look. He had a hole through one lung and another through his arm that had learned him not to be too inquisitive. Just give them both barrels and hightail it out of the country. He was out now and under the doctor's care, and he did not intend to go back not on any account.

Right there the second deputy, who had not done any talking, begged to differ with him on that. He had been sent down by the sheriff of Inyo County—who exercised a nominal jurisdiction over Death Valley and the four ranges of desert mountains between there and the county seat. Also the three alkali deserts that lay between. But since the entrance to the Valley was from Nevada nothing much had been done, so far. Still, he would like to inquire where Mr. Jones had been at the time these Indians were killed.

"I don't know," blared Snake Bit, "because I don't know when they were killed. Why don't you ask this man, who seems to take so much interest in my business? Why don't you ask King George? He can tell you to a minute where I was and what I was doing. He's got scouts that trail me everywhere."

He pointed a tremulous finger at Hathaway, who came back with a hot denial. He knew nothing of Mr. Jones' movements since he had shot at a party of prospectors and killed two Shoshones and one white man.

"Oh, I did, eh?" rejoined Slim and, turning to the deputy, he gave him a crooked smile. "Here's your man!" he said. "Here's the witness you're looking for. Get Mr. Hathaway to swear out a warrant. He was right there and seen it all."

"No, no," protested Hathaway. "I didn't say that. Unfortunately for the course of justice all the members of the party were killed."

"Then who told you?" demanded Snake Bit, "that I killed those three men? Where's your witnesses? You haven't got any. I've been shot twice but I haven't got any witnesses. I don't know who shot me, myself. But you know, you old hypothesactor—you hired them to do it. Now tell the deputy sheriff about that!"

"I know nothing," began Hathaway in frigid tones; and with a sigh the deputy threw up his hands. The private opinions, publicly expressed, of these two leaders in a feud, would not hold in a court of law. While probably based upon fact, were far from being evidence—and why should Inyo County bankrupt itself over a country that did not even pay taxes? Why send coroners and officers over four ranges of desert mountains when nothing would come of it, anyway? Why not let them shoot it out as they always had, instead of running up a big expense account?

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "since you're not willing to swear out any complaints—"

"That's the stuff," nodded Slim, "Glad to have met you. Good-bye."

He WAVED his hand languidly from his bed of sickness and the doctor shooed them all out. His patient was in a highly nervous condition and must not be disturbed for any reason. He had suffered a severe shock from being bitten by the skunk, and absolute rest was essential.

Slim rested then for twenty-four hours; but after he had made up his sleep he called for a T-bone steak and announced that he was all right. All that he needed was a little excitement to help him forget what had happened—music and song and the sight of fair women to soothe his tired eyes. Well,
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They were of all kinds—grave and gay; tall, petite, blondes, brunettes; even a few platinum blondes. Nancy told him all the secrets of their make-up, but he still liked the platinum blondes best. No matter if they were artificially colored. Did people refuse to patronize the soda fountain because all their flavors bore that sign? On the contrary, they seemed to like the drinks better because they contained a little benzoate of soda.

Nancy laughed heartily at his quaint sayings and jests, but she never became so good natured as to introduce him to her young lady friends. Not even her boy friends, who looked at him so sulkily as they bore her off for a dance. She was playing a system of her own, but one which as yet he did not understand. After moments almost confidential, in which she revealed the intimate problems of her life, she suddenly became almost brazen in her efforts to learn the secret of his mine.

She asked him boldly how he had come to find it, and why he tried to keep it for himself; and if it would not be wiser to reveal where it was hidden instead of fighting against those desperate men. He was so shot up, so battered, so scarred by the cruel conflict he fought, that she really never knew when she would see him again, or which arm or leg would be gone. He should remember his friends who, for all he knew, might still wish to keep him alive. Then she laid her hand on his and gazed up into his eyes until Slim did not know what to think.

What could a man think when a girl like her smiled at him, making all her Willie-boys sore? Was she playing with him again, or had his manly charms made these Slim-Jims look what they were—mere pretty-kids, without a dollar to their names, depending on their dads for support. While he, Snake Bit Jones—and he acknowledged the name proudly—was rich beyond the dreams of avarice. The papers always called him the Croesus of Death Valley, and ran his picture every few days.

As for his money, it was safely stored in a safety deposit box—with strict instructions not to open for him when he was drunk—and when Kate made the payment on this last shipment to the smelter there would be more sheafs of thousand-dollar bills. No wonder such wolves as Hook Nose Miller followed furtively on his trail. He meant real money to any man who could spot his mine or roll him when he was drunk. It represented a real threat and he became more and more particular who it was he let buy him a drink. But with Nancy, now, and in a joint like Raymond's—it was the only safe place he knew.

Meanwhile he was waiting to hear from Kate who, as always, was a woman of few words. When he had ridden in, skunk-bit, reeling warily in his saddle but with four mule-loads of metal in his packs, she had hustled the ore off on the afternoon train before her father or Hannigan got home. But now, of course, there was another rush on, with the evidence all pointed to her. It had come out, at last, that she was the secret agent who had shipped his ore to the smelter—and there was trouble at the ranch.

What kind of trouble he could not learn, but she had told him to come on back. Now she sent him another note, even more urgent—but important business detained him in town. Unfinished business, business he could not neglect, for Nancy's young lovers were tireless. They seemed always in the background, like Hook Nose Miller at the hotel, and it was evident that their intentions were matrimonial. For the man who married a girl like Nancy did not need to have a dime. There was daddy, and daddy was rich.

Kate's note, which was now a week old, was brief and to the point.

Dear Slim:

Shipment made and receipt enclosed. Please be here to get your money. Am leaving soon. Yours truly,

Kate.

Leaving, eh? Kate leaving the ranch? Then trouble must be breaking in bunches—and who would look after his mules? The Old Man was all right, only he was away from home most of the time. Kate carried a glass and kept watch from the buttes—she knew every man that came and went. But she was just one woman against a gang of lost-mine hunters who would not hold their hands at murder. He really ought to go, but
it was the doctor’s orders to stay. He had to have that shot in the arm and the company of congenial people or he might wake up biting at the bedpost.

SO HE let it go and spent ten thousand dollars buying an elegant diamond ring. Just in case, of course; but with a girl like Nancy almost anything might happen. She held hands with him now when he took her home in the taxi, and there was a look in her eyes that roused up strange, wild dreams. And after all, he was rich. Besides being the only man who could show Hathaway the way to his mine!

She always got out and walked a few blocks before they reached home, but the Old Man was hep—he knew. What—with all his rubberneck detectives watching? He knew every little thing that went on between them, even if Nancy didn’t tell. It was just mother who was left in the dark, and in that household she didn’t count. She was always two laps behind when she tried to keep up with her daughter.

No, the Old Man approved—and for a very good reason. Any fool could see he was whipped, and going in the hole every day. This was to be an alliance of state in which Nancy drew a very good husband and daddy discovered the secret of his mine. By fair means or foul, he was determined to get it—and Snake Bit, of course, would come through. He would have to come through before the king of grubstakes would utter: “Bless you, my children!”

And after all, another good fighter in the family would be a very valuable asset.

But all things must wait their time and season, and Slim had never flashed the ring. He never quite got the chance before some busybody hustled in. She seemed to live by choice in an atmosphere of rushing to and fro, of telephoning, of being phoned to, of mysterious summonses from head-waiters—of everything but peace and quiet. And while she played out her game, whatever it was, Snake Bit Jones sat alone, and waited. Not unseen, however, by many a wandering eye, for his exploits had made him famous.

There were even romantic girls who looked at him hard, with faint, cryptic smiles on their lips; but he passed them coldly by. Only the platinum blondes with their permanently waved tresses could break down his arrogant front. There was something about this new type of beauty which exercised a subtle appeal and, two weeks after his discovery of Raymond’s place, the queen of all platinumas walked in. Alone, but with what a regal tread. And what lines her silver gown revealed!

SOMETHING rose in his throat and choked him as their eyes met and seemed to speak. He knew her—and yet he did not. It was just that she seemed to know him. He was talking to himself when Nancy came back and saw that something was wrong.

“Who is she?” she asked, at a venture; and Snake Bit jerked his head.

“That platinum blonde, down by the orchestra,” he muttered. “I’ve seen her somewhere, in the pictures.”

Nancy fixed the new siren with a penetrating eye and her lip curled up disdainfully.

“Can’t you see that make-up?” she demanded. “She’s just from Madame Camou’s or I miss my guess. Some country girl trying to break into the movies.”

“She’ll do it,” predicted Slim. “And she’s a rider, I can see that. By the gods she steps off like a spike-buck. Some class, if anybody asks me.”

“She seems to know you,” observed Nancy, after a silence, “What is this, a case of love at first sight? I’m going to be jealous if—oh, oh, here comes a man! John du Valle, the motion picture director. And he is—he’s going to her!”

Nancy sat frozen as they met and he bowed, she watched as they talked and thawed out, then as the girl flashed a radiant smile she turned and spoke crossly to Slim.

“Don’t you know,” she said, “I’m almost ashamed, the way you stare at these women.”

“Yes, so am I,” he observed. “Almost!”

“Oh, he’s going now,” she exclaimed expectantly. “All the girls are simply crazy to meet him—just a word from du Valle would get them a part. Yes. No. Oh, he’s gone!”

She rode up with sudden vexation and as she hurried towards the entrance Slim stared
the other way. The strange lady with the 
platinum hair undoubtedly was giving him 
the eye. He blinked, he touched his breast 
inquiringly; then as she smiled and jerked 
his head imperiously, he went to her as 
meekly as a child. She had summoned him 
—that was all he knew. But the nearer he 
approached the more certain he became that 
somewhere he had met her before. Not in a 
picture—he knew her—but who? The eyes 
that she fixed on him had a friendly, almost 
a familiar smile; but how could he have for-
gotten her if he had ever seen her before? 
He was startled at the music of a laugh 
which thrilled every fiber of his being—and 
still he did not know. Then she spoke, and 
the spell was broken.

"Hello, Slim," she greeted. "Sit down 
and have a drink."

It was Kate, Kate Scarborough. A blonde!

CHAPTER XII

BIG MONEY

"MY GAWD!" he gasped, as he stood 
staring. "You here, Kate? And a 
blonde!"

"Yours truly," she mocked. "Sit down."

"Yes, but out at the ranch you were 
almost—er—brown!"

"Black," she corrected. "But they can fix 
all that. Out at Madame Camou's they can 
change you to order—I'm trying for the 
pictures, you know."

"The pictures," he repeated. "Since 
when?"

"Since I sent off that last shipment of ore. 
I suppose I get the customary cut?"

"Cut! But where's the money?"

"I've got it," she said. "Didn't you get 
my two letters? Well, why didn't you come 
out and receive it?"

"Well, I was—er—but where is the 
money?"

"Right here in my handbag," she whis-
pered, leaning close. "Who's that rat-faced 
man, by the door?"

Slim glanced towards the entrance and 
shrugged.

"Oh, one of Nancy's young men."

"He is not," she snapped. "He's a Hath- 
away detective. I saw him out at the ranch. 

And speaking of detectives, I've seen a 
thousand of them since the news of that shi-
ipment got out."

"Yeah," he nodded. "Seen quite a few 
myself. Let's go out and split that roll."

"Not now," she answered. "Too many 
people watching. What is this—a school for 
detectives? Look at that tall man with your 
girl."

Slim turned his head, startled, and as his 
eyes met Nancy's she gave him a peculiar 
look. Something like that look her mother 
had given him when she showed him out 
the front door.

"Sit around a while," advised Kate, "and 
see how many more we can turn up. I really 
feel quite important, the amount of atten-
tion we attract."

"We!" he whispered. "It's you they're 
after. They've spotted that money in your 
handbag and they're just waiting to grab the 
whole roll."

"Oh, no," she laughed. "I've been carry-
ing it for days—ever since I came to town. 
Nobody expects a woman to have any 
money—and especially a motion picture 
girl. But oh, did I tell you? I've got a job, 
now! A real engagement, to double for 
Flora de Ora in all her riding parts."

"In the pictures?" he gasped. "Already?"

"Already," she bowed. "I'm a fast worker, 
you know, and Nancy told me how to get a 
start. Why, yes! All about Madame Camou. 
So when I came to town I went straight to 
hers studio and laid a thousand dollar bill 
on the table—you know, the one you gave 
me."

"I want to get into the movies," I said. 
And sure enough, here I am! New hair, new 
complexion, dancing lessons—everything. 
The madame saw she had picked a live one 
and extended herself accordingly. And when 
Mr. du Valle saw me ride this morning! 
Oh, Slim, isn't it wonderful?"

"Well, I don't know," he grumbled 
grudgingly. "Who's going to take care of 
my mules, now?"

"Oh, Dad, I guess," she murmured light-
ly. "You didn't seem to care what happened 
to them, so why should I stick around? An 
Indian sneaked in and tried to steal Good 
Eye, but I sure made him hard to ketch. But 
I've got my career to consider now, and that
thousand dollars was burning a hole in my pocket. I wanted action—and I got it!"

SHE laughed happily, gazing about with beaming eyes, and several proper gentlemen smiled back. But Snake Bit was looking glum.

"Hell's bells!" he muttered. "I've got to get back. I was kinder depending on you."

"Sure," she agreed. "Like the rest of those men. They expected me to do everything. Cook and wash the dishes, fix the windmill when it broke down—"

"But I paid you!" broke in Snake Bit, hastily.

"Yes. A thousand dollars. Who else could you get that would do it for ten times that money? And, speaking about pay, how much do I get this time? My expenses are running up."

"We'll—two thousand," ventured Slim, and she snatched her handbag away.

"Do you know how much I've got here?" she demanded. And at the whispered words he turned pale.

"I want ten thousand dollars," she stated in measured tones. "No man can hold out on me. I've been a slave long enough."

"Well—ten thousand!" he agreed. "You did a good job, Kate. I was kinder in a hurry when I went through there last time, but—"

"Just as well," she nodded. "Just as well. There's a man hanging around there that has promised to shoot you—"

"Bill Hannigan?" he broke in. "Him?"

"Never mind," she said, "but keep your eye peeled. Bill isn't the only man by a juggling that would shoot you full of holes for a dime."

"Judas Priest!" he complained. "They're all after me now. And with you gone—"

"Well—what?" she inquired, and he noticed a funny look in her eyes. "You'll have to marry her, eh?" she suggested with cutting scorn; and rose up without looking back. Slim tagged along behind, his eyes on the expensive handbag, his mind on its still more expensive contents—but Nancy Hathaway misunderstood.

"Slim," she rapped out as he passed, but he did not come to heel. A fortune in big bills, half the treasure he had won was in Kate's determined hand, and he did not even know where she lived. She might be robbed at the gate, or on the way home. He galloped after her and flagged a taxi.

"No, not that one," she corrected, and hailed another one, just driving up.

"You can't be too careful," she said as they stepped in. "Those detectives had that first driver fixed. 'Home, James,' you'd say. But would James take you home? Oh, I've learned a lot in ten days!"

"Take me down to the First National Bank!" directed Slim and she nodded a silent assent. Then they sped through the traffic and as he glanced at her askance he could not believe it was Kate. Not honest Kate Scarborough who never stopped to talk—riding off across the desert to her lookout on Black Butte, keeping track of everything, saying nothing. She was never as pretty as this. To the dress, the hair, the dainty slippers and gloves, Madame Camou had added an exquisite perfume which ever after would remind him of her. But he could not speak of it now.

At the First National they went down long, winding stairs to a vault set with safety deposit boxes and in the presence of the stony-faced custodian Kate opened up her elaborately meshed bag. Slim counted the money, wrote her out a receipt and handed her ten big bills.

"Thank you," she said, and as he caught the denominations the iron-faced guard blinked his eyes. Then she strode out swiftly—with that walk Slim had noticed which marked her as one who had ridden—and before he could catch up she had stepped into the taxi and motioned James to drive on.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

DEATH VALLEY SLIM walked home in a daze when Kate left him flat at the bank—took ten thousand dollars as if it were a dime and drove off without looking back—said "Thank you," and put the money in her bosom. It came over him suddenly that she had behaved the same way when he had given her that first big bill.
Page 43 missing
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"If I find the mine, then, you will offer no objections?"

"None at all—if you find it. I'm going to stay right here until you get a bellyful of looking for it. And then!" He smiled wisely and went out.

CHAPTER XIV

RIDING ON AND ON AND ON

SNAKE BIT went from his meeting with King George to a well-known detective agency, for it had come over him that if Hathaway could find Kate Scarborough he could do as much himself. The King had no monopoly on the idea of hiring scouts; and Kate was in the city, somewhere. Slim had found out that much while his enemy was pumping him, and so far the honors were even. He was certainly not going to turn up Ash Meadows Pete.

Like the late-lamented Hungry Bill—who was dangerous, but kept out the wood-rats—Pete kept away the scouts. They were a hard outfit anyway, and seemed to need killing; and when it was all over Slim could drift back into the Valley and bring out another shipment of ore. Pretty soft—and meanwhile he could concentrate on Kate and talk her out of her pique. A great girl, Kate, and she knew how to keep her mouth shut.

Compared to her, Nancy Hathaway was a spoiled child, playing around with those cheap boy-detectives. But Kate had spotted them, the first time she walked into the Garden, and she had made Nancy look like a fool. Now if he could only find her again—but it took the detectives three days.

George Hathaway had disappeared, Hook Nose Miller was gone, there was something doing in Death Valley and points east; but when he received the magic number Slim leaped with alacrity to the telephone, and called.

"Hello," he said, "Is this you, Kate? I've got something important to tell you."

"Well, so have I for you," she came back on the instant. "They have stolen all your mules!"

"Never mind about that," he said easily. "When can I come out and see you, Kate? You wouldn't believe how important this is."

"No, and you wouldn't believe how important this is. Hathaway's Indians have got away with Good Eye and he's leading them back to your mine. You must have been bragging him up to Nancy, you soft-headed, locoed fool!"

"To Nancy!" he repeated, and it came over him like a flash just what had taken place. He had told Nancy how Good Eye would follow trails—but did that give Kate the privilege of calling him a locoed fool?

"I've got all over that," he said, at last. "Can't I come out and see you, Kate?"

"Well, you are crazy," she pronounced with a jesting laugh. "What do you want to see me for?"

"I'll tell you," he promised, "when I get there. Some Hathaway spy may have tapped my line—rather not talk about it over the phone."

"Well, what about the mine?" she demanded at last. "Are you going to let those tin-horns grab everything while you're just talking to me?"

"How'd you like to go with me?" he came back, daringly; and Kate gave way to light-hearted laughter.

"Out to the ranch?" she asked. "You might get killed. But maybe I could protect you? Say, I never thought of that."

"No," he said. "Nor nobody else. But there's a whole lot to it, Kate. I never realized how much I needed you until you bowed up and quit me cold."

"Well, you deserved it," she replied. "And all the rest of them. But now that you have put it so nicely I might be persuaded to go."

"Come on, then," he urged. "This town is dead, anyway. Let's ketch the first train—the four-twenty."

"Nope, too soon! Get the ten P.M. and land there just at daylight. You wouldn't believe how many people are looking for you—and every man with a gun."

"Well, but when am I going to see you, Kate? I've got something very important—"

"You'll see me at ten P.M.," she said. "And say, bring me down a forty-five!"

She hung up abruptly, but at ten she
was there. Another Kate still, dressed in boots and a buckskin skirt and a cow-girl’s sombrero over her curls. The platinum hair with its permanent wave was hidden beneath its broad brim, and when she hung on the forty-five she looked like the real thing. She was the real thing, but busy—very busy. Try as he would Slim could not slow her own long enough to speak his piece. And then, at daylight, they dropped off the train and the time for talking was past.

Up the long, crooked trail between the giant mesquite trees they walked in silence until they came to the clearing, and as they slipped through the fence and started for the house a man rose up with a gun.

“Dad!” cried Kate, and the rifle came down.

“Is that you, Kate?” exclaimed the Old Man.

“Yes, sir,” she answered. “These are my motion picture clothes. Put your gun up—this is only Slim.”

“Oh! Slim, eh?” he grunted. “What about Bill Hannigan?”

“I quit him,” she said. “He’s no good.”

“No, I’ve known that for some time. Know what he’s done now? Sold out to Hathaway! Stole Good Eye.”

“Never mind,” cut in Snake Bit. “I’ll tend to all that. How long ago did they leave?”

“Three days, Mr. Jones. I’m awful sorry about those mules. It’s the first time in ten years that I’ve lost a man’s stock, once he put them in my pasture.”

“I’ll get ‘em,” promised Slim. “Sorry to make so much trouble but—”

“I’ll lend you my best horse,” broke in Scarborough. “And if that scoundrel comes back—”

“We’ll get ‘em,” promised Kate, with a smile.

“We!” repeated the Old Man, and glanced at Slim.

“She’s going along to protect me,” he said.

“Oh!” grunted Scarborough. “Well, everything else has gone to hell. But what’s happened to her face—and hair?”

“This is just my picture make-up!” she explained, and the Old Man regarded her dourly.

“Well, hurry up and cook my breakfast!” he ordered, “while I ketch that horse for Slim. He’s a good horse, Mr. Jones—the best in these parts—and if you don’t get back Good Eye—”

“We’ll get him,” nodded Snake Bit.

“I’ve got a hunch we’ll meet ‘em, coming back.”

The sun was on the desert when, with Kate beside him, Slim rode across Dry Lake and headed for Black Pass. There was a mirage all around them, trees floated in thin air, bushes quivered and danced in the heat; but to him it was all very beautiful.

“Kate,” he said, taking her hand, “how’d you like to ride like this, always? Just you and me, and the desert?”

“Fine,” sighed Kate. “But look who’s coming.”

From the mouth of the Pass a procession of horsemen was stringing down, with Slim’s mules, traveling without packs.

“Busted!” he laughed. “That’s Hathaway, coming back. But who’s that tall hombre, behind?”

“It’s Bill,” she said. “Lend me your rifle.”

“No, kid,” he replied. “It’s between me and him. He sees us—he’s turning back.”

“Keep out in the open, then,” she warned. “If you go near that pass, he’ll ambush you.”

“Dead right,” agreed Snake Bit. “Let’s see Mr. Hathaway and find out what he’s got to say. Stealing my mules—trying to steal my mine! If he didn’t look so sick I’d bore a hole plumb through him. But ump-umph—see ‘em holding up their hands.”

“No shootum!” yelled the two Indian scouts as they saw him whip out his rifle; and Slim laughed as he rode up on them.

“Mr. Hathaway, I believe,” he said.

“Gone into horse-stealing for a change, eh? What’s the matter? Couldn’t you find my mine?”

“No,” answered Hathaway, hanging his head. “You got the best of me, I’ll admit it. But was it really quite right not to warn
me that a maniac was right there at your
cave? Mr. Miller was killed the first shot.
I didn't think it of you, Jones!"

"No," bawled back Snake Bit, "and I
didn't think it of you. Are you satisfied
now or have I got to give you the limit
for stealing my bell-mare and mules?"

"I'm satisfied," sighed Hathaway. "You
can have your mine. All I ask is to be
allowed to go on."

"Go ahead," agreed Slim, and glanced
at Kate, who still had her eyes on the pass.
Then a bullet kicked up the dust in front
of them and she dropped off, his rifle in
her hand. She took a rest over one knee,
drew a bead and fired, and there was a
scramble among the blackrocks. She fired
again and as a tall figure rose and fled she
gave him another shot.

"That's what I think of you, Bill Hanni-
gan!" she said, and Snake Bit ventured a
smile.

"What's the matter with Bill?" he in-
quired.

"Matter!" she flared back. "I ought to
kill the dirty whelp. Do you remember that
ring he gave me? It was phoney—he won
it in a poker game and I knew it the first
time I laid eyes on it—and I just waited to
see what he would do. And sure enough,
he got drunk and told! That's the kind of
man Bill is."

"Say, listen," said Slim, dropping down
beside her and fetching out his dia-
mond ring, "how'd you like to wear this,
Kate?"

He flashed it before her—bluish-white,
of the purest water, a diamond to win any
heart—and her eyes grew big with sur-
prise.

"For me, Slim?" she quivered as he put
his arm around her, and when he slipped
it on her fingers she gazed up at him with
an adoring smile. "Did you get this for
me?" she beamed and then suddenly the
black hate came back. The ring had stuck
—it was too small—and she flung it in the
dirt.

"You did not," she sobbed. "You got it
for her!" And like a flash she was up on her
horse. "You and your second-hand ring,"
she cried, and was off like the wind across
Dry Lake.

But Slim had a horse, Morgan Scarbo-
rough's best, and he took after her on the
run, leaving the diamond where it fell. This
was no time for pleadings—the explana-
tions could wait. He thundered up behind
her and swung her out of the saddle, hold-
ing her close as he rode on and on.

"Listen, Kate," he said. "I love you—
understand? Never mind about the ring—
I'll get you another! Come on, Pet—give me
a kiss!"

"You're all the same," she wailed. "No,
no! Let me down. Please, Slim! Let me go.
I hate you."

"You just hate the ring!" he answered.
And suddenly her struggles ceased.
"Well, maybe—" she began, and he took
the kisses, anyway. Riding on, and on, and
on.
COPS LEARN FAST
By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

You Can't Always Expect the Sergeant to Admire You

VACATION was over. That is, if you could call patching up the furnace, getting the storm windows on, and doing a thousand and one other little jobs around the house a vacation. But that was just another one of the breaks that went with being a greenie on the police force. I mean, that rookies like myself get their choice of vacation periods after the veteran members of the Department have had theirs. And two years running now I had been allotted two weeks when it was too cold to take my wife to the seashore or the mountains, and not cold enough for winter sports and the like. Besides, there were lots of things to do to get our place in shape for the winter, and so I was stuck.

Well, I reported at the Precinct Station a half hour before midnight, and no sooner did I go in the door than a faint hope I had been cherishing during my two weeks off went up in smoke, as I was sure in my heart that it would. In short, Sergeant Pat Mahon was still in charge of the night desk. Don't misunderstand me, Mahon was, and is, a good cop. However, he was a member of the old school who in their pavement pounding days considered it a sign of weakness to call for help if less than five roughnecks were engaged in a free-for-all. And though he had the good sense not to make mention of it, he looked with scorn upon such things as prow cars, radio, and so forth. At least, as far as rookie cops were concerned.

"A cop should be broken in to be a cop," I once did hear him growl to a brother old-timer. "Nowadays they make it too easy. A rookie should be pavementized for four, five
years. That way he learns something about being a cop."

Just the same, Mahon was a good man. I just didn’t like him, that’s all. And he didn’t like me. Perhaps it was because I had a college degree and was heading for the Detective Bureau by the shortest route I could find. Anyway, neither of us was very fond of the other, and as a result I pounded a night beat in a lonely section of town, and dreamed of the day when an application for entrance to the Police School run by the Detective Bureau would receive Mahon’s okay recommendation and I could start my studies. You see, there was a rule in the Department that you had to get your Sergeant’s okay for a thing like that. Going over his head got you simply nothing. That is, save Mahon’s everlasting enmity.

However, I had hopes that Mahon might retire, or be transferred, or even start liking me enough to put his okay on my application. His greeting, though, when I reported was certainly no indication that the latter miracle had come to pass.

"Showed up, huh?" he growled, and glared at me from under his bushy brows.

"Had a feeling you’d probably quit and turn in your badge. Most of your kind don’t stay long."

"Maybe I’m different, Sergeant," I said. "I like police work. Now, if you’d only give me a break and O.K.—"

"You learn to be a cop first!" he cut me off short. "Trouble is with you rookies you think you can rate stripes by just reading a few books. Well, not while I’m on this desk. You show me that you can be a cop first, that’s all I’ve got to say."

And it was all I had to say, too. No use pleading or arguing with Mahon. I’d simply have to bide my time and pray for the miracle. So I took a look at the blotter, and learned that nothing had happened that I should worry about. Then I went over to the board and simply as routine copied down the license numbers of cars that were lost, stolen, or strayed.

"Anything special, Sergeant?" I asked when I was all set.

He glared in disgust as he always did at that question, and tapped a thick finger on the blotter.

"You read it, didn’t you?" he demanded.

"I meant, was there anything else?" I explained. "How about that Rossi thing? Any smoke on him?"

Toni Rossi, not one of our better citizens, was wanted for questioning on a twenty thousand dollar pay-roll robbery that was now some seven or eight weeks old. In fact, Toni was wanted for more than just questioning. He was wanted so that he could be brought to trial on an airtight case, and promptly be sent up the river for a considerable number of years. The Bureau had all the proof it needed. The only two things missing were Rossi, and the twenty thousand dollars in small bills.

"Rossi!" Mahon exploded at me. "There’s nothing you need to know except that he hasn’t been grabbed yet. But the boys will get him soon enough. You never mind about Rossi, though. There’s men that know their jobs to handle that thing. You just mind your beat, and see that you don’t fall asleep. Now, get out of here."

"Okay, Sergeant," I said, and turned to leave. And then, because I just couldn’t stop the words, I said, "I just wanted to know. I’ve been working on a few angles to that case. I just wanted to know what was what, that’s all."

MAHON bawled something after me, but I didn’t hear what it was. I was out the door by then and a little annoyed at myself for not keeping my big mouth shut. That was certainly no way to get Mahon to change his views on my application. And, of course, the truth is that I hadn’t been working on any angles of the Rossi case. I simply didn’t know any angles that could be worked on. I didn’t know any more about it than had appeared in the papers. And, also, I had the feeling that even the Bureau knew precious little more.

Naturally, I had thought about it a lot, as did every man on the force. Were the gods to drop Rossi, even without the money, into one of our laps and we would definitely become the fair-haired boy of the Department. Why, I’d even be able to tell Mahon a thing or two and get away with it.

Yes, of course, I had thought a lot about it, and I was thinking about it some more as
I started walking my beat trying store doors to make sure they were locked, and flashing my bull-light through door glass for a look inside. In two years I’ve never seen anything doing that last, but it’s part of a beat man’s technique so I go on doing it.

When I reached the far end of my beat, without having seen so much as a passing car, or a pedestrian, I made my check call into the Precinct. Mahon took the call with a grunt, grunted again when I’d finished, and then hung up. I closed the call box, and was starting back when I heard the sound of a car a couple of blocks away. It was traveling pretty fast, and a couple of moments later there came the scream of protesting rubber as the car went around the corner on two wheels, no doubt.

The new route would bring it into the block where I was, and as I got ready to flag it down the usual thought of drunks heading for home, or some other all-night joint, flashed through my brain. And it took only as long as that for the car to rubber scream around a corner again and throw both headlight beams into my face as I stepped down off the curb. Instinct, or something, made me leap back up onto the sidewalk again. And it was well that I did. The left front fender missed me by no more than a couple of inches, and the next thing I knew that car was fifty yards down the street. Too far to catch the rear license plate, and too far to drill a shot or two after it, even if I had thought of doing it.

Maybe I actually did think of doing that, but I don’t exactly remember. At just about that instant it developed that there were two cars, not one. And the second one came tearing around the corner to catch me again with headlight beams. I did have my gun out by then, and when I saw that the driver was going to miss my curb by a lot I jumped out into the street with a pull-over yell. My bull-light was in my other hand and I caught the driver with its beam as he slammed on the brakes. He was hatless, and I never saw a guy so mad looking in all my life. I saw also that his old car bore new side-swipe marks that ran the full length of the body. Then he yelled at me.

“Jump aboard, quickly! I think I can catch them. A car of drunks. They side-swiped my parked car on Vine just as I was getting in. They should be jailed for life!”

Before half of all that was out of his mouth I was up on the running-board, and he had the car in high. The other car was a good couple of blocks away by now, and certainly not traveling in a straight line. The driver of my car yelled things at me but it was just a jumble of sound, and I didn’t ask for a repeat. He was doing sixty at least and the wind whistle in my ears made conversation impossible. Besides, I was having trouble enough hanging on.

The car ahead suddenly swerved around a corner. My driver had picked up a full block by then, so when he tore around the same corner, centrifugal force trying to pull me loose and slap me against a building front, we were able to see the tail light of the other car as it spun left at the next block. Seconds later we spun left, too, and this time centrifugal force tried to drive me through the back seat window.

It so happened, though, that the twist the force gave my body turned me so that I caught a flash glimpse of the street sign. It was Baker Street, and for a split second that meant nothing except that it was Baker Street. Suddenly, though, it hit me. I realized that Baker had no cross streets. That is, it ran straight east until it hit the railroad embankment. There it turned sharp south for the depth of a block, and then back sharp west. Only it ceased to be Baker Street then. It became Carver Street. And when all that hit me, I realized something else, too. There were no cross streets between Baker and Carver but there were a five-and-dime store arcade that joined the two streets half-way down.

That made it fine for me, I figured. A fast sprint through the arcade and I could trap that other car as it came back on Carver. So thought and action became one for me, as it were.

“Brake this thing quick!” I bellowed at my driver. “Brake it, quick! I’m getting off!”

Maybe I startled him, or maybe he just acted on impulse. Anyway, he certainly stepped on those brakes, and hard. Momentum tore me loose and threw me down
onto the middle of the street in a heap. Luckily, though, I was halfway prepared for that, so I didn’t hit too hard, and was up on my feet and running for that arcade as fast as I could. My driver yelled something after me, but whether it was a question or a curse I didn’t stop to find out. I hit the opposite sidewalk in full stride, tore across it, and went pounding through the arcade. There was still so much roaring echo in my ears I couldn’t tell whether or not I was hearing that other car coming along Carver Street.

I knew it was going to be close, though, if that drunken driver held to the same reckless speed. But close or not I was certain to have a shot or two at the tires, if not a warning shot across his radiator cap. Only it didn’t work out that way. When I came out onto the sidewalk on the Carver Street end of the arcade there was still the roaring echo in my ears, but no additional sound of an approaching car. In fact, there wasn’t even a sign of a car. The street both ways was absolutely deserted.

Skidding to a halt I cursed myself for not having told my driver to turn his car kitty-corner across Baker thus blocking it off. And I was tempted to sprint back through the arcade again to Baker Street just in case those drunks decided to double back. However, I didn’t go through with that idea, and even today I don’t know exactly what stopped me. Instead, I started running along Carver Street toward the railroad embankment end. When I was about fifty yards from the embankment a car came streaking around the corner. It passed under a street light and I saw at once that it was not the car I had been chasing. It was the car that had picked me up.

I opened my mouth to yell at the driver, and started to jump down off the curb onto the street. But I didn’t. Something simply checked me, and the car went streaking by as I stood hidden in the pitch dark shadow of a building front. I realized, of course, that my driver couldn’t possibly have passed the other car without seeing it. And that, of course, added up to just one thing. Right after the drunks had turned the corner at the embankment end of Baker Street they had undoubtedly run the car down a dead end alley. And my driver, of course, had raced right by the alley opening not even guessing the trick that had been played on him.

That fact a certainty in my mind I started running again, but before I reached the corner three figures darted across the street, raced up the steps of a brown stone front on the other side, and disappeared through the front door. Still running I debated going after them but decided against it. If they were the ones I was hunting I knew where to find them. I decided that the first thing to do was find their car and have a look at it.

It didn’t take me more than five minutes to do that. It was at the end of the second side alley I tried. A Buick with local state plates and a badly crumpled front and rear fender and running-board on the right side. I took a second and longer look at the license plates, and suddenly something clicked in my head. Yes, it was one of the cars reported stolen earlier in the evening. I got out the list of plate numbers I had jotted down at the Precinct Station just to make sure. It was there.

That made things different. It wasn’t just a bunch of hit and run drunks now. It was a real pinch to be made. But there was a fly in the ointment, and as I walked out the alley to the railroad embankment street I cursed myself for not having flagged down those three running figures when I had the chance. I didn’t know what any of them looked like. I only knew the building into which they ducked. It was a five-story apartment building, and I would probably have me a time hunting them out.

However, there wasn’t anything else to do but search that building from top to bottom. For a moment or two I debated calling for help, but thoughts of Sergeant Mahon at the other end of the phone checked me. So I decided to do it on my own.

The first break I got was that the lobby door was open. There were twenty-five name cards under twenty-five bell buttons, but not one of the names meant anything to me. That is, except two. One was John T. Smith, and the other was Carter S. Hall. All the others were either Mr. and Mrs., or Miss. Smith and Hall had apartments on the top
floor, so I decided to check on them first. There was a self-service elevator but I passed it up. I used the stairs instead.

The top floor had five apartments. Carter S. Hall's was at the front, and John T. Smith had one at the rear. I stood on the landing for a moment listening, but I didn't hear a thing. Then I started walking toward the door of Hall's apartment. I had taken perhaps three or four steps when I suddenly stopped dead in my tracks. An angry voice was sounding off inside the rear apartment. The one that John T. Smith occupied. I stood right where I was, catching what I could.

"... stay right here until I tell you!" said the anger shaken voice was exclaiming. "You drunken bums, I've a good mind to . . . !"

"Aw look, Chief, it's okay!" a second voice cut in. "I'm telling you. Maybe we shouldn't have picked up the car, but we were out of luck, see? Stuck, and no way to get back. And so help me, we only had a couple. You know I wouldn't take chances, Chief. Nobody seen us. And even when they do find the heap, so what? We're . . . ."

"Oh, shut up!" the first voice snarled. "Ruddy! When's Joe to get here? He going to bring that mouthpiece with him?"

The one called Ruddy made some kind of an answer, but I didn't hear it. By then I was going cat fast and just as softly toward that apartment door. The door was closed, but not all the way. That's why I had been able to hear the voices inside. Yes, I was heading toward that door fast and softly, and then it happened. The door of the self-service elevator behind me clanged open as I spun around. A plug-ugly of the worst type stepped out of the car, and I am forced to give him credit for being just a shade faster than chain lightning. He caught one look of my uniform and presto there was a snub-nosed gun in his hand and it was spitting yellow-orange flame. Something caught the left side of my tunic and spun me around. That near miss no doubt saved my life. The second bullet bored the air right where I had been standing, but I was off balance and falling by then. There was no third shot. Not from his gun, anyway. I squeezed the trigger of my service revolver even as I hit the floor flat. I caught him in the neck just under the jaw and he went over backwards.

Just one shot was all I used on him. Not because I knew that one was more than enough. Rather because all hades broke loose inside John T. Smith's apartment. There was much shouting and cursing and the door flew open with a crash. I had swiveled around by then and I caught the flash glance of three faces framed in the doorway. One of them struck a responsive note in my head but there was no time to follow it though. As a bullet tore into the carpeted cement floor three inches from my face I fired my own gun.

I hit the man in the middle of the trio, and he would probably have gone bouncing back into the room if it hadn't been that the other two more or less blocked the way. So instead he fell on his face half in and half out the door. I fired again, heard somebody scream, and through a red haze I saw the apartment door being violently slammed shut. But it couldn't be shut all the way because of the fallen man.

The red haze bothered me, and when I fired again I saw my bullet knock slivers of wood off the door jamb. By then it dawned on me that I must be hit, though I swear I hadn't heard a shot or felt a single thing. But my whole left side was paralyzed, and the red haze was getting deeper and deeper.

"Drop them, and come out with your hands up!" I remember hearing my voice call out hoarsely. "Come out or I'll smoke you out!"

The reply I got to that order was two shots from inside. They both came through the wood door and missed me by a couple of feet. If they lowered their sights a little, however, I'd certainly be a cooked goose the next time they fired. I fired through the door back at them and at the same time tried to inch over more toward the hall wall. It was impossible to move, though. I felt as though my body were nailed to the floor, and the only thing I could move was the hand that held my gun.

A few seconds later they fired again, and for the first time I felt stabbing pain. White hot stabbing pain that went across the back of my neck and up into my brain. Half
crazy from the pain I emptied my gun through that door. I heard some screaming and the solid thud of a falling body. And then I didn't hear anything more. Nor did I see anything, or hear anything. The red haze before my eyes became almost a black. It was as though I was tumbling head over heels down into bottomless emptiness.

WHEN I opened my eyes again I was in a nice clean police hospital bed. An orderly in white was standing on one side writing something on a chart. And on the other side, looking down at me out of eyes filled with concern, was none other than Sergeant Pat Mahon. I just looked up at him blankly for a moment. Then I saw his lips move, and he spoke.

"I thought you were just shooting off about them angles," he said, as his leathery wrinkled face got a little red. "Why didn't you explain? You shouldn't have tackled that without no help. Even if you did manage to plug them all, so's the boys could grab them."

None of that made any sense to me. I was still numb all over, and my head was full of black clouds.

"Shouldn't have done what?" I heard my own voice ask.

"The Toni Rossi clean up, of course!" he said as his eyes widened in surprise. "You don't remember?"

"Toni Rossi?" I mumbled. "What about him?"

Mahon frowned, and then shot an inquiring look at the hospital orderly who had finished writing on the chart.

"He'll be all right," the orderly said. "It'll all come back to him. He's still in a dazed condition. He lost quite a lot of blood."

Maybe so, but I wanted to know all about it right then and there. What was I doing in a hospital bed anyway, with a couple of miles of bandage wound around me?

"What about Toni Rossi?" I demanded again.

"Why you, of course," Mahon said gently. "You smoked him from his hide-out. Two of his rats you dropped cold for good. Rossi you got in the chest, but he'll live to sit twenty years in a cell. You winged another in the leg. And another broke his neck trying to jump for it just as the boys got there. One of the other tenants put through a call that there was some shooting, and the prowl boys got there fast. Lucky they did, too. You were in a bad way. But you just heard the orderly say that you'll be okay soon. But you should have told me that you really were working on a couple of angles to the Rossi case. How'd you find that was his hide-out, anyway?"

I didn't answer him. I was too amazed by his revelation to speak. And in a hazy sort of way I remembered one of those faces framed in that apartment doorway clicking in my brain. That was because it had been Toni Rossi's face. But Sergeant Mahon took my silence the wrong way.

"Okay, let it ride," he growled. "Just one thing I want to tell you before I beat it, though. Got thinking about you last night, after you'd gone on your beat. And... Well, some learn to be cops faster than others. What I mean, is that I O.K.'d your application to enter the Bureau school. You should do all right there. You've got what a good cop has to have. Well, I got to go. I'll be in again to see you, and the boys send their best."

He nodded and turned to go, but checked himself.

"Oh, yes," he said. "One other thing you don't know. The boys found the money in that place. The whole twenty thousand. Too bad a cop doing his duty can't collect the reward, too. But I O.K.'d your application, so maybe that's something. Be seeing you."

And with that he gave me a nod and went out leaving me with a jumbled mess of bewildering thoughts. Of course, when memory did come back, and I was able to write out my report, I put down the true story. And in time Mahon got a look at the report, of course. It was too late then, though, for him to do anything about it. I was already attending the Bureau school, and doing well. But I doubt that Mahon would have done anything, even if he could have. He was all cop, all the way through. We just happened not to like each other much, that's all.
That Devotion Is a Good Substitute for Honesty Was a Theory of the—

GREAT SCOUNDREL

By GORDON YOUNG

I

CAPTAIN JACK HESIOD was sharing a bottle of wine under the shade of the trellised vines outside the Café Napoleon, on the island of Tupulo, with a Frenchman that he did not like.

The Frenchman was Jules Plantoine. He was fat, red of face, with little evil pig-like eyes, and a mustache that drooped over his puffy mouth as if to mask its cruelty.

Hesiod had cold blue eyes, red hair, and a hard name. He was saying things that made Plantoine sweat; and Plantoine kept scratching at the calf of his right leg where an insect had bitten him as he slept. He wore sandals and no socks; and, as he could not find a ready answer, he would lean over and scratch hard to have more time to think.

A sullen barefoot native slip-slapped up to the table and spoke to Hesiod. “Cap, ol’ Tolman he wanta see you at his house queek!”

Hesiod stared at the sullen Maake, then hit the table with smack of palm. “No. Go back and tell the damned old thief that I want nothing to do with him!”

Maake scowled and backed off. Then Plantoine spread his puffy palms, saying, “Many men would be glad to visit old Tolman’s house. He has a pretty wife and guards her closely. Ah, it is something to have seen her, close!”

“I’ve never seen her. But I’ll say that your taste in beauty isn’t mine.” Hesiod sipped wine, eyed Plantoine above the glass brim. “You and Tolman used to be as close as two ends of a rope in a hard knot. Was it over her that you had a falling out?”

Plantoine took a pose, looked severe. “Not at all! But he is, as you just said, a thief!”

“And what the hell do you call yourself?” Hesiod’s eyes were hard to meet. “Some months ago you bought of me a fine cargo of pearl shell. And you have delayed payment with promises that I choose to call lies. You sold the shell, Plantoine. And here I am again on Tupulo. And I will be paid! I give you three days. No more! Three days from now, if I’m still unpaid, I’ll go to sea, and you’ll go with me. And we’ll sail to Noumea, where I’ll ask the governor if he has ever missed anybody from his collection of convicts with a face like yours. For I’ve a great suspicion,” Hesiod went on coolly, “that you are such a rogue as would never be sent to prison—except for life. So being out, you have escaped.”

Plantoine’s big face was too red from brandy and sunburn to turn pale, and he sat
like a dead man bolstered upright, and he spoke with a shaken voice:

"Monsieur! My honor—my—"

"Never mind your honor. Let us speak of your record. An hour ago I was wondering how the devil I was going to have my money out of you. I've seen too many ankles scarred by leg irons not to know what to think when one is stretched out before my eyes. So in the future, when you scratch in public, be careful not to raise your trousers' leg! Now what do you say?"

Plantoine muttered asthmatically, "I will pay! Oh, I will pay you—in—full!" His little evil piglike eyes gleamed, but Hesiod carelessly did not notice.

II

THAT evening Captain Hesiod again idled at the Café Napoleon and Madame Duoy, the buxom proprietress, sat at the table and chatted gayly with him.

In came a tall, thin cockeyed Eurasian known as Harri, whose tailored whites were spotless. He spoke politely in a thin voice: "Capitaine Hesiod, Meestare Tolman ver' um-bly ree-quests the on-or of your pre- sence at his un-worth-ee hoam."

Hesiod eyed this head clerk of Tolman's. "You know what I think of Tolman. And of you!"

The Eurasian bowed imperturbably, and his thin womanish voice wheedled. "Capitaine, it iss not lak the last time, if you please. Meestare 'Tolman iss ver' seek an' he mus' see you."

Hesiod's ice-blue eyes could stare at a man for a long time without winking. "Go to the devil. Both of you. Especially you!"

The Eurasian walked off stiffly.

Madame Duoy lifted her brows. "He has the bad eyes of one who would use a knife in the dark! Have you no fear, my captain?"

"Less fear of his knife than his tongue. Politeness from one who hates you is danger- ous. Tolman used to be rich. But with that fellow around for a Jonah—where did he come from?"

Madame fluttered a hand. "Monsieur Tolman picked him off the streets of Singapore some years ago and gave him food and clothes, for you must know that in spite of his gaunt look, this Tolman has the kind heart. But this Harri is not well liked for, as you can see, there is a sly evilness in his face!"

Hesiod nodded. "I have heard that Tolman got his young wife in much the same way. If not off the street, off the beach—which is just as bad."

Madame waggled her head. "That is not true. Non! She came to Tupulo with a wretched troupe of actors and, having the prettiest face, Monsieur Tolman, who is three times her age, out of the kindness of his heart, married her. She is only a child. I have seen her often under the great wide hat that keeps the sun from her face as she takes the air in a carriage that Harri sometimes drives."

"I wouldn't want him around any wife of mine."

"Non?" Madame leaned forward on plump elbows. "And will you tell an old friend why you used such short words just now with that ugly Harri?"

"Certainly. You know, Madame, that I am the biggest scoundrel in the South Seas?"

Madame's laughter fluttered into a gay "La, la, la! So I have heard you say!"

"When I visited Tupulo about four months ago, Tolman sent for me, much as he has today. He and this Harri then proposed that I take their rotten brig to sea and sink it for insurance. I said that I would— gladly!—if they would go along so that I could batter them under the hatch. I could see that it was this Harri who had first thought that I was such a thief that I could be hired to steal for others. But, no, Madame, I do my own stealing for myself only!"

III

ABOUT 3 o'clock in the morning Hesiod rowed out to his schooner and found the anchor watch asleep from too much whiskey; but the mate was also dead drunk in a scupperway.

"You worthless old lag," Hesiod growled. "This time I will throw you overboard!"

He heaved up the old seaman and, with as much gentleness as if carrying a child, took him down the ladder. Then he almost
dropped the mate on the deck for a pretty girl was asleep in a chair under the dim lantern in the cabin.

He dumped the mate into a bunk and went back to bend low for a good look at the girl. She wore a parau and slept with her head thrown back.

A mere child she seemed, with the sort of beauty not often seen in the islands. Her white face had been barely tinted by the tropical sun so that her cheeks had something of a pearl shell’s luster, and her silken hair was golden.

He was stooping over her when the girl awakened with a startled look. She said, “Oh!” and got out of the chair quickly, then smiles flitted uneasily.

“Who the devil are you?”

“Captain Hesiod, excuse me, please. I am Avis Tolman, and I went to sleep. It was so long, waiting.”

“And what are you doing here?”

“Oh, please, my husband wants to see you, quick.”

“He does, does he? First, that ugly Maake. Then that Harri. Now you! What does he want!”

She had a sweet, flute-like voice and it trembled a little. “He is very sick, Captain Hesiod, and must see you, please! You will come with me?”

“What does he want?”

“I do not know, Captain.”

“I think you are lying. But most women do when they want their way, so we won’t quarrel over that. Sit down.”

Hesiod threw his cap at the sea chest, ran fingers through his hair, eyed the girl. She was a pretty trinket, and he suspected a childish mischief from the look of her eyes, but now she was too nervous to be mischievous. A beautiful slim child, and old Tolman was a gaunt, dark, wrinkled, somber and dishonest man.

“You will come with me, Captain?”

Hesiod thumbed tobacco in the bowl of a pipe, struck a match. “Will he beat you if I don’t?”

Avis laughed at him. “Of course not! He is a nice man and loves me!”

“Not much of a nice man to send a kid like you, at a time of night like this, out to a ship like mine. Bad lot of boys for a crew. Cannibals. They might have put you into a frying pan!”

“I am not afraid of natives. I was born in the islands!”

“But what of me? Don’t you know that I’m a hard case? I’m likely to carry you off?”

His teasing made her less nervous. With an upward glance from under lowered lashes, she said, “Maybe that is what we want, Captain!”

“So? But I leave husbands ashore! Tell me all about it.”

She sat on the arm of the heavy chair and one slim leg dangled. “You will come with me to see my husband?”

“It’s likely that I’ll go. Which shows exactly why I oughtn’t have anything to do with that Tolman. He knows too well how to get around me. What does he want?”

Avis said that she did not know, but Hesiod was sure that she knew all right. He asked how old she was. She studied, then said, “Twenty-five”; but he called her a little liar. She laughed and admitted that she did not know.

She had lived in the islands all of her life. One day when she was very small, the Englishman that she had called “father” went away, and her mother cried, broke furniture, and made Avis swear to hate all men, always. Then she had gone with her mother to Sydney and joined a troupe of people who wandered about the islands, singing and dancing. Her mother died and Avis was in bondage. Everybody beat her and hated her, probably because she was pretty and young, and reminded them that they were old, ugly, wretched.

They came to Tupulo and Mr. Tolman by chance saw, through her flimsy dress, that her shoulders were covered with black welts. He took Avis to his house, then went to the manager of the troupe. The manager at once ran with a bruised face to complain to Major Dubonnet, the governor.

Major Dubonnet had Avis brought to him, looked at her face, at her shoulders, and, being an officer and a gentleman, threw the manager into the new jail with a three months’ sentence to work on roads.

The next day Tolman married her and kept her very much as a willing prisoner be-
cause he told her, and she believed, that all men were just about as bad as the manager.

But tonight he had told her that Captain Hesiod was one of the few honest men in this part of the world, and that she need not be afraid, but must go alone to his schooner and persuade him to come to the house where he, Tolman, lay in bed, helpless.

"Alone? Then how did you get out here?"

Hesiod asked.

"I swam."

"Liar. Your *parou* is dry."

Avis laughed.

"I tied it about my head."

His nod admitted that might be, for, if she were island born, she was probably sister to a fish. "Nobody knew that you came?"

SHE shook her head, saying, "Only Harri and Maake," as if their knowing were not important."

"Do you like that Harri?"

"Of course I like Harri! He is good to me."

"I'm not so sure that you know when somebody is being good to you. Was there a drunken man on the deck when you came? The mate?"

"Um-hm. So I came here to wait and I got sleepy. Please, you like me, Captain Hesiod, don't you?"

"What has that to do with it?"

"If you like me, you will come." She stood up and held out a hand, as if to lead him away.

"I can't like any girl that makes the fool of me that you'll likely be doing if I let you pull me by the nose to old Tolman. So tell me, what does he want?"

"Will you come if I tell you?"

"You tell me, then I'll tell you."

"My husband made me promise not to tell you. He said if you knew that you would not come. But if you *do* promise to come, then it will be all right for me to tell you. Don't you see? So you will promise?"

"All right."

"Honest promise?"

"Honest."

Avis came earnestly close and her eager face was lighted with coaxing anxiety. "He is a very sick man and has oh so much trou-

ble! It is that beast of a Plantino that has made him worry and lose money!"

"Ho, so? It will be a pleasure to help Tolman if breaking Plantino's neck does any good!"

"Please, Captain Hesiod, my husband wants for you to take him and me and Harri away, and not have anybody know. Will you?"

"Not much I won't. You go tell him he has a ship or two of his own."

"No!" Her cry was shrill and angry. "He has nothing now but some pearls that he keeps under his pillow. And he will give them to you if you—"

"I'll not." Hesiod backed to the chest and sat down. "There's some flummery in his trying to dodge off the island. I've trouble enough with the French as it is. Tolman can do his own running away. What's the reason?"

"It is that old Plantino who has taken everything away from my husband! And that old Plantino, he loses and loses at gambling and makes my husband give him more and more!"

Hesiod grunted, clicked the pipe stem against his teeth. "Tolman is rogue enough himself to know all along that Plantino was a cutthroat! Too bad. I've no love of Tolman. Less of Plantino. But I'll have nothing to do with sneaking him off Tupulo. Go tell him so!"

"But you promised me!"

"Not to do what you want, I most surely didn't."

"You did, too! You promised to come with me. That is what I want!"

"That—yes. I did. So, all right. Come along."

IV

IT WAS dark when they left the beach with Avis' small warm fingers holding to Captain Hesiod's hand. It was bright dawn when they came to the old two-story house that stood on three-foot piles of coral rock.

The barefoot Maake was sitting on the veranda steps. He did not look sullen now, but grinned smugly as if he understood a thing or two, and stood up with beckoning
twist of arm. "You come along with me, Cap. I take you to Mista Tolman."

"You go with Maake," said Avis; and to Maake, "You see! He did come with me!" She ran lightly into the house.

Hesiod followed Maake up the gloomy stairs and went through a door that the ugly native opened for him.

"You wait, Cap. Mista Tolman he call you, I go tell 'im you come."

Hesiod looked about the room, saw nothing of interest. He sat down, took out his pipe, and fell to musing on the prettiness of Avis.

He heard a weak cry and arose. It vaguely had the sound of someone calling to him, in a muffled voice, from the next room. Hesiod went to the door that led to the next room, opened it slightly, spoke. "Tolman?"

There was no answer, so he opened the door wider and stood there.

The split bamboo shades were down and it was too dim to see clearly. There was the sick room odor of medicine. He said, "Tolman?" again and went nearer the bed where the whiteness of sheets gleamed in the gloom.

A long gaunt form lay face up. Hesiod stopped close, then muttered oaths amazed. He put out a hand but drew it back, and, turning quickly to a window, jerked up the blind, all the while looking backwards.

A knife had been driven into Tolman's breast. Hesiod bent low, frowned at the knife's black handle, touched it, then straightened with a slow deep breath. It was his own knife.

The door from the hall into Tolman's room opened. Maake, with eyes big as teacups, stared for a moment before he yelled and ran. In a half minute commotion stirred through the house. Maake was bawling, "Cap Hes'd he kill masta!"

Avis came flying and gave Hesiod a horrified look, then she fell to her knees by the bed and sobbed as she clutched at the gaunt dead man.

Then Harri came, looking a bit frowsy in rumpled pajamas and with uncombed hair. His twisted eyes gleamed hatefully. "You keel my mas-tare!" His thin womanish voice had a hysterical screech; and he struck a pose as if about to attack Hesiod, who remained perfectly still, glowering as suspicions took shape.

Harri looked at the floor, then stooped with out-reaching snatch. "The pu-urls!"

His eyes darted over the mat, then he went to the bed, thrust his thin hand in under the pillow, jerked the pillow from under the dead man's head. "You thief! You have roab heem! You keel heem an' then roab heem!"

Hesiod laughed, not pleasantly. "By God, I'll say you two played it well! Got my crew drunk to steal that knife. So be it! But we'll have some truth right now!"

He stepped forward with a look that made Harri jump aside; then Hesiod put out his hand to take the kneeling Avis by her golden hair, meaning to jerk her to her feet and shake out a confession. But she looked up. Her pretty face was distorted with anguish, and there was no fear. "Oh, Captain Hesiod, I know that you did not do this thing! I know that you did not! But oh, who did it, and why, why, why?" She fell forward, sobbing.

Hesiod turned to get his hands on Harri, but Harri sprang back into the hallway, ready to run.

V

MAJOR DUBONNET came, accompanied by marines.

The Major had grown fat in colonial service. He wore a black spade beard that gave a martial air, but his blue eyes were tired and tolerant.

After listening, Major Dubonnet summed up his opinion in a rather weary voice, spoke directly to Hesiod:

"It is known that Madame Tolman spent the night on your schooner. What she says of why she went to visit you may be true, but most likely it is not, for a woman must protect her name. And what even if Tolman, who could not leave his bed, did send for you? He was very jealous of his wife, and it would not be the first time, that a wife's lover was summoned to talk over matters with her husband.

"Maake heard an outcry in his master's room and came to the door, but at first was afraid to open it. When he did open the
door, he saw you with your hand on the knife. And it is your knife."

Hesiod thrust out his right hand. "Would I need to use a knife on a sick man?"

"In a passion," Major Dubonnet answered judicially, "one does not know what one is using. And as for the suspicions that you have tried to throw upon Harri—you must know that it is common evidence of guilt for the one who has committed the crime to accuse another. If Harri had wished to kill his master, what easier than a drop or two of poison, and who would ever have suspected that it was not the doctor's bad medicine?

"It is of no importance that the pearls, which are said to have been under Tolman's pillow, have not been found on your person. Perhaps there were no pearls, or only the single one picked from the floor where you may have dropped it in your haste. But there is the knife. It is your own. Your initials are upon the handle. It was driven into Monsieur Tolman's heart when you were alone with him."

"But this man was dead, long dead—his body was cold!" said Hesiod.

Major Dubonnet shook his head, unimpressed. "Being a sick man, his body was cold while he lived. And it is easier to believe that you arranged to have your own crew drunk, so they would not know of Madame Tolman's visit, than that an enemy would go to so much trouble in order to steal your knife, and stab the husband with it while you waited in the next room—as you would have me think. Enemies are seldom so obliging to a wife's lover!"

VI

HESIOD was put into the small one room jail that had been built of coral blocks, with high narrow windows through which a man could scarcely crawl, even if the iron bars were removed. A marine packed back and forth before the door, and all Tupulo came to stare at Hesiod.

That evening Plantoine slipped coins into the sentry's palm and was permitted to put his fat face against the bars of the jail door, where he called softly.

Hesiod, not moving from the stool in a far corner, said, "If you are a wise man, Plantoine, you will pay what you owe, even though I am here. I can use money; for with money enough, one can get out of any jail."

"Come closer, my friend," Plantoine urged. "Let us talk and perhaps arrange something. I can tell you that it will do no good for you to get out of the jail without Major Dubonnet's permission. Out of fear that your crew might help you escape, he has removed them from your schooner and put two marines on board. Your mate has been sent to another ship. He told Major Dubonnet that last night a native brought out whiskey and said that it was sent as a present from you.

"He did not see the native's face closely, and would not know him again. So you, my friend, stand on a slippery place with a rope about your neck!"

"And I," said Hesiod, coming to the door, "do not see tears in your eyes!"

"Oh but, my friend," Plantoine urged, "I do believe that the cutthroat Harri did that thing. Who better than he knew that Madame Tolman, whom he loves, had been sent to bring you? And that, since she is a pretty woman, you would come! He could have murdered the sick man with your knife, knowing that you must be suspected. Ah, the world is filled with evil cunning! And this Harri knew of the pearls that Tolman concealed to evade his honest debts!"

Hesiod asked coldly, "And how do you propose to evade your honest debts? Remember, I have a tongue. Major Dubonnet has ears. And you have scars on your ankle!"

"Name of God, if you please, not so loud! It is of that I wish to speak."

"All right, speak!"

"Monsieur, I have not at hand the money I owe you. But I am a man of resource and not a fool. Therefore, Monsieur, if I devote myself to proving that you are innocent, and convince Major Dubonnet that it was the villain Harri, may we come to an understanding?"

"Call the debt paid, and keep my mouth shut about certain scars?"

"Precisely, Monsieur!"

"Agreed."

The marine came to the door and told Plantoine to stand aside as a woman with a
basket, that was covered with a napkin, came out of the darkness. It was Madame Duoy. The sentry unlocked the door and politely permitted her to go into the cell. Police matters were conducted informally on peaceful Tupulo.

"Major Dubonnet," she said, "has given me permission to send your dinner every day, and this evening I have brought it myself because I want to tell you, my friend, that I do not believe that you did what they say. I know that you are an honest man. Also, I know that if you were a scoundrel, as you are pleased to call yourself, you would be such a scoundrel as arranged the thing too cleverly to be suspected!"

Then Madame Duoy began to cry a little and put her arms about Hesiod's neck. He patted Madame's plump cheeks.

The marine, out of his own thoughtfulness, brought in a lantern and lingered to gaze hungrily at the good things with which Madame had filled the basket.

When she left, Hesiod invited the marine to have a glass of wine and a piece of roast chicken.

The marine said, "Monsieur, I, too, do not believe what they say of you, for I am of the same opinion as Madame, who is an intelligent woman. But will you please assure me, Monsieur, that you are not using the friendliness of sharing your dinner to make your escape? I would be severely punished!"

"Escape? Where the devil could I escape? Your Major Dubonnet is a forethoughtful man. And besides, to escape would seem to admit that I murder sick men!"

There was only one glass, but a whole chicken. The marine stood by the door and ate and drank. He wiped his greasy fingers on his trousers and said, "Monsieur, it is a pleasure to be with a gentleman, even in jail. I shall arrange to stand watch here again tomorrow evening. If you but knew, the food in our barracks does not come from the Café Napoleon!"

VII

THE next morning Harri came to stand before the door and hiss, "You deed keel my mas-tare!" And to scream, "You try to mak pee-ple theenk I deed a cru-ul theeng lak that!"

"You did, damn you!"

Harri went away howling, as if noise must be taken for innocence.

Plantoine came in the afternoon. "I have talked long with Major Dubonnet, and he begins to see that there are other facts than those he first believed. Harri is making so much talk of how he loved old Tolman that many people grow doubtful. Tomorrow, I may have even better news."

It was well after dark that evening when a native boy came with the basket that Madame Duoy sent. The marine opened the door and brought it in, placed it on the table by the lantern.

Hesiod, having more to trouble him than hunger, smoked in the corner on his stool while the marine took off the napkin, eagerly set out the food. The marine took up the bottle of wine, regarded the label by lantern light.

"Ah. Tonight we have merely claret. Last night it was fine Burgundy!"

"Unfit to drink, I am sure," said Hesiod.

The marine said, "I shall soon tell you."

He pulled the cork, poured a glassful, drank thirstily, and made a face. "It is not the best claret." But he poured another glass and drank it. Then he eyed the glass and pronounced judgment. "No, it is not good wine." He put a slice of pork loin on bread with tart jelly and munched.

Hesiod smoked with eyes closed.

The marine put both hands to his stomach and began to groan. He fell to the ground, writhing, and his words were both prayers and oaths.

"The wine! The wine! That wretched Duoy has poisoned us! Name of God, I am dying!"

In no time at all he was quiet.

VIII

HESIOD cautiously slipped out of the shadows near the kitchen of the Café Napoleon. It was the hour when the last of the diners were about through.

He knew that there would presently be a clamor when the sentry relief came to the jail and, having no time to lose, Hesiod
entered the kitchen and said to the cook, "Tell Madame that I am here."

Madame came with a flurrying bustle and joy on her plump face. "Ah, you have been released!"

"Madame, tonight, who prepared the basket of dinner?"

"Oh, I! And why do you look so? What is wrong, please?"

Hesiod brought the bottle of claret from behind his back. He held it out to her. "I have come to complain of the wine, Madame!"

"Why, Monsieur! Ah, this? This did not come from my cellar!"

"It was in the basket, Madame."

"In the basket?"

"And poisoned, Madame. The marine drank of it and died!"

Madame threw up her hands and ran through many unlady-like French oaths. She was astonished and angered and a little bewildered, but she had made her own way in the world, and was not so flurty as she appeared.

She hurried out of the kitchen and returned with a hand on the back of a native boy's neck. He terrified by her roughness and temper, began to cry. Madame slapped his face until he had something to cry about; and, after many denials that he knew how the wine could have been changed, he at last admitted that Harri had met him on the way to the jail; and Harri had given him twenty francs to run with a message. So the basket was put under a bush while he made off as fast as his legs would go, because twenty francs were not to be picked up every day for a little errand.

"So you see, my Captain, it was that sly evil Harri!" said Madame. "I will go at once to Major Dubonnet and tell him—"

Hesiod said, "No, do not do that. Let us wait until the relief sentry comes to the jail and makes an outcry. I can use my free hour. I believe that the most likely place to find Harri will be at the Tolman house."

IX

HESIOD approached the house on the run but slackened his pace to tiptoeing caution as he came near the veranda. The front room windows upstairs were lighted, and he entered the house stealthily.

The old stairs creaked under his feet. He went along the hallway and near the door he could indistinctly hear voices.

Hesiod flung open the door, stood there a moment, stepped in. By his sudden entrance he caught the insolent grin on the face of the ugly Maake who sat on Avis' bed. Harri was there also, lying on the floor, bound and gagged. The fat Plantoine was bowed caressingly above Avis who sat in a chair, crying.

Maake leaped up with a shout and started for a window as if to fling himself out of it, clear to the ground. Hesiod caught up a chair by the back and swung it. A leg and rung were shattered on Maake's head and he dropped as if shot.

Hesiod turned on Plantoine, then threw the broken chair aside. There was a sheath knife on Plantoine's hip, but no fight in his heart. His fat red face was helpless with fright and bewilderment.

Avis jumped from her chair, stumbled against Hesiod and clung to him.
"A man of resource and not a fool, Plantoine? So I see!"

Avis' small hands were beating Hesiod, partly in hysteria, partly to make him listen to her flurried words. They were not entirely coherent, but they told that Plantoine had found out, somehow, that Tolman was an escaped convict from Australia; and Plantoine's extortion had increased mercilessly until all that Tolman retained were some choice pearls, selected over a long period.

"He wanted you to take us all away, quick, for this beast of a man had learned of the pearls!" she said. "And it was this beast of a man and Maake who planned the crime when they were sure that I would persuade you to come ashore!"

Harri, however, had believed that it was Hesiod who killed his master, so he had readily listened to Plantoine, who prepared the poisoned wine and told Harri how to arrange to substitute it, secretly.

"Tonight," Avis explained hurriedly, "Maake made a boast of how he had thrown a pearl on the floor to fool everybody, and if Harri had not found it, he would have pretended to find it himself. That let Harri know the truth, and he wanted to kill this Maake and this Plantoine. So they tied him up to take him on the ship that Plantoine has ready to go away; and they would have killed Harri at sea, so that nobody would ever know what became of him. And this beast of a Plantoine had come here tonight to take me with him!"

Hesiod stared at Plantoine. "So Tolman was also an escaped convict? And you were afraid that I would bleed you as you bled him?"

"Monsieur, I will give you half of everything! I have a schooner ready for sea. All I could put into money and goods is there. We will go away together at once and share equally!"

"Where are the pearls?"

Plantoine put a hand to his belly, indicating the belt he wore under his shirt. "Monsieur, we are men of the world!"

"Right!" said Hesiod, and hit him on the jaw. All of Hesiod's angered weight was behind the blow.

Plantoine thumped to the floor, lay awkwardly sprawled and as motionless as if dead.

Hesiod cut the lashings on Harri's ankles and wrists, jerked out the gag, helped him to his feet.

Harri put out his hand with cringing timidity. "I am sor-ree, Captain Hisiod, by my mas-tare was ver' good to me!"

Hesiod at first gave him a scowling look, then took the thin womanish hand. "Devotion is the best substitute for honesty that I know of. I don't like your way of evening scores, my friend; but if you had guessed right, your justice would not have been so very bad. But you poisoned the wrong man.

"This fellow-" Hesiod gave Plantoine a prod with his toe "-is coming to life. I'll tear a sheet and tie him up as a present for Dubonnet!"

Hesiod turned to the bed, threw back covers, and ripped at a sheet with Avis close beside him, touching him, as if to reassure herself of her security. Suddenly she clutched his arm fearfully and screamed.

Hesiod turned quickly and saw Harri straighten up above Plantoine. Harri folded his arms and lifted his head. The knife out of the sheath on Plantoine's hip was hilt deep in Plantoine's fat neck.

"No man was ev-are so good to me as my mas-tare," said Harri calmly in his thin womanish voice. "Now any puneeshment that Major Dubon-net mak' on me, I weel con-seed-dar it a plee-sure!" He bowed to Hesiod. "I know now that you weel tak' good caare of my mas-tare's wife!"
Some rivermen are born pilots. Some learn the trade, and some, even though they try forty years, can’t take a light-draft sand float through a hundred feet of water without snagging up.

There are some that have cat eyes and can steer all night without a government light to help them around a single bend, and some that use searchlights, and some that are daylight-pilots and never try to be anything else.

And there are some that, should they lose the use of their hands and go blind into the bargain, would still have the gift. Turn them loose on the upper Nile in low water at midnight, five thousand miles from any daymark they ever laid eyes on, and they’ll get the feel of the channel underfoot and steer as nice a course as any owner could wish for. Brad Reeder, down there in Kentucky, was one of these.

Brad had his papers on all the rivers in that middle section of the country, from the headwaters of the Mississippi to the Gulf, from Pittsburgh on the Ohio down to Cairo, and on the Missouri and the Warrior and the Great Kanawha and the Tennessee.

Now anybody that’s got his papers on the Tennessee, you can chalk up on the side of the barge as an A Number One pilot. For that’s a river that needs knowing before you turn a man loose on it between the steering levers. It’s a deceitful river, the Tennessee is, tricky as a moccasin and twice as mean.

But it never worried Brad Reeder. Why should it? He knew every bend and chute and ripple in it, every stone and snag from Owen’s Island where it spills into the Ohio at Paducah, up past four states to Knoxville, Tennessee; knew the clearance of every bridge and the names of the people at every landing, and where the mussel beds lay, and what sycamore trees were safe to tie up to at night.

There wasn’t anything Brad wouldn’t try. One season you’d find him handling a show boat out of Baton Rouge, and the next he’d be pushing a fleet of railroad ties down from the Tennessee hills, or towing gravel from Twelve Mile Island to Louisville, or putting in his nights on the Cincinnati packet run.

You might see him anywhere on those rivers, standing up there in his black derby hat behind the spokes of the big wheel, and him so short that he had to lower the breast board in the pilot house.
so's he could look over it. Yet when you talked to him you never noticed how short he was, or how fat, either, or what small feet he had. All you could see was how capable he was.

He had no bad habits, unless you feel that way about a small pinch of snuff now and again. And he never was known to leave a silver dollar on top of a rock on the up-trip, so's to pick off a bottle of mountain dew from that same rock on the way down. And he never gambled, which is probably the reason he stayed single.

It was about twenty years ago he bought his towboat. Her name was the Little Alec Murray, and she wasn't much of a boat, any way you looked at her. But before he'd handled her a year, men got to talking. For Brad did things with that boat no one else would try to do.

She was only ninety-six feet from kneefenders to the back end of her pitman, and her boilers weren't all they should have been, and men that had run her said she handled cranky and, what's more, she needed red lead and paint.

But Brad Reeder took hold of the steering levers the way a smart horseman takes a hold of the reins, and that boat knew. Don't you ever think that a boat can't tell who's sitting up there in the knowledge box. This one did what Brad told her to. Why, before the first season was out, Brad Reeder could drive a row of tacks with Little Alec Murray.

You see, not being a marrying sort of man, he tied up all his heart in that shabby little boat. He loved her like she was wife and child to him, petted her, talked mighty proud about her, and between trips he just used to sit there on the levee and look at her with a kind of mist across his eyes.

"Was there ever anything half as pretty as her afloat?" he'd say, and before anybody could answer, he'd go on quickly, like he didn't want an argument, "I tell you she's the sweetest towboat ever slapped the water, bar none!"

There was traffic on the Tennessee in those days. Three times a week a packet would splash up from St. Louis, stopping at any landing where there was freight, and there were a million railroad ties a year to be towed out, and cotton and corn and peanuts. They were good pay loads, and the water was tricky, and there weren't half enough good Tennessee river pilots to handle all the fleets.

So naturally Brad Reeder put the Little Alec on the Tennessee run. He made money, Brad did. Plenty.

Then, all of a sudden, after fifteen years, he began to idle over longer between trips. Claimed he was having his boilers cleaned.

But everybody knows the water in the Tennessee is clear. It never chokes up your flues with mud every time you run to Pittsburg Landing and back. No, it wasn't boilers that bothered Brad Reeder. It was something worse than that. It was no business.

PEOPLE said that river traffic was over, that the ties were all cut, and that it didn't pay to haul cotton any more, and that the peanuts were rotting in the ground for want of markets. Brad listened, for quite a while. Then he got mad.

"There's as much life in the old river as there ever was," he said. "I'm not goin' to let any motor trucks bother me!"

So he went out to beat the trucks and the railroads and the hard times, too, which was quite a proposition, even for as good a riverman as Brad. He'd stir up business for himself, he said. He had his money put away very thoughtfully in three banks, and he drew half of it and bought four barges, and put water-tight covers and hatches on two of them for perishables, and went and contracted with the planters and the tie cutters.

His plan was good enough, only it didn't work. He contracted for corn, to sell to the molasses factory at Evansville, and for peanuts to put on the open market at Paducah. Bought before the fields were harvested, and gave his word to pay. Nobody thought of agreeing on paper with him, for Brad Reeder's word of mouth was better contract than some men's first mortgages.

But when he came to sell, he couldn't sell. Not at half what he contracted for. Nobody wanted corn and peanuts, and the bottom had dropped out of the tie market.
But the planters and tie cutters had trusted him, so he paid them, every cent.

It took all that he had left in the bank to do it, and he had to put a lien on his four barges and on the Little Alec besides. A business fellow named Jerry Hartshorne lent him the money and took the notes.

Hartshorne was a little man, too, no taller than Brad Reeder, and about half as broad. But he had a knowing kind of face, flat and plain and pale, with two small eyes, like a mussel shell that's had two buttons stamped out of it. You never did business with him if you could help it. He got the best of a man too often and you heard now and then that he’d misrepresented a thing in the telling, without a man seeing it in black and white.

Brad wouldn't listen, though.

"'Y' can't be choosey, if you owe somebody money that needs it," he said, and he took Hartshorne's check, holding it tight in his fingers so it wouldn't blow away and started uptown to the bank.

Right off he paid the planters all the money he’d promised them, and then he went back to towing. He worked all season, but at last he had to admit that the river wasn't as active as it used to be.

"That will mend itself," he'd say. "Every river has its off years."

But it didn't mend. It got so's a steamboat whistle would bring the people running towards the landings, it was so unusual. Farmers gave up planting altogether and took to fishing for mussels, and they were so poor you'd not count one pair of shoes to fifty men along the banks.

The Little Alec was tied up half the time, and when she did run, she was towing only one barge or two at most, instead of a fleet of four or six like the old days. Then, a year ago, everybody heard that Jerry Hartshorne was pressing Brad Reeder to pay him the money Hartshorne had loaned. But Brad couldn't pay, so what could Hartshorne do? It never struck any of us that Hartshorne would try to take Brad's boat away from him.

To begin with, this Hartshorne wasn't a steamboat man. He was a business fellow and would deal in anything on which there was a chance of profit. He bought old barges and put a coat of paint on them and sold them at twice what he paid; he'd dicker in ties and lumber and real estate.

Once he even bought a load of sassafras logs, which shows what kind of steamboat man he was. For you can't bring sassafras down the Tennessee. It's bad luck, as everybody knows, and there isn't a riverman alive would think of working on a fleet that had a single stick of it aboard. So Hartshorne had to see his sassafras rot away on the bank and after that everybody knew he didn't belong on the river.

He came from up the Ohio somewhere, on the north bank, and he didn't have a scrap of paper that would let him touch a wheel. But he did have a son.

This son was a tall lad, twenty-one or -two years old, with the same kind of a mussel-shell face that his father had. He wasn't a riverman either, but what does Jerry Hartshorne decide suddenly but that it'll help his business if this boy John becomes a pilot.

By this time Hartshorne owned a pair of small Diesel boats, little pug-nosed stern wheelers that had a lot of push in them, which he had got cheap in some trade or other. And about the same time there was great excitement up the Tennessee. The government was putting Wilson dam to work at Muscle Shoals, and was letting the first contracts for the Joe Wheeler dam, above that, and was talking about building the dam at Highland Landing.

Jerry Hartshorne had let one of his towboats out to the government, and he saw that if he had a Tennessee river pilot, he might sign up for some of the contract work, hauling machinery to the dams, and perhaps get some jobs towing material, too. So he went to Brad Reeder.

"How about your paying me the interest on my money?" Hartshorne asked. He always was a quiet spoken man, but his voice was sort of threaded, like the end of an iron pipe, so that it sank right into you and took hold.

"Why, mister," Brad told him, "I've promised to pay, you know. Give me one smart season—"

"The interest from last March is over-
due," Hartshorne reminded him, "and September's coming."

"I never fell down yet," Brad answered, "I aim to be friendly, Brad," Hartshorne said. "I'm not a man to skin a cat because it hollers nights. But if you could pay me part of it now—"

Brad shook his head. He couldn't pay a cent now. Couldn't keep up with the wages of his mate and deckhand, and his fireman and engineer and watchman. Couldn't give the cook enough to feed them.

Hartshorne said, "Well, that's all right. Only I'm needing cash. Maybe I can throw a little business your way."

"How's that?" Brad asked, and you couldn't blame him for being suspicious.

"I got a contract to take some steel up to Danville, Brad," Hartshorne told him. "It will make three or four tows. My Diesel boats are busy down at Cairo just now, and if you'll handle these tows for me—on one condition, that is—"

"Of course I will, and cheap," Brad agreed. "Anything to help pay off what I owe you."

"All right," Hartshorne said. "The condition is, my boy's to ride with you each trip. He's got his pilot papers now on the Ohio, from West Point to Paducah. Want him to learn the Tennessee this summer."

"It can't be learnt in that short a time," Brad warned, "but he can cub with me, if that's what you want."

Jerry Hartshorne ought to have been smart enough to hear the change in Brad's voice. It would have upset any pilot's temper to hear how some boy is to learn the Tennessee this summer. This summer—that was the hitch. You can't learn an easy river that fast, let alone one as mean as the Tennessee. Besides, there's a funny thing about all pilots. They don't like to share their rivers, any more than Brad would want to share his boat.

A river's like a secret; either you know it or you don't, unless you have the gift and can steer all rivers like Brad can. But there isn't a pilot that I know about who'll give away his secrets, unless he takes a fancy to some cub. If he sees the cub has river sense, and is trying hard, and is likely to make a steamboat man, then a pilot will tell him things. But only then. You can't buy a pilot's secrets, and that goes for every river anywhere.

But Brad let young John Hartshorne come aboard the Little Alec peaceful enough, and he took him up into the knowledge box and set an extra high stool for him, over to the right of the steering wheel where the young fellow could see everything he ought.

But the boy's first words sort of touched Brad off. They had pulled out of the chute above Paducah and had passed Ross Landing, and the kid was making notes sort of careless like on a pad, writing down the course and landmarks, and sitting with the chart book open on his knees. The water was high there, the way it usually is since the dam was built below Paducah, and Brad was pushing his tow of four wooden barges up the middle of the river.

"Well, this looks like an easy enough job," young Hartshorne said, kind of condescending. "Keep to the middle. Oughtn't to take anybody with any brains long to learn this."

Brad didn't answer, only helped himself to a small bit of snuff and pushed the steering levers a little to the right. But young Hartshorne was in a talky mood, and so he went on, telling Brad all about piloting. He was just that age when telling was easy for him, and besides, he had his father's big ideas.

"It took me only two trips to learn this reach of the Ohio," he boasted. "I went right up to Louisville to the examiner's office and drew my chart like the one in the book and answered the questions without a hitch. All you need to get your papers is just a little memory. Before many more years I'll have a license on all the western rivers."

"Oh?" Brad said. "You learnt the Ohio on two trips?" He squinted out across the water at a place he knew an old steamboat wreck was hidden, right on the edge of the channel and under the surface just enough to be deceitful. "It took me quite a spell to learn the Ohio, son. Fact is, I don't know it perfect yet."

"Mebbe you don't," young Hartshorne said. "You're pretty old," and he laughed,
which was what you'd expect Jerry Hartshorne's son to do.

It made up Brad's mind for him. He decided if this lad found piloting so easy, let him learn his own way. I'm not saying he was right. You can decide that for yourself. I'm just saying Brad loved his boat and loved the rivers and the Hartshornes were pushing him for money.

By this time they were passing the daymark at Jim Landing, fourteen miles up from the mouth of the river, and a mile below Big Chain o' Rocks. Now every riverman should know that when a place has got a name like that, it means something, and oughtn't to be passed over lightly.

But young John just looked at it on his chart and glanced at the course and at the banks, and didn't ask a question. Didn't even notice Brad shift over, so's to miss the ledge that stuck up seventeen feet out of the bottom on the right side.

Brad could have told him all about that chain, how it starts at the Mississippi near Memphis and crosses the Tennessee and then the Cumberland and then the Green, and finally winds up on the shore of the Ohio. He could have showed him just where it was safe to put a boat through the chain and where not to try it in low water. But he didn't. He was feeling a little bit hurt over being told maybe he was too old to know very much.

So the young fellow said nothing and Brad said nothing, all the way up to Danville. They dropped their bridge steel, easy enough, and found the message waiting there for them. They were to push on to Riverton locks, where the state of Mississippi touches Tennessee, and bring down a fleet of empties.

They cast right off again and went on butting up the river. But after a while Brad's heart went soft on him.

This cub couldn't help being Jerry Hartshorne's son, he reasoned, and maybe he wasn't a bad lad, except for his mouth being too big for his size.

So Brad said, mighty pleasant, "Fellow, going back on the down trip, I'll show you a thing or two we might of missed coming up. There's a bit of nasty water around Big Chain o' Rocks."

"Needn't bother," young Hartshorne said. "I saw everything on the chart, and I've been setting it down on my notes. I'm not blind. Think I can't watch the channel? I'll remember more'n you ever forgot about it!"

Brad looked at him, sort of hurt. Then he spun the wheel far over to the left, and cut jagged across the river to the opposite shore. Young Hartshorne saw him do this, so he leaned forward on the let-down breast-board and sighted a big white sycamore with mangy bark on the left bank and made a note of it, and a log house without any roof on the right, and noted that, too.

But all the time the young squirt was writing out these landmarks, Brad Reeder was steering away from the channel, and straight across Green Bottom Bar, where he shouldn't ever go. He went right across the bar, and the gravel fill, and that wide bed of rocks, hidden by the water. Bad rocks, too. Just as bad as the Big Chain, which young Hartshorne hadn't noticed either. They'll rip the hull out of any boat that scrapes them, and the current will sink it fast in the deep water just below.

Now, most rivermen say you can't navigate Green Bottom, except you mind your channel. But remember, the Tennessee River was high at certain times last summer, while the engineers were making tests at Muscle Shoals, with all the wickets open, letting out water to capacity. The gage at Florence, Alabama, popped up from minus-two to seven feet at midnight, and thirty-two hours later, that head was passing over Green Bottom Bar, just as Brad Reeder put his boat across what usually was shallows.

Brad was a pilot, I tell you. He didn't need to look at the daily river bulletin, or read the gages on the bridge piers, either, to know how much water was flowing down the Tennessee, or what depth he had. He just glanced at the banks and got the feel of the river up through his feet, and he knew. A man can do that, when he has the gift.

He knew that there was plenty of depth on Green Bottom that minute to sail a boat
SHORT STORIES

drawing twice as much as his across the
shallows. And another thing he knew; by
this time tomorrow, there wouldn’t be water
enough where he was running now to sail a
John-boat.

But he said nothing. He just crossed
over the hidden reef of sharp rocks that lies
abottom there, hungry to take a bite out of
any hull, and he looked out the corners of
his eyes to see young Hartshorne writing
down more false landmarks in his notes.

So when they picked up the tow of
empties at Riverton and started down to-
ward home again, Brad Reeder held his
peace. Nothing much happened, going
down. The kid didn’t watch very close,
since he thought he’d learned it all on the
up trip.

They crossed Green Bottom just at
dusk, and this young John fellow was
at supper, so he didn’t notice how the
water came down across those rocks. It was
scant, I tell you, not full from bank to bank
the way it had been on the up trip.

Brad Reeder looked it over and steered
safe, and when he got through, tried to re-
member how many good boats were rotting
in the deep pool below the bar. There was
the Mary B. and the King of Cairo and
Old Hercules—he couldn’t remember half
of them. Not a fifth.

He got a wondering if he hadn’t better
call young Hartshorne and point everything
out to him. The more he wondered the
more his conscience hurt, and while he was
ruminating on it, the boy climbed up the
ladder to the knowledge box.

Brad said, ”Now right about here, I want
to show you—”

But this boy just let go his mouth at the
old man,

”Don’t you fret,” he interrupted. ”I got
it, on the up trip. I don’t need anything
else. I’m all ready for the examination.”

”Examination?” Brad repeated.

”On the Tennessee,” young Hartshorne
said offhand.

Brad looked at him. Didn’t say a word.
There’s nothing you could say to that. But
he thought, ”There isn’t room on this river
for a fellow like you. Take your examina-
tion, boy. They’ll sure ask you about Green
Bottom Bar. They always do. And you’ll
answer, smart. And the examiners will see
that you don’t know anything, and you’ll
not get your papers!”

He didn’t say it, understand. Just
thought it to himself, and took a bit of
snuff.

Back in Paducah the next Monday after-
noon, he heard young Hartshorne talking
on the levee as how the Tennessee was
easier than the Ohio, and making remarks
about taking the examination before the
month was out, so Brad just waited.

But that’s what this cub did. Took the
Tennessee examination, at the inspection
office down to Cairo before he got to know
the taste of river water. The inspectors
asked him questions, and he answered them
quick and smart, like a parrot that’s learned
the chart book. Wasn’t hard, the way he
could talk, I guess. Made them think he’d
done the run a dozen times. But one ques-
tion they didn’t ask, for a change, was about
Green Bottom Bar. Don’t ask me why.
They just didn’t ask. And then he drew
his map.

You know how it’s done—the cub can-
date just draws the course of the river on
a plain piece of paper, only he doesn’t have
to put in all the bends, just the dayboards
and the chutes and landmarks, and where
the channel runs.

Well, the inspectors must have had a
sleepy moment, or else they were so anxious
to get pilots on the Tennessee that they
didn’t look close. Either that, or the map
he drew was simply a copy of the chart-
book, learned by memory. It’s one of those
things that don’t happen once in a thousand
times, but when it does happen, there’s
plenty trouble around the bend.

So young John got his papers, properly
stamped and signed, to navigate the Ten-
nessee from its mouth to Riverton.

The month was July, and once more
there was plenty of traffic up the Tennessee.
There were tows of steel and cement for
the new dams, and barges loaded with heavy
machinery, and sand suckers and gravel
boats and gasoline tankers, government and
contract work, and every bit of it in a
hurry.

But not so much of a hurry as Jerry
Hartshorne was. He came running to see Brad Reeder.

"Brad," he said, "I've got to have the money that I lent you. Got to have it now."
"Give me six more months, mister," Brad pleaded, but Hartshorne wouldn't hear to that.

"You used to have a good reputation, Brad," he said, and Brad swallowed hard.
"I aim to keep it good, mister," he answered very quietly.

"Then maybe we can make agreement," Hartshorne told him. He used his business voice, which was quiet and pointed, and he spoke his words slow and cautiously, as if he had to convince himself as well as Brad that he was talking honest. "You need me a half interest in your old steamboat," he started to say, but Brad held up his hand and shook his head.

"A quarter interest," Hartshorne said.
"A quarter interest in your boat. You keep on running her. I'll get the business for her. You take most of the profits."

"I don't aim to sell a quarter of her any more than you'd sell a quarter of your wife," Brad said slowly. "She's mine, every plank of her. She'll stay mine."

"I don't know about that," Hartshorne answered. "I need my money. If I put a libel on her, as I've got every right to do—"

"Oh, my!" Brad said. He was not a swearing man, so he just once more repeated, "Oh, my!"

HE SAW that he was beaten. He looked at Hartshorne the way a father must look at a kidnapper when he is caught, and he thought the same kind of thoughts. But there was nothing else to do. Brad was beaten before he started, if this got into the courts, so he signed over a quarter interest and went out to running tows again.

Then he took sick. The doctors told him it was his heart that ailed him, and they were right, even more so than they knew. The trouble was his heart, only it wasn't just worn out muscles. It was completely broken.

He started to decline the day he signed over the quarter interest in *Little Alec* to Jerry Hartshorne. Even his flesh began to fall away, like age had sneaked up on him unexpectedly. But he kept right on steamboating.

He made three good pay trips, towing out four barges at a line, lashing in double pairs, like in the old days when steamboating was steamboating. Everybody along the waterfront hoped that this would take his mind off his troubles. But it didn't. They just bored in on him, and he got thinner and had nothing to say to anybody.

A man in such a mind is ready to catch anything that's catching, so the ague came along and put Brad down. Of course, anybody's likely to get the ague, that runs the upper river in the summer, especially if he doesn't fortify himself with quinine morning and night. But it hit Brad hard, fever one day and the shakes the next, and at last he had to give up and go to bed.

Jerry Hartshorne, meantime, had grabbed himself another boat. He had put young John to running it, up Evansville way, pushing coal on the down haul, and on the up river tow he was handling gypsum and feldspar from the river mines.

It wasn't steady, though, and there wasn't much money in it, so Jerry pulled the boy off of it, when Brad took sick, and brought him back to Paducah, and told him to ready up the *Little Alec* for a trip.

The Greater Southlands Sand Company had just got the government contract to furnish a half million yards of gravel for the approaches to the new Joe Wheeler dam, and it had sent its big digger up from New Orleans. A down-river toboat took it as far as the mouth of the Tennessee, and Jerry Hartshorne had the contract to push it the rest of the way. There was fourteen hundred dollars in it for him, and any riverman will tell you it was worth every cent of it.

For this wasn't any ordinary sand sucker. It was a ladder-bucket digger, with fifty buckets of four and a half foot capacity, on an endless belt, and its digging ladder would let down forty feet below the surface to where the gravel beds are. The outfit weighed twelve hundred tons and drew almost five feet of water, and it was so broad that it would fit the rock channels in the chutes above Danville, without three feet to spare, either side.
So with Brad Reeder shaking in his bed, the older Hartshorne put his quarter-interest authority to work. He set young John down on the high stool in the knowledge box of the Little Alec, called Brad's crew together, and told them to take hold of that digger and push her relentlessly up the Tennessee.

The crew kicked quite a little, of course. But young John tacked his papers, that didn't have a flyspeck on them, above the headboard, and Jerry, stretching truth a little, though of course the crew didn't know that, told 'em it was all right with Brad. They went aboard, muttering; but they went, and that's all Hartshorne cared about.

"You can't have any idea how ridiculous it was to send that tow boat up-river with such a cub between the levers, unless you happen to be a riverman and understand such things. That digger was worth half a million dollars, and Hartshorne got his bond to take it in tow on the understanding that Brad, and nobody else, would pilot it. The whole thing proves what everybody always said, that Jerry Hartshorne was nothing except a business fellow, and a little on the slick side.

They started out on as hot an afternoon as ever set the river to steaming where small waves wash the white paving stones on the landing at Paducah. The water looked thick as split pea soup, there where the Tennessee meets the Ohio, and its surface was scummy like a film of oil.

That's how things stood at three o'clock, when the tow passed out of sight around the bend beyond Owen's Island and headed southeast up the Tennessee.

THE day stayed hot, sticky hot without wind, and the night was no better. There was a kind of warning in the air. Old Brad Reeder felt it, even if he didn't guess that the Little Alec was out. It was his time at fever. Some of the rivermen went out to spend the evening with him, and first thing they see is, the heat and the fever and the warning in the air of storm had all got mixed up with his personal troubles in his thoughts.

He kept talking about the Little Alec, talking crazy, and they discovered that in his fever he had forgot she was a boat and was thinking she was—well, a person, like his child, maybe, if he'd had a child.

"Hartshorne won't be good to her," Brad said, rising up on the pillows. His eyes were so dull with fever that they looked like pieces of water-worn glass. "I'll not let Jerry Hartshorne share her! He wants her for that boy of his."

Then he dropped back and lay just staring at the ceiling.

Nobody said a word, only looked at one another, everybody wondering where young John Hartshorne was with Brad's boat that minute.

Of course, if anyone had known about Brad cutting across Green Bottom Bar that one time when the water was high there and young John was talking so uppety, the cub never would have been allowed to go out in the first place. But Brad hadn't told that. Not to anybody.

Next morning still was hot. But at about eight o'clock a coldish wind jumped out of the northwest. A rough wind, like sandpaper. It filled the air with bits of trash and with the smell of dust, and chafed the brown river water till it fastened up in a million little white patches, all over, close together.

It was a storm. Sort of a small tornado. The worst of it didn't hit the town. It passed inland several miles, across the hills, and then it found the valley of the Tennessee and started up it. Not a bad tornado, just a little one. The kind that knocks down barns that should have been knocked down long ago.

But it tore up telephone lines, too, all the way from the Ohio to the Riverton canal, there where Alabama and Mississippi touch each other. There wasn't any rain up-river to raise the water level, but at Paducah the rain fell hard and cold, after the wind had passed.

And about eleven o'clock, who should be standing on the wet stones of the river bank, below the foot of Broadway, but Brad Reeder. He was wrapped up in two sweaters and a coat, and shaking all over with the ague. He stood and looked at the river. Then he stepped forward a bit and looked
again, as if he couldn’t believe his eyes. At last he started to run, down toward the landing.

Some riverman caught up with him and was he wild!

“Where is she?” he was asking, “Where is she?”

When they told him Jerry Hartshorne had sent the Little Alec out, he called them liars and asked all over again. Quite a crowd gathered, of course. And who should come along then but Jerry Hartshorne.

He was smiling a small, one-sided smile, and looking up-river where a Diesel boat was grumbling around the bend. It was one of his down-river towboats, now running light.

Brad began to scream at Hartshorne as soon as he saw him. The ague made his voice unsteady.

“That cub o’ yours will sink my boat!” he yelled. “On Green Bottom.”

“Green Bottom?” Hartshorne repeated.

“He doesn’t know that channel. He’ll sink my boat!”

“Why don’t he know the channel?” Hartshorne demanded, as if his boy could learn anything anybody could—which he could, I suppose, give him time.

At last Brad made him understand, and Hartshorne demanded, “You showed him wrong course?”

“I was willing to show him the right,” Brad countered. “He wouldn’t listen. But that ain’t the point now. You took my boat without me in it!” He had pulled off his own coat and dropped it on the stones. Hartshorne didn’t take offense at what Brad had told him, funny enough. It was probably just what he would have done himself, under like circumstances. He just started to walk fast up the bank.

“I’ll telephone ahead to warn him,” he said. “But he was back in five minutes, looking more worried. “All telephones lines are out. Can’t get Johnsonville or Danville or Savannah.” He was beginning to get angry, and everybody thought he was going to hit Brad. He tightened up his fist and stepped forward quickly, but Brad just stood there shaking with ague and swallowing.

At that second the little Diesel boat sounded her air whistle, and Brad swung around and stared at her. She was one of these new boats, too short for comfort, and her name was the Mary Gray. Brad, still looking at her, said again, between shakings of his teeth, “Y’ don’t own my boat! Y’ only got a quarter of her. It was stealing to take her out! When? When did that cub take her?”

And all this time he never asked a word about what the Little Alec was pushing.

“Three o’clock yesterday,” Hartshorne answered, “but I didn’t steal her.”

“Three,” Brad repeated to himself. “He can’t be far. Tied up last night, that’s sure. He’d of set her high and dry on the first sand bar ripple if he’d tried to run after dark.” He turned on Hartshorne. “Got enough oil in that tub?” He pointed at the Diesel boat.

Hartshorne nodded. He didn’t quite understand.

“We’ll catch her,” Brad said. “You and me. If he tries to cross Green Bottom, he’ll sink.”

“He will, if you showed him wrong,” Hartshorne bellowed. “Damn you, Brad Reeder, that tow’s worth a good half a million!”

You see, he wasn’t thinking of the Little Alec. He was thinking of that half million dollar dredge, just as most men would, but with Brad, it was just the Little Alec. They went aboard the Diesel boat on the run, leaving its regular pilot standing on the bank, and a deckhand pulled in the stage, and Brad climbed to the knowledge box and sounded off the air whistle.

And first thing you knew, they were swinging up the Tennessee.

Of course, Brad’s fever came back before the middle of the afternoon. There he sat, on the stool between the levers, his eyes so glassy you’d think he couldn’t see out of them. But he could. He saw everything. Saw the banks sliding past at six miles an hour, but still he wasn’t half satisfied. His right hand kept reaching overhead and yanking the cord, giving the engine room the gong.

If he gonged once that afternoon and night, he gonged a thousand times, and hollered every time he did it.

“More steam, I tell you! All you’ve got.
Hold down that safety valve! Where is that lazy fireman? I want something like a head of steam!"

He was a steamboat man, you see, and he wasn't accustomed to oil engines. He didn't get any satisfaction out of six miles an hour there on the still water that backs up behind the dam at Mile 939.

"He'll drown her," he kept yelling. "Drown her on Green Bottom!" And still never a word about the dredge.

Jerry Hartshorne learned not to talk after the first bend. But he'd come and stand in the doorway of the knowledge box, even though Brad never seemed to see him or know that he was there. Jerry was thinking more and more of his promise to his bondsmen; his promise that Brad Reeder would pilot that dredge. Brad didn't know anything about that promise, and wouldn't have cared if he had.

That Diesel nearly shook itself to pieces. It went up past those little landings pushing white water away from its head end, with the buckets of its stern wheel spanning the river like it never got spanked in all its years.

Brad kept right on hollering all the way. "Another mile! We've got to make it! He'll sink her! Drown my crew!"

The weather had turned hot again, which didn't help Brad's fever, and the sky clouded over and breathing was hard for everybody aboard. It was three o'clock when that Diesel boat went grumbling around Widow Reynolds' bar; at five o'clock it passed Blood River.

And every bend, Brad looked ahead, fearful he'd see the Little Alec piled up on a bar. But this John Boy was having luck. Either luck, or the old river, knowing it was Brad's boat, was kind to it. But it wouldn't be kind at Green Bottom, no matter whose boat it was. It would be mean, plenty. It would make the boy pay on Green Bottom for taking his examination before he was ready for it. Brad knew it, and he gonged for steam till you'd thought the lanyard would wear out.

There were no government beacons on the Tennessee that summer, for sake of economy. But the empty boards, without the lanterns, stood up on the banks with their cross-arms painted white, sticking out from trees on both sides of the empty lantern shelves. At Sandy River, you could see the cross bars of the unlighted beacon on the left side, gray against the shadows of the bluff, and three miles farther up, the yellow reflection of candles in the lonesome house at Bradford Landing.

NIGHT had come early, and with it rain and thunder, but Brad paid no attention. He didn't need lights. Day and night were all the same to him. Thunder didn't bother him, either. He was sitting forward on the high stool, short legs bent up, heels hooked into the top rung, hands on the levers, eyes straight in front, when Jerry Hartshorne came up to the knowledge box and said:

"Aren't you going to use your searchlight?" It was the first time he had spoken in sixty-eight miles.

"Get out of here!" Brad answered without looking up. "You didn't own all my boat!"

"But you can't see," Hartshorne argued, still thinking of the searchlight, and letting what Brad said about him go. "I don't want this boat piling up, too—"

"I can see right smart," Brad answered. "Oh, I can see!" He laughed then, and there was so much fever in the laugh that Jerry Hartshorne skipped backward out of sight and said nothing more. And Brad, squinting left and right at the dark banks under the rain, gonged the engine room for more speed again.

The lightning began at Leatherwood Shoals. It came only once in a while, very bright, and flooded the whole river sharper than day. It would have blinded most pilots. At least they would have tied up to the bank at the first flash. But it didn't blind Brad.

It showed him the whole river, and both banks, and between the flashes it was the gift that told him where he ought to go. And that's where he went, still watching at every flash for the coming wreck of the Little Alec.

The rain fell faster and the night grew darker except for the flashes, and Brad kept going. He held the channel by the feel of it, that soaked clear through his fever.
was crazy with fever, but that didn’t take the gift away from him. He gonged the engine room every five minutes. And along about half past eight, he began to pray.

Now, Brad was not a praying sort of man, any more than a swearing sort. So when he began to pray, the deck hand and the mate, who had slipped quietly into the knowledge box behind Jerry Hartshorne, began to worry. Brad prayed louder than the rain or the grumble of the engine. You could hear his voice right through the thunder and there was something quite fearful in it.

He prayed for the Little Alec and he prayed for punishment for Hartshorne for taking his boat without him, and he prayed for speed. He knew that young John must have tied up somewhere last night, but where, and how long? Was there still time to catch him before he reached Green Bottom? He prayed and gonged and prayed and the lightning came faster.

Once in a flash, he thought he saw his boat, below Hurricane Towhead. But the next flash showed that he was mistaken, so after that he just went back to praying. The little Diesel pounded under the bridge at Danville about half past ten. At eleven it came up to the foot of White Oak Island. And still no sign of the Little Alec and her tow.

Brad moaned to himself, “We must of passed her! She must be sunk, somewhere behind us!”

And then he started praying again, and prayed till midnight, when he came to Turkey Island. The current was strong there, and Green Bottom Bar lay just five miles ahead. And by this time Brad was praying for his own soul as much as for anything else, for it came over him that if his boat had got as far as Green Bottom, and piled up there, it was sort of his fault, in a left-handed way, for crossing it, like he did that time in high water, with this Hartshorne boy watching.

The crew had all come out in front, down on the main deck, even the engineer, and they were hanging over the knee fenders, with their eyes propped open, waiting for a lightning flash.

But the lightning had stopped. It just wouldn’t flash any more. And Brad kept on, steering by the feel of the river, till he came up to the next bend.

Then he yelled. And the crew saw the long narrow streak of white, away up ahead. It was a searchlight, no doubt of it.

Young John Hartshorne hadn’t tied up. Which showed him to be all the greener on the river. He was piloting by his lights and pointing his tow straight at the middle of Green Bottom, where the rocks are worst, and pushing the digger with all the steam the plucky Little Alec had in her.

Brad kicked over his high stool and stood up there between the levers, and seemed to be trying to put more speed in the big pit-mans, while they pounded back and forth turning the stern wheel.

Jerry Hartshorne cried, “Will we make it?” but Brad didn’t answer, just hollered for steam and hollered at the Little Alec to go slow. Talked to that boat of his up there ahead like it was a baby. Begged it to stop. Tried to reason with it, across two miles of water. But it kept right on going ahead, with its lights pecking first at the left bank, then at the right, and stopping now and then to make big round white spots on the housing of the digger.

Brad was four miles below Green Bottom, now, and the tow less than two miles, and it was in quieter water than Brad was, just at the minute. So he wasn’t pulling up on it any too fast.

Suddenly he turned on his own searchlights and he swung them with the overhead wheel, and he blinked them, and swung them, trying to get young Hartshorne to pay attention. But young Hartshorne wouldn’t. Brad sounded his air whistle, but that didn’t do any good, either.

So finally Brad turned his lights full on the Little Alec, thinking that the boy would understand. But instead of understanding, that kid turned his own lights back on Brad, being playful, and succeeded in blinding the old man.

Blinded him for a minute. And then he got the feel again and in the next ten minutes, he gained half a mile. And another half mile in ten minutes more. He was only a mile behind the Little Alec, and the Little
Alec only a mile below the bar, and heading straight for it.

The engineer jumped up from his knee fenders and ran back to his engine room, to try to coax another revolution out of those old Diesels. Brad had turned off his own lights. He didn't dare take a chance on getting another shot in the eye. But still the Little Alec went right on. Till she was three quarters of a mile—half a mile—a third of a mile—below the bar.

And Brad coming right behind him.

Yes, he gained a little. And a little bit more. Till finally, when he turned on his searchlight again, he could see the cracks between the boards on the Little Alec's deck-housing and the series of guy wires on her stack.

He was only two boatlengths behind her. But the head end of the big digger with the Alec behind, pushing, wasn't two lengths free of the bar. Brad sounded his whistle again. But he knew it wouldn't do any good. That kid was too stubborn. So when the echoes quit, Brad yelled for the decker to take a loop to the side.

"Make her fast!" he yelled. "Fast to the Alec! Sure, that's what I mean! Quick!"

The engineer saw what he was aiming to do, although Jerry Hartshorne didn't. Brad swung his front end past the stern-wheel of the Little Alec and over against the side of her and the deckhand jumped aboard.

He dropped the loop over a niggerhead, and the mate was ready to take up slack, and Brad rang for full speed astern. Astern, see? Not ahead.

The wheel of the Diesel began to slap the water backward. The rope between the two boats groaned, but it held. It didn't do the Little Alec much good to push the tow, with the Diesel pulling back on her. The big digger went slower and slower, with its front end so close to those rocks you could spit on them.

THEN Brad knocked Jerry Hartshorne aside, and ran down the ladder, and jumped over to his own Little Alec, and up to his own knowledge box. He caught young John by the neck and threw him aside, and Brad stepped in between his own levers and he rang for the engines to stop.

The Little Alec began to back away from the bar. And Brad sent his own mate back over to the Diesel boat, to tell them to cast off their line.

"Take her to a good bank and tie her up," he said, "till morning. It's only old-timers try to run this river in a storm at night."

Young John was coming up on his hands and knees from the corner where Brad had thrown him, and he seemed to want to fight for some reason or other. But before he could start, his father was standing there.

"Hold on," Jerry Hartshorne said, "I was some to blame for this myself. Captain," he said, speaking to Brad, "what you plan to do now?"

Brad looked at him a moment, and he looked at the Diesel boat pulling away, and he looked at the banks and at the water ahead.

"I'm taking her through this bad stretch," he said. And he took her through. Clean as a whistle, without scraping once. Up above the bar, he found a sycamore tree, and he tied up for the night.

Jerry Hartshorne went home on the Diesel in the morning. He was for taking his boy with him, but old Brad would have none of that.

"The kid'll never learn the river," Brad said, "if he don't get showed. And I'll show him. Show him right, this time, whether he wants me to, or not. He's going along the whole way."

Brad took him, and showed him. It was the fever did it, some way. Made his conscience hurt, to think he'd lied about the river to anybody. Oh, sure, he took the digger all the way. Got his boat back, too, when the insurance company found out about Jerry Hartshorne's trick on them, sending his green boy, when they thought Brad was doing the job.

And the boy? Why, Brad signed him on as deck hand the next trip. Explained how in ten years of decking, he might make a riverman yet. And there's no telling. Maybe he will.
The Tonto Kid May Have His Dark Spots—but the Bright Ones Are So Much Brighter Than the Average Man’s That They More Than Make Up for It

BEDROCK

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

THE reins loose in his hand, Slim Akers glanced sideways at his partner. “Pete, when it comes to conversation you’re about as noisy as a desert ter-
rapin.”

The Tonto Kid shifted his weight in the saddle. “Been doing a little thinking for myself. What I mean, I’d like to quit this kind of a life and settle down.”

Slim Akers smiled. “All you have to do is to ride back to Tecolote and give yourself up. Permanent lodgings, and free board.”

“Give myself up? For what?”

“Oh, borrowing horses and shooting better than the folks that were shooting at you. Remember what the colored gentleman said when he lifted the rooster. ’I got nothing personal against you, but you’re wanted.’”

Pete frowned. That was it! He was wanted.

Orphaned when but two months old, fate had tossed him hither and yon for twenty odd years. Horse wrangler for a gang of Arizona rustlers when only thirteen, through loyalty to his friend Tonto Charley, he was drawn into his first gun fight. Since then he had borne a hard reputation. Finally he became known as The Tonto Kid, a name he either had to live up to or get shot. As for settling down, he had tried it. But always some unforeseen circumstance thrust him out onto the trail again. His only real friend was the card man, Slim Akers. Slim understood him and liked him.

Slim gestured. A tiny black dot, moving slowly across the desert, began to take shape. Suddenly Slim’s horse raised its head and nickered.

“They say horses can smell ’em for a long ways,” remarked Pete.

“Prospectors?”
"Mebby I was meanin’ burros."
The oncoming traveler stopped and seemed to be trying to locate the origin of the sound.
"His eyesight ain’t any too good," commented Pete, "or he’d seen us quite a spell ago. Old, too, I reckon."
"Can you really see his teeth from here?"
"What I mean, did you ever see a young fella punchin’ a burro across the desert?"
The distant figure dipped into an arroyo and did not reappear. "Maybe he broke his neck?" suggested Slim.
"Or mebby he’s layin’ behind a rock lookin’ down the sights of a rifle."
Exercising a most natural precaution—the partners had left TECOLOTE in haste—Slim and Pete sat their horses watching. Presently Pete sniffed. "I smell smoke."
"He’s getting ready to cremate the body."
"That’s interestin’," said Pete. "Let’s go look."

IN THE dry streambed, a white-bearded old man was squatting before a tiny fire making coffee. His burro, bearing a small pack, stood just behind him. "Good mornin’!" called Pete.
The old man glanced up at the noon sun.
"Had your breakfast?"
"Yesterday."
"Then light down and come right in."
The old man shuffled the coffee pot and added more coffee. Pete and Slim dismounted.
"I can’t see any too good," said the old man, "so mebby you’ll excuse me if I ask my burro a kind of personal question. Misery, are these boys all right?"
The mouse-colored burro brayed like a trombone. Slim and Pete grinned, "And if we weren’t all right?" said Slim.
Misery’s owner set a skillet of bacon on the fire. "Misery would ‘a’ said yes, just the same." He chuckled. "You see, I never ask him a question that ‘yes’ won’t fit."
"Well," Slim spoke slowly, "a man can be all right but in wrong."
The old prospector’s eyes twinkled. "My business is mining, and looking after Misery’s health. You see, his ma died when he was no bigger than a jackrabbit, so I had to raise him on canned milk. He looks stout enough. But he’s a leettle delicate in spots."
"He’s got kind of a unforgivin’ eye," commented Pete.
"It ain’t his eye. He backed into my stove once. Since then he ain’t what you’d call plumb responsible behind."
Cold biscuits, bacon, coffee—in ten minutes pot and skillet were empty. "Now what can we do for you?" asked Pete.
"Just be good boys," chuckled the old man. "I reckon you could if you was to try hard."

Slim rose and stretched. "There are several different ways of being good, especially after breakfast." He gestured toward their weary horses. "We’d take it as a favor if you’d tell us where we can find the nearest water."
The nearest water, he told them, was THE Pipes, about six miles due west. He, himself, was headed for town. His name was Hathaway, but most folks called him Bedrock. He was packing some ore to Tecolote and coming back with a supply of grub. As he took up the slack in the hitch he nodded toward the distant Pinnacles. "Looks like you boys were headed that way."

Slim nodded.
The old man stroked his beard, blinking up at them. "Sure you can’t do any better than that?"
The Tonto Kid shrugged. "We did pretty well to get this far."

Bedrock filled and lighted his pipe. "It ain’t for Misery and me to set in judgment on nobody. Specially when we’re packing ore and can’t see good enough to shoot and get results." He stared shrewdly at the partners. "Now you boys could ‘a stuck me up and taken my ore, if you’d been a mind to."
"Bacon preferred," said Slim.

Bedrock nodded. "Ever do any mining?"
"Not me!" Slim gestured with a slender brown hand. "I’m like Misery, somewhat delicate in spots."
"You boys kind of hang together, I take it?"
"We expect to, someday."

BEDROCK took up his stick. "Misery and me’ll have to be gettin’ along." He hesitated, seemed to be turning something over
in his mind. "The law, now," he said finally, "it ain't always right. And justice, around these parts, has been hidin' her head in the sand for quite a spell. I know you boys are all right in your hearts, even if you are both packing guns and riding played out horses." He punched Misery, and followed by the partners, moved on up out of the arroyo. "Yonder is The Pipes. About two hours further up the trail is my camp. Purty place, with pines all around it. Right nearby is a sizable meadow and good grass. Now if you boys was to change your minds about them Pinnacles, nobody over in Tecolote will know which way you headed."

"Thanks," said Slim.

"I could do with a little help, for a spell. One man workin' a windlass and fillin' a bucket—well, you can't be at both ends of a hole at the same time."

"My partner," Slim indicated The Tonto Kid, "can make a windlass sit up and talk."

"If I ain't getting too personal, just what is your line?" queried Bedrock.

"Cards."

"Can you play pinochle?"

Slim bowed. "I invented the game."

Bedrock's face lighted up like a sunset. "They's no lock on my cabin. Nobody ever comes up that way. And they's plenty grub till I get back." And speaking to Misery, the old prospector set off across the noon desert.

The Tonto Kid stood staring after him. "I was thinkin' that if half the folks in the world was like old Bedrock, the other half wouldn't find it so hard to get along."

"He's whiter than some that take a bath oftener."

The Tonto Kid did not relish the thought of pumping a windlass or pounding a drill. But it was evident he had taken a fancy to old Bedrock. Slim himself was not averse to retiring from public life for a season. The past year had been pretty strenuous. Anything they did was a gamble, so why not sit in Bedrock's game for a spell and see how the cards ran?

By the time they arrived at The Pipes the partners had begun to feel sleepy. Automatically they took to the foothill trail leading to Bedrock's camp. Slim's only remark was that while they and their horses needed a rest, to say nothing of the peace officers, he did not intend to make mining his life's work.

As bachelor quarters the camp was perfect, the cabin swept, shelves, table, and cooking things neat and clean. An old-fashioned Seth Thomas clock ticked leisurely on the shelf above the fireplace. Bedrock's Winchester was oiled and loaded, a little detail which interested Pete. The yards and sheds were neat; tools nicely arranged, firewood ahead, and wonder of wonders, the ax was sharp. Misery's small corral had been recently scraped and the results distributed carefully among the geraniums along the north side of the cabin. It was more than a camp, it was a home.

Mountain pines, widely spaced, grew round about. Cold mountain water chuckled in the stream above the camp. Pete liked it all. Even Slim admitted that the prospect was not without its good points. Following the stream they found the mountain meadow, where they staked their horses. Beyond the meadow rose a barren hillside pitted with holes. On a cone-shaped dump stood a crude windlass. "There's where you shine," said Slim.

Pete grinned. "And sweat."

Before night came on they had pretty thoroughly explored the immediate vicinity. The Tonto Kid always liked to know just where he, and everything else, stood before settling down in a strange place.

After a hearty supper they turned in. Slim had smoked his final cigarette and was half asleep when Pete rose on his elbow. "Say, this here is great! But just what in hell are we doin' up here, anyhow?"

"Being good boys," murmured Slim drowsily. "Go to sleep, you tomcat."

They were pretty well worn out, but through habit, slept lightly. Just before daybreak Slim woke to see the dim figure of Pete standing in the doorway. Slim rose and came behind him. He could hear nothing unusual. But presently came the faint patter of hoofs on the trail below the cabin. "It can't be old Bedrock."

The sound ceased for a few seconds, then became clearer. "Goes awful quick and light for a horse carrying a man," said Pete.
As the pattering hoofs approached, Pete drew back into the cabin, closed the door and took up his belt and gun.

"Might as well put on my dress suit too," said Slim. "But no warrior would come hoofing up here like that." He turned and glanced at Pete, who was laughing.

"Shucks!" The Tonto Kid stepped to the door and swung it open. In the cabin yard stood a mouse-colored burro.

"It's Misery," said Pete.

"Misery is right!"

THE little burro was in a bad way. The pack saddle hung under his belly. The breast strap was half torn off, the breeching completely gone. On his rump was a long slanting gouge, the hair below it clotted with red.

"Misery," said Slim, "where's the old man?"

Misery raised his drooping head and brayed, but his customary "yes" didn't tell them anything.

"It happened mighty quick," declared Slim.

"What?"

"That everlasting something that always happens when we settle down. And here's Misery, scared to death, his rig a wreck, and somebody's taken a shot at him. What I mean, what has happened to old Bedrock?"

"That's right. He was packin' ore. He didn't have much of it, so it must have been high grade stuff."

Pete got breakfast while Slim caught up Misery and greased the bullet wound. After a hasty meal they packed their saddles up to the meadow. "I wasn't figurin' on ridin' back to Tecolote," said Pete as he saddled up.

"Maybe we won't have to. If the old man was anywhere near Misery when that slug seared him—" Slim waved his hand.

Hard-headed, accustomed to frontier fatalities, The Tonto Kid nodded casually.

"Mebby so. Shootin' in the air, I'd say the ruckus happened when Bedrock was goin' in. Nobod'y'd stick him up for a measly burro-load of grub. We only knewed him about a half hour. And we didn't stay up here long enough to get a chair warm. But he was meanin' right by us. He shoved in the ante, and it's up to us to keep on playin'."

"Then," said Slim, mounting and swinging his horse round, "let's play."

Taking with them a can of tomatoes each and some cold biscuits they rode down the morning trail. Misery's tracks were too plain to merit any special attention. He had stopped at The Pipes, evidently for water. They traced him to the arroyo, but in coming from Tecolote the burro had not crossed it. His tracks showed that he had come down the arroyo, and had come fast.

AS A PRECAUTION against a surprise, Pete finally took to riding the desert level, leaving Slim to follow the burro tracks in the arroyo. Slim discovered nothing unusual until they were within a half hour's ride of the town. The card man called to his partner. On a round, smooth boulder was a tiny spatter of red, long since dry. They could see where Misery had traveled close to the rock. "Keep foggin' ahead," said Pete, who again took the higher ground. The arroyo was rough and the going slow. Shortly before noon Slim again called to his partner. Pete rode down into the wash. In the hollow of a cut bank, behind a huge boulder, lay the figure of a man, Sun-blinded for a minute Pete stared. Heavy prospector's boots, faded overalls, gray flannel shirt—the blurred figure began to take on a familiar shape. It was Bedrock.

"Hell!" whispered Pete, as he knelt and gazed at the clotted beard, the hands still half clenched, the closed, sunken eyes.

"Breathing, and that's about all."

Carefully they lifted Bedrock out of the shadows, dashed water into his face, spoke to him. But the old prospector for the time being was traversing a far country. A heavy rifle bullet had gouged a furrow in the top of his head; how deep, the partners could not determine.

"We can't pack him back to his cabin." Slim shook his head. "If we take him in to Tecolote, well, it's up to you."

Recently Tecolote had been handbilled with a reward offered for a person known to his intimates as Young Pete, to outsiders as The Tonto Kid. Pete knew that his reappearance in daylight would mean trouble. And
trouble would mean a shooting, for Pete didn't intend to let them take him. It was not fear that caused him to hesitate, however. He simply wished to plan ahead so far as he could. Old Bedrock had offered them a haven when they were sorely in need of it. Chances were he wouldn't pull through, but that made no difference so far as playing the game went. "If we lay him across the saddle, that wound in his head is like to bust open, and he'll just naturally bleed to death."

Without further talk Slim stripped the saddle from his own mount, and took the cinch from the latigos. Pete saw what was doing and took his rope from his saddle. They laid Bedrock length-wise on Slim's horse, and roped him there. I'll take him in," said Slim. "If I'm not back here before sundown, you better light a shuck for somewhere else."

"All right." Pete's tone was brisk. "Nobody's gunnin' for you, anyhow. Say, you might fetch me some tobacco and papers."

At the head of the arroyo Slim struck into the smoother going of the Tecolote road. Young Pete, he reflected, was the whitest little liar this side of blue space. Could Slim see Pete heading south down the desert if he didn't return! Not any. Pete would slip into town at night, and start something. And that, Slim confided to the unconscious Bedrock, was what partners were for.

Wondering what luck Slim would have in Tecolote—it being generally known that The Tonto Kid and the card man were inseparable companions—Pete looked over the ground where they had found Bedrock. At the rate he had been traveling he would have reached this spot about two in the afternoon. Save his own there were no tracks in the immediate vicinity. As the burro tracks went no further up the arroyo, Pete reasoned that right here Misery had stampeded for home. Sign showed that when hit, Bedrock had crawled behind the boulder under the cut bank. Had the old man seen his enemy, or had he been shot from behind? Pete rode down the eastern edge of the arroyo and back again, and found no further sign. "Somethin' wrong with me this mornin'," he muttered. "Better do a little thinkin'.'"
same horse tracks coming from the opposite direction. The holdup had ridden from Tecolote, swung down and ambushed Bedrock, secured the ore, and making a wide loop had circled back to Tecolote. Pete was three hours determining this.

In a grassy pocket he let his horse graze and opened the can of tomatoes. With a clear view of the distant arroyo, he sat waiting for Slim’s return. Another hour drifted by and still not a sign of his partner. Lassoing his horse, Pete lay down and took a much needed sleep. He knew that if Slim arrived he would wait for him.

Just before sundown Pete awoke. Slim had not returned. Pete was worried. He knew the card man would not tarry in town any longer than necessary. Surmising there was trouble ahead, and pondering all the possible things which might have happened, Pete took the foothill trail, and keeping his eye on the arroyo below for the possible appearance of his partner, drifted slowly toward Tecolote. Just what was in the cards he did not know. But with his usual deliberation, he decided to turn a few and see.

Entering Tecolote at dusk he learned from a Mexican that his partner was in jail. “What did they run him in for?” Pete asked in Spanish. He was told that the stranger, as the Mexican called Slim, had been put in the carcel for having murdered Bedrock: murdered him, and fetched his body to town, expecting that because he had done so people would believe him innocent.

“That’s just about the way it goes,” reflected Pete, as he arranged with the Mexican to take care of his horse, “but I aim to make it go different.”

Leaving chaps and saddle with the Mexican, and a dollar as a guarantee of more if he kept his own counsel, The Tonto Kid made his way into town.

TECOLOTE in general knew him only by name. Darkness was his friend. Assuming an easy going manner he strolled up to a group on a street corner. They were talking about Bedrock and the man that waylaid and shot him. One of the group mentioned Slim’s name, said he was partner of The Tonto Kid. Another declared that old Bedrock was done for, that he had been shot through the head. From the conversation it was evident that the old prospector was well liked in Tecolote. The fact that he was still alive, as one of the group asserted, seemed to make no difference in their attitude. Nor did the fact that there was no actual evidence against Slim Akers. Public sentiment was against the card man. The men to whom Pete was listening talked openly of lynching him.

Drifting down the street, The Tonto Kid stepped up to a young cowpuncher who had but recently arrived in town. After a word or two of greeting, Pete asked the cowboy into the nearest saloon to have a drink. At considerable risk of being recognized, Pete tarried in the saloon, plying the cowboy with questions natural to a stranger who had just heard of the shooting. The cowboy knew Bedrock, and was strong for the lynching idea himself. He told Pete that the man who shot the old prospector was known to be the partner of The Tonto Kid, and that the Kid was a black-hearted killer. “Too bad,” mourned the cowboy, “that they didn’t get ’em both.”

“Just who arrested this Akers fella?”

“City marshal—Jim Collins.” The cowboy grew confidential. “Between you and me, Collins is just as willin’ as anybody that the skunk gets lynched. ’Course, bein’ a peace officer, he’s got to throw a bluff, but I’m tellin’ you it ain’t goin’ to be so awful hard to get that card sharp out of jail.”

They stepped outside to see if there was anything doing. “From what you say,” said Pete, “I reckon that Akers fella oughta get lynched. Me, I never seen a lynchin’.”

“That’s easy. All you got to do is follow the crowd.”

In front of the saloon they parted, agreeing to meet again if the Lynchers got busy. Pete walked past the jail. No chance to get in communication with Slim, because of the curious crowd moving up and down the streets. As Pete passed one group a man stared hard at him, The Tonto Kid walked slowly on. But this wouldn’t do. If he were recognized, all chances of helping Slim would be in the fire. Pete turned the corner, walked round the block and hunted up his cowboy friend. “Just found out somethin’ mighty queer,” he told the other, who had
taken several more drinks. "It's about that card sharp's horse. Did you see it?"

"Not me, pardner."

"I reckon the city marshal must have overlooked it." Pete's tone was confidential. "Anyhow, it's a dead giveaway."

"What about the horse, anyhow?"

Pete hesitated. "If you won't let on to nobody—but I'll tell you what. Come on and see for yourself."

In the alley back of the feed barn Pete stepped to the rear doorway and peered in. He beckoned to the cowboy. The other came stealthily, much impressed by Pete's manner.

"That first stall, there. If that ain't a giveaway..." As the cowboy passed him Pete swung up his gun and hit him on the head. Dragging him into the empty stall, he stripped off his rowdy, overalls, boots and hat, and put them on. Slipping out into the darkness of the alley, he took a roundabout way to the Mexican's. Calling the Mexican to the door he gave him another dollar and told him to fetch a lantern and a pair of shears.

In a lean-to in the rear of the house the Mexican clipped Pete's long black hair tight to his skull. "Barber shop is closed," explained Pete. "Goin' back up into the mountains tomorrow. No tellin' when I'll be able to get another haircut."

In the cowboy's clothes, gray Stetson for black, blue rowdy and overalls for Pete's black cotton shirt and striped California pants Pete looked like a Hassayampa hay tosser disguised as a cowboy.

Tecolote's two saloons were doing a rush business. Groups of townspeople argued on the street corners. Nine men out of ten were for lynching Slim Akers. Pete knew he had to do something and do it quick. Any minute the cowboy in the livery barn might come to. And any minute the crowd might find a leader, break into the jail and get Slim. A deputy was making a bluff of guarding the jail. The town marshal was not in sight. If he was straight, reflected Pete, the marshal would be guarding the prisoner himself. Slim's happy-go-lucky companion tossed his recent intent to seek peace into the discard, and once more became The Tonto Kid. He and his partner had done what they could to save old Bedrock's life, and this was how a grateful community was repaying them. Pete couldn't make war on the community, but he could interview the man that ought to be at the head of the community talking them out of their wild idea of lynching.

Assuming a slouch quite different from his usual straight-backed gait, Pete sauntered to the city marshal's office. Marshal Collins was not at his desk swearing in extra deputies to help keep the peace. His back to the doorway, he was toying with the combination of a medium-sized safe. There was no one else in the room.

"Is this the town marshal?" drawled Pete. Mr. Collins became immediately upright. His mouth grew contemptuous as he sized up the seedy looking cowhand. "What do you want?"

"Nothin'."

"Then what did you come in here for?"

"Nothin'."

"Then get out."

Pete had had time to survey the surroundings and size up the marshal at close quarters—a tall, heavy-set man, with a whiskey eye, and a straight lipped mouth. "Your hand is tremblin'," said Pete. No man likes to be told his hand trembles, much less a peace officer. Mr. Collins exploded. Pete's face assumed a startled expression. "I'm a tax payer," he said. "What the hell of it?"

"I want to find a horse I been lookin' for."

"Well, I'm busy."

"So am I," drawled Pete. "Only you don't act like you thought so."

"Say, who are you, anyway?"

"Old man Rucker's boy, from Claybank."

"Well, come around in the morning."

Never once losing his slouch or his drawl, Pete watched Collins' face. "I been a long time trackin' that horse. Tracked him down the arroyo south of town, and then done lost his tracks down near The Pipes."

The town marshal's hand again began to tremble noticeably. "Well, that's nothing to me."

"Then I guess I come to the wrong post-office." Pete slouched to the doorway. Turn-
ing, he kicked the door shut with his heel, whirled and faced the marshal. The abrupt change of manner opened the marshal's eyes. And those eyes were centered on the muzzle of a gun that seemed to have come from nowhere. "Yes," said Pete. "You got it. I'm the Kid."

The marshal took a step back.
"Take just one more, then down on your knees and open that safe. Or pray. Makes no difference to me."

Naturally the marshal hesitated. Some one might come in almost any minute, to tell him that the crowd had taken his prisoner. But anticipating that contingency Pete reached back and shoved the door bolt home. "Now get busy, Collins."

"There's nothing in the safe except some town records and a little change."

"Open her up."

Collins knelt and fumbled with the combination. The heavy door swung open. Pete moved forward. "Town records, eh? What's in them two dirty lookin' ore sacks?"

"Oh, that? Just some specimens from my claim up in the Granada hills."

"Specimens of what?"

"Silver."

"Let's look at 'em."

Watching for a chance to get The Tonto Kid off his guard the town marshal grudgingly opened one of the sacks.

"Specimens, hell!" Pete's face grew dark. "It's high grade stuff, and it's gold. I reckon I found that horse I was lookin'."

"Say, Kid, listen a minute!"

"Not a minute. Take them handcuffs off the nail and put 'em on. Don't slip, or I'll drill you, as sure as you tried to kill old Bedrock. Now we're goin' over to the jail and we're goin' in the back way." Pete took a Winchester from the rack. "If you say any more than 'howdy' to anybody that hails you, there'll be a big black bow on your door handle tomorrow mornin'."

"Say, Kid—"

"Don't say, and don't kid. Just walk."

If SLIM AKERS was surprised when they entered the jail, he didn't show it. Although he saw plainly that the city marshal and not Pete wore the handcuffs, he had to have his little joke. "So they got you too?" he said, grinning at Pete. "Well, I don't object, if you don't snore. Won't you introduce me to your friend?"

"Bedrock's ore," Pete gestured toward Collins, "is in the city marshal's safe. Draw your own conclusions, and when you draw, shoot. What I mean, I'm goin' out again for a spell. If they bust in the door before I get back, get him first. He was all set to let 'em hang you."

"Hang me? What a pity! Did Mr. Collins lend you that rifle?"

Pete handed the Winchester to Slim, who sat on a short bench along the wall. "I might suggest," said Slim to Collins and there was no humor in his tone now, "that you sit on the floor, opposite me, where I can study your features."

"Now listen!" began Collins. Slim shook his head. "No. I've listened too much. Sit down!"

Mr. Collins sat down.

When The Tonto Kid came out onto the street the atmosphere of sullen expectancy had changed to one of action. Grouped here and there, mounted men seemed to be waiting for something. A crowd was standing in front of the town marshal's office. The voice of the crowd had changed. From quietly talking of lynching the murderer—they had no other name for Slim in their blood hunger to see someone suffer for the crime—men were now threatening to break down the jail door and handle the business themselves, city marshal or no city marshal. The local blacksmith appeared with a sledge hammer on his shoulder. The crowd yelled.

Slipping up the alley back of the jail, The Tonto Kid made his way to the livery barn. That almost everyone in town was out on the street was in his favor. The liveryman, a scared stable boy told him, was in the crowd somewhere. "Too bad," said Pete. "But you'll do. Just came from a talk with Mr. Collins. He wants his horse and the horse he took from the prisoner."

"They—they goin' to Lynch him?"

"Looks that way. But me and the city marshal are goin' to do all we can to stop 'em."

Pete helped the stable boy saddle up, and in less than ten minutes both horses
were tied in the alley back of the jail, and Pete was on his way to get his own mount. In less than ten minutes more he was back. He could hear the crowd clamoring in front of the jail. Fearful that someone would think for himself a minute, and come round to the back of the building, Pete kicked the rear door open and walked in. Ordering Collins to get up and come out, he untied the marshal's mount and told Collins to step up into the saddle. Surmising why, and what most probably would happen, the city marshal made a final, desperate appeal, but Pete and his partner were too busy to listen. Hobbling Collins' feet under the belly of the horse, the partners stripped off the bridle.

**TOWN MARSHAL COLLINS** began to show his true color—and it wasn't red. "Boys," he said, his voice shaking, "don't do this! Half of those dam' fools out in the street are crazy drunk. They—"

"'They won't lynch you, don't you worry," said Slim quietly. "It'll be quicker than that."

That was just what Mr. Collins feared: that before he would get a chance to identify himself, somebody would shoot him. The townsfolk were in an ugly mood. "Kid, those two sacks of ore up in the office are yours if—"

Pete swung the bridle and lashed the horse across its flanks. The startled animal tore down the side street and out onto the main road. "There he goes!" cried someone in the crowd, "Collins has done turned him loose!"

His manacled hands on the saddle-horn, Collins lay close to the horse and rode for his life. A slug whistled past his head. With a rush a score of riders took after the flying horseman, blood hungry to kill the man who had shot Bedrock. On toward the desert sped the town marshal's horse, the pursuers working quit and spur to overtake him.

"We're leavin' too," said Pete, turning to Slim. "But not so fast."

"Perfect! And thanks for the rifle. They took my nice little gun away from me. Ivory handle, too."

Riding quietly up the alley the partners stopped back of the marshal's office. Slim held Pete's horse while The Tonto Kid walked round and entered. When they rode on again each had tied back of the cantle a small ore sack. Slim asked no questions.

They followed the foothill trail Pete had discovered that morning. It was nearly daylight when they arrived at Bedrock's cabin; the last place, declared Pete, in which anyone would think of looking for them. Staking their horses in the meadow the partners took turns in sleeping.

After breakfast the following day, Slim asked his partner where he intended to settle down next.

"Right here," said Pete, "anyhow, till old Bedrock gets back. I got somethin' to say to him."

"Think he'll ever get back?"

"Sure! A fella in Tecolote told me the old man come to and was askin' to get up and go home the same night they tried to stretch you."

**PETE** was right. Three days after their arrival at the mine, Bedrock showed up, riding a borrowed horse. His head was bandaged and he was still a bit shaky, but the twinkle had come back to his eye. "Knowed you was good boys," he said, as Pete and Slim helped him down and took care of his mount. "Where's Misery?"


"Wound? Which wound?"

Slim proceeded to tell the old prospector how Misery had arrived at the cabin with a wrecked pack saddle and a bullet wound across its rump. Then the card man mentioned their search for Bedrock, and how he had been transported to the doctor's office in Tecolote. Dwelling lightly on his own arrest and imprisonment, Slim described Pete's campaign, the taking of Mr. Collins and that gentleman's final flight from Tecolote.

"It is not for me," said Slim, "to sit in judgment on my fellow man. However, I am obliged to confess that I strongly suspect Mr. Collins of conspiracy and attempt to commit murder. A lot of little things point that way. I am one of them. But then, you don't have to take my word for it."
For a long time the old man sat looking out of the cabin doorway. "It ain't for me to set in judgment on nobody, neither. But I kind of suspicioned it was Jim Collins, after a friend of mine in Tecolote told me how they run him up into the foothills, and come pretty nigh stringin' him up by mistake. He—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Slim. "It wouldn't have been a mistake."

"Well and good. You see, Jim was scared. It was dark. They had a rope around his neck before they knew who he was. He talked. Then, when he seen they was going to turn him loose, he took it all back. Said he must 'a been crazy."

Slim nodded. "Reckon I'll go look at Misery."

"Sit still," said Pete. "I'll fetch him down."

"So that young fella is the real Tonto Kid?" queried Bedrock as Pete departed.

"The same."

"What folks say about a man, and what he is, don't always jibe. Now I'd call him a right nice-lookin', quiet boy. A leetle dark, in spots. But nothing mean about him."

"Yes, he has his dark spots. If you knew what he's been up against all his life you wouldn't blame him." Slim handed Bedrock a clay-scratched slug of lead. "Pete dug this out of the bank of the arroyo just above the spot where we found you."

"A forty-five-seventy, eh? And you boys are packing pistols. Hmm!"

"Your ore, which Pete took from Mr. Collins' safe, is in there under your bed."

"My ore? What did you say?"

"From Mr. Collins' safe the night he interviewed that gentleman."

"You mean that boy found my ore in Jim Collins' safe?"

"And took it. Wanted to put it where it would be safer."

"Justice," said Bedrock, "has been hiding her head in the sand for a long time around these parts. But someday ... someday ..." his voice trailed off into unintelligible mutterings. Not until Pete appeared with Misery did the old man seem to realize where he was. Then he got up, examined the crusted wound across the burro's rump, patted Misery and told him to run along back to the meadow. But Misery would not leave the dooryard.

"'Course, you boys'll stay here, now," said Bedrock.

Slim and Pete glanced at one another. "A day or two longer," said Pete, "till you get to feelin' stout again."

"Figure somebody might trail you up here?"

"Somebody might."

"Then I'll have to set that straight." For the remainder of the afternoon Bedrock sat resting and staring at the forest.

The next day, and the next, the old man seemed to be wandering about in a dream. He ate heartily and did a little work. But he said scarcely anything. The third day he was pretty much himself. Pete and Slim decided to leave.

"I'm leavin', too," said Bedrock.

"How come?"

"Grub is getting low. And I got some other business in Tecolote."

That morning, Bedrock and his burro took the trail down the mountain, Slim and Pete accompanying him. At The Pipes they bade him farewell, Bedrock gave them each a tiny slug of gold, enough to see them in provisions for a week at least. He was almost himself again, but he still seemed a bit too silent to be natural.

Pete and his partner were far down the southern desert when the old prospector crossed the arroyo where he had first met them. Halting, he stood blinking in the sun. "Misery, folks in Tecolote are like to keep on suspicioning it was them boys and not Jim Collins. That ain't right. Now I take it you would do something about it if you was me."

The little burro lifted its head and brayed.

Bedrock nodded, and stepping to the burro took his old brown Winchester from beneath the lash rope and laid it across the hollow of his arm. Burro and prospector moved on toward Tecolote.

A few minutes past six that evening, Bedrock entered Tecolote. Tying Misery to a hitch-rail, he walked to the marshal's office. The town marshal was not there. Bedrock made inquiry, finally locating him in The Peak Saloon. Standing in the middle of the street the old man called
to Collins to come out. Passersby stopped and stood watching. The swing doors of The Peak spread apart. The few persons who saw the affair said Collins had a gun in his hand when he appeared.

"I don't want trouble with you," said Bedrock, blinking toward the figure in the doorway. "But I'm asking you to say, right here so folks can hear it, that those boys—I'm meanin' The Tonto Kid and his partner—didn't hold me up and rob me, no how."

"You better go on home," said Collins.

"No, I ain't going home, or I ain't going anywhere, till you say them boys are good boys."

Collins laughed. "Good boys, hell!"

"Be just a leettle careful, Mr. Collins. I can't see any too good, and I might make a mistake."

Collins' face grew purple. People near him and across the street were grinning. Quiet, inoffensive old Bedrock had the town marshal buffa loed. Something twitched in Collins' brain. His hand came up. His gun flashed and roared. The Winchester still in the hollow of his arm, Bedrock stood like a statue. The pedestrians opposite Collins stood for cover. Again Collins fired.

"I turned the other check," said Bedrock. Swinging the Winchester round he fired without raising it to his shoulder.

There was no official inquest. The town marshal had shot twice at Bedrock before the latter had even moved a finger. Some townsfolk said that the old man had gone queer. Others declared that he was considerably more sane than the late town marshal. The following day Bedrock and Misery left for the hills. Misery bore a heavy pack of provisions.

Recovering their fortunes in the Border town of Sandoval, Slim Akers and The Tonto Kid learned of the shooting as reported in the local paper. "I ain't a whole lot surprised," said Pete.

"Nor I." Slim was toying with a couple of faro cases. "It was that scar on Misery's rump that touched the old man off. Seems the late Mr. Collins wasn't as good a shot as he might have been."

THE SHOOTER'S CORNER
(Continued from page 6)

Joshua Shaw, of Philadelphia, Pa., developed the idea of placing a bit of detonating powder in a small copper cup, which when placed over a hollow tube leading into the barrel, and struck by a spring operated hammer, would set off the charge in the barrel. Thus the percussion cap was born. It was used in most parts of the world until the development of the self exploding cartridge about the time of the Civil War.

All types, including double and multi-barrel, revolvers and most others of the Flintlock period were adapted to the percussion cap.

The first of the world renowned Colt line of cap and ball revolvers appeared in 1836. The early Colts were made in Paterson, N. J. Later models were produced in Whitneyville and Hartford, Conn., as well as in England.

During the Percussion Lock period many very fine target and duelling pistols were made and sold. Some of these guns were quite accurate and enthusiasts throughout the United States still shoot them as a hobby.

Percussion Lock arms were produced until late in the nineteenth century when they were almost completely replaced by cartridge guns.

It is interesting to note that during World War II a large quantity of caps, black powder and balls were manufactured for use in old Civil War muskets by natives in North Africa.

I started out with the idea of telling you about some unusual cartridge handguns, but we have run out of space—so, let's continue with "One-hand Guns for Six Centuries" in the next issue of SHORT STORIES.
THE GEOGRAPHY-EATER  
By HOWARD BRUBAKER

HOW is this for criminal liable? "Lawrence McNulty O'Phelan, better known as 'Élemeñopeée'. Sparta's leading motorcycle fiend and geography-eater, is spending the week-end all over the new England States and Maritime Provinces."

This was in the weekly Progress, of which Jim Calkins, just because he's got four hundred subscribers and a gas engine with a bad cough, he thinks he's Horace Gamaliel Cox. Skinny little small guy, built something like a cotter pin.

Way last week this was, but a lot of history has gone over the bridge since then. Some people will get sick or give a party or anything just to get their name in the paper, but I was so ashamed I cut out the piece and showed it to everybody and asked them what they knew about that. The boys around the Eureka garage, where I loaf when I am not working there and vice versa, got a lot of cheap jokes out of their exhaust.

"I admit I like motorcycles," I admitted. "Now you take Agnes there—" this was a joke I thought up once—like she was Lizzie's little sister—"and hand her a schooner of gas and three fingers of oil and she'll go from here to Sunapee, New Hampshire."

"Nixy" Biddlecome opened his cut-out as follows:

"Who wants to go to Sunapee, New Hampshire? Maple Avenue is far enough away for me." Which Nixy thought his face was a welcome sight at the Dawson home, whose father, Neil Dawson, works in the creamery, and I was not one-two-three with Myrtle.

When did Agnes have a bath last?"

asked Collins, a witty car-washer, believing everything has got to be spick and span. They stopped work and looked at Agnes, for the boss was out with the service car and their time was all their own.

"Two years come Labor Day," I defended. "We fell in the Kennebec up near Gardiner, Maine. Her and me. She's painted light blue, if you want to know."

Collins rubbed the dirt off the nameplate, "The Skylark."

"Looks more like a mudhen," he witticized.

"Her insides is clean," I told the world. "Of course if you want plate glass and a dish of flowers and cigar-lighters and nose powder, why Agnes ain't there. Personally I like to get someplace and not sit around all day in a telephone booth blocking up the road and looking at the same scenery all the time, practically."

"What you got against motor cars, Larry?"

"Too many wheels, too many cylinders, too many gallons a mile. And when you need a new shoe every couple minutes you have to put a mortgage on the back forty."

Nixy handed a wink to the low car-washer.

"Say, Mac,"—for they call me Mac and Larry and Pheely and everything—"just to settle a bet, Myrtle and I were having a little argument. Did you get bowlegged and round-shouldered from riding a cycle, or did you get a cycle to fit your figger?"

"There is a good deal of poison gas around here," I answered back. "I guess I'll go out and get a breath of fresh air."

So I took Agnes and we strolled around

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Massachusetts and Rhode Island and Connecticut all afternoon. Didn't get home till nearly supper time.

In the evening I put on my other khaki suit and believed I would go out and get a breath of fresh air. For I am not a great home body.

"Don't go out of the state," Mother said like she used to say, "Don't go out of the yard," when I was a young one.

"When are you going to get a job again?"

pestered dad. Though my own father, ne believes in working regular.

"I got gas money to last over Sunday," I answered back. "But I suppose I'll have to go to work at the garage next week. Of course I hate to associate with all them low characters and four-wheeled cars."

Agnes and I trickled down Maple Avenue, though my own private name for it was Myrtle Avenue, and pretty soon I smelled a strong pipe and I knew Neil
Dawson was at home. Nevertheless I parked against the fence. Her father was resting his feet on the front porch because it is bad enough to have to wear shoes all day in the creamery.

"Well, Elemenopee," he puffed, "visiting Sparta for a few minutes? How do you like our city?"

"Some editors ought to mind their own business," I answered back (but meaning butter-makers).

"If they did, they could not get out any paper," denounced Myrtle, who had suddenly finished helping her mother with the dishes and was looking very fine.

"Oh, hello, Myrtle." I acted surprised to see her as if I had come to visit Neil Dawson’s feet. And after a while I asked, "Like to take a little buggy ride?"

"No, thank you!"

From the way she said it I knew what she meant all right. She meant, No, thank you.

"We like Myrtle, her ma and I both," butted in Neil Dawson, "and we don’t want her all shook to pieces." If he was not better at making butter than he was at making jokes, Myrtle wouldn’t be wearing any shoes either.

"I’d throttle her down," I said.

"Who, me?"

"No, Agnes."

"Yes, I know how you throttle her down," she said sneerfully. "If you’re only going fifty miles an hour you think you are driving a hearse."

"I suppose you would crave to have some jalopy sneak up behind and bite off our tail-light," I demolished.

All because Myrtle took a ride with me one Sunday—just over the Jacob’s Ladder road and up through the Berkshire country and maybe a little New York State and back by the Mohawk Trail and so forth: might as well say we didn’t do a mile over three hundred—but since then I had no luck getting Myrtle to ride on the back seat.

"Didn’t you like the scenery that other time?" I asked.

"All the scenery I seen was your back. I lost all my loose parts," she said. "Thank goodness my hair is my own."

Neil Dawson is not a bad fellow in some ways, so after a while he took his poison gas pipe and went in the house so I could quarrel with his daughter in peace.

MYRTLE sent me away early with my think-tank full up. I was all right in some ways but I didn’t stick around at all and she didn’t yearn to be married to a total stranger. If she had a husband, she said, she would expect to see him once in a while and not have half grown kids think she was a widow-lady. She seemed to think a husband’s place was in the home only when he was working, and that was another thing the matter with me, how I didn’t work all the time like a slave.

"I’d work all right if I had a reason," I answered tenderly. "Then on Sunday—oh boy!—we could go out and amble around the New England and Middle Atlantic States a little and get acquainted. I’d do anything to make you happy," I said. "I’d even put on one of those sidecars like a tin bathtub."

"A wife-killer? No, thank you."

"Mebbe you’d like some old stick-in-the-mud like Nixy Biddlecome which probably thinks Bangor is a disease. If Nixy was riding on a caterpillar tractor the speed would take his breath away."

"At least Nixy Biddlecome is willing to stay in the same town with me for a few minutes," she backfired, "and not rush off to Vermont every time he gets a good look at me."

"If you think Bangor is in Vermont," I came back, "you ought to marry me just to learn geography."

"Well known geography-eater," she quoted. "I bet that’s all we’d have to eat." It seemed that she would ratify me all right, but with a lot of reservations and amendments. Finally she ultimatized that I would have to choose between her and Agnes.

"You mean—sell Agnes!"

"No; you wouldn’t necessarily have to sell her." I cheered up a little because I saw we were going to have an armistice. "No; you could dump her in the lake."

"Say, I was gassed."

"Think it over." She practically shoved me off the porch. "Me or Agnes."
I WENT out to the old boat, which happened to be pointing north at the time. It didn't seem worth while to turn her around just to go home, so we went to New Hampshire. That is a good thing about living in Massachusetts, it doesn't take long to get to some other state if you want to think something over or anything. As we chugged along I remembered the name of that poem we heard about in high school when I used to be educated, "The Last Ride Together," by Robert Cullen Bryan or somebody.

"That's me and Agnes," I yelled, so I could hear myself. Because I knew that Myrtle generally always meant what she said.

It was a grand summer night with all the stars running without dimmers, which these birds that live in limousines don't know any more about stars than if they were a fish-worm. It seemed like Agnes was doing her sweetest that night, just to make it hard, firing regular on both and making beautiful music through the quiet New Hampshire hills like a machine-gun.

Up ahead, I thought, is Pickstone, and if I turn right there I can take the Babylon road and like as not I can see the sun rise in the Atlantic Ocean. Or I can go straight and find out if the White Mountains are getting along all right this week. Then of course I could beat it across Vermont tomorrow up through Barre and Montpelier and Burlington and find out all the latest news about Lake Champlain; maybe I might drop around and see an Adirondack or two.

There was the old army blanket I brought back from France all ready to unroll and gas money and ham and egg money in the wallet, and anyway my folks never expected me home until they saw me parking Agnes on the back porch.

So I was arguing with myself and loafing along at 40 or maybe 45, because it's foolish to hurry until you know where you are going, when suddenly I saw a tail-light and one of these traffic-obstructors loomed up ahead. In a moment I made out a big car and she's out of luck and a guy is standing talk-to a couple of feet. I give you my word as an honest motorcyclist, he was wearing a two-gallon hat. At midnight on a lonely New Hampshire road!

I turned off the juice and passed the time of night.

"Having trouble?" I asked.

"No trouble at all," the stylish fellow grumbled. "It's a pleasure to have a wheel come off."

I lugged my headlight around and looked. The feet were attached to somebody which this high-toned party addressed as Oswald, though it isn't for me to criticize anybody's name after that alphabet my folks wished onto me.

"I'm afraid it's no good, sir," said this emerging chauffeur. "The spindle's broken clean off. It won't hold a wheel."

"Can you get us some help?" the owner said to me. "I'll make it right with you. I'm the Governor of New Hampshire."

"Pleased to meet you, Governor," I said jeerfully. "Personally I'm the Emperor of Switzerland." They don't put anything over on me without a struggle even if I do live in a small town.

His nobs looked at Agnes and kind of laughed.

"Does that boat belong to your famous navy?" So now I know he was a kidder, because I had heard that old one. You know the Emperor of Switzerland hasn't any navy. "What's up ahead?"

"Pickstone's ahead but nobody's up," I came back, just like that.

Jack Caldwell had a garage there, I told him, but his heart wasn't in his work much at this time of night.

I examined the broken axle where Oswald had jacked it up; then I got bit by a crazy idea, and I eased my tugboat alongside and kind of measured. I shoved Agnes, in under the fender and the idea didn't seem quite so crazy at that. So I made Oswald man the jack and get me a seat cushion and tire chains and everything except the vase of paper flowers.

Well, anyway, when I got through, the so-called governor's house-boat was resting as comfortable as could be expected on my back seat. The rest of Agnes stuck out in front with room for me. When the jack was removed the broken axle didn't rest on anything except the fragrant night air.
Whether she'd ride that way and steer with one wheel I didn't know at all.

His nibs took off his superstructure and mopped his heated brow, for we had been working pretty hard—I and Oswald.

"Do you think it will be all right?" he nervoused.

"I wish I had ten dollars," nothing but the truth so far, "for every general I brought into port this way over there in Europe—not counting majors at all." I thought this sounded cheerful and patriotic, and besides it kind of fixed ten dollars in a person's mind. "So you get into your gilded cage and I'll tell Oswald what to do. It's only about two miles to Jack Caldwell."

"Is he a good man?" asked the chauffeur.

"No, he's a garage man," I replied.

"I won't be responsible, sir, if anything happens," said Oswald.

"All right. If this brave fellow offered his life to his country, we can trust him."

A little more of this bunk and I'd think he really was a governor.

Oswald salvaged the recent right wheel and started picking up the bearings that had spilled around.

"Quit your stalling," I honked. "Leave them for the deserving poor."

"I don't care about myself, but I'm a married man and—"

"Then, listen, if you don't want Mrs. Oswald to be a widow."

I fixed up a set of signals and speed laws all complete.

"Is that all?" he asked meanfully.

"If I've forgot anything, I'll mention it in your obituary. Let's go."

And, sure enough, we went away from there. The straight road was all right and pretty soon we took a right curve successfully and then a left turn without that rambling axle amputating my leg at all, and then we climbed a grade. I looked back and noticed that the crystal palace was still there. Now we began to go down-hill.

Personally I was nervous about down grades. I was not quite a married man yet but I didn't crave to have a couple tons of limousine slipping forward onto my back. She did slip a little, but good old Agnes managed to keep out from under and all I got was a gentle little poke like Lew Car-

son, the night clerk, wanted to tell me one he heard from a traveling man.

After a while we began to arrive at the village, and did so immediately for it doesn't take long to pass Pickstone. Now we carefully and thoughtfully turned into Caldwell's garage and tooted at it until Jack's vile but sleepy face appeared at the open window upstairs—which his face was also open, with astonishment. Pretty soon he turned on the lights and opened the door and the new-fangled five-wheeler rolled in and shut off practically all our engines.

"Look who's here, Jack," I said. "The Sultan of Sulu is in there and he has broke his chariot."

This Caldwell kind of rubbed his eyes, and I thought he said something about how he'd have to leave the home brew alone after this. Then he got a good look at the license plate and cried, "Number one!"

THE big nifty party got out and Jack collapsed like a punctured shoe. It turned out that the fellow who was masquerading as the governor was nothing more or less than the governor. It only goes to show that you can't disbelieve everything you hear. I got to thinking how fresh I'd been talking, and I thought I'd better get away to the Adirondacks and crawl in behind one.

"Jack her up, Jack, and Agnes and I will get out from under."

"Well, this is the first time I ever knew a motorcycle was good for anything," said the vulgarious garage man.

It seemed that nothing would do but a new axle, and there wasn't an axle in the house, only for flivers; but he would go off to Manchester or Detroit or the moon or some place first thing in the morning and dig one up, and no doubt he could fix Governor Bradley all serene by the close of the day (which is garage for a week from Thursday).

The governor acted kind of nervous and looked at his watch, which he is wearing in open-faced clothes, and says it's one o'clock and could he use the telephone.

"I'm sorry, sir," groveled Jack, "but our central goes home at midnight and they don't open up till six."
"I'm in a kind of a pickle, his excellency said. Seems he's been off to a dinner some place and on his way back he is looking over some papers in his car he didn't have time to read before he left Concord, and he finds a reasonable doubt which some guy is to be executed at 5 A. M. in the penitentiary at Colby, unless he can get a reprieve, and here it was one o'clock.

"He's in a worse pickle than you are," I comforted.

"The Pitkin case," he said and his fellow statesman, Jack Caldwell, nodded. "You know, the chauffeur who was convicted of murder over toward Portsmouth."

"Oh, let him die," I soothed. "If he's a chauffeur, he done it."

"Not necessarily," piped up Oswald. "If this man can furnish a car we'll go to Concord and you can get them on the 'phone."

"If you don't lose a wheel or a cylinder or something, Jack's cars generally always come apart." Thus I killed both those birds with one stone.

The upshot of it all was that the governor got invited to ride on my back seat and see a little life.

"I'll take you to some big town where central stays up all night and you can get the warden on the wire and save this poor fish's life, if you feel that way. Or, if you'll just hold tight, I'll take you clear to Colby and you can settle it all up."

"Colby is way over in the corner of the state."

"Well, it's not so much of a state—for size, I mean. Let's see, cross country to Weymouth, state road down to Bingham, around by the Sawtooth Valley; we could easy get there before the party."

"Larry seems to know just where the penitentiary is," said the malicious garage man.

Oswald likewise demolished my idea, but the governor seemed to be thinking something over.

"Well, I suppose it wouldn't do me any harm."

"Not a bit. I'll deliver you all safe at the prison door just as if the sheriff was taking you."

"I didn't mean harm that way." He gave a governatorial wink. "You know what happens this fall?"

"This fall? W'y the motorcycle races at Newark and the World's Series, of course, and—"

"No, no. I mean in New Hampshire."

He had me there. What did happen in New Hampshire in the fall?

"Well, the leaves turn red, for one thing."

"Never mind," said the governor. "Let's go."

While Jack was giving my Agnes a jolt of gas and oil, which he would put on the governor's bill (a couple of times), I sort of pointed to my passenger's scenery.

"I don't mind it if you don't, but they generally never ride on a motorcycle with a plug hat on—not very far, anyhow. And the soup and fish—"

"I always wear evening clothes in the evening," he said, "and it's still evening. But maybe you're right about the hat—I'll trade hats with Oswald."

Poor Oswald had to give up his cap, but he stowed the silk lid away in the caboose and we bade him an affectionate farewell. For my part this was a real pleasure.

"Stay until the car's fixed and bring it to Concord," said his majesty.

"He'll be an old, old man," I reparted, giving Jack a playful dig with a monkey wrench.

Now we started off, and we would have been a great treat to Pickstone if any of the Pickstoners had been up yet, but it was only 1:30. I could tell right away that his royal highness had never enjoyed any transportation before, by the way he tied himself all up in a knot and took a double handful of my back. After a while I heard him gasping out something about stopping in the first big town to telephone and maybe we wouldn't have to go clear through, but I pretended not to understand and answered back over my shoulder.

"Yes, isn't it? Just the night for a little spin." I never had a governor at my mercy before, and I got to figuring out how we could miss all the big towns. He couldn't get off as long as we kept going.

I figured that it was only about a hun-
dread or so, but it wasn't all state road by a
good deal, and when New Hampshire roads
are not safe roads you got to slow down,
or it's no place for a governor who was
brought up refined. There were lots of hills,
too, though Agnes is a mountain goat, if I
do say it myself, leaping from crag to crag
and *vice versa*.

After about an hour my passenger poked
me gently in the back like a limousine and
murmured at the top of his voice.

"Can't we stop about five minutes and
have a smoke?"

When he had ironed the kinks out of
his legs and put his arms in their sockets
he said: "We must be pretty near there at
the rate we been going?"

"Oh, no," I discouraged. "I had to crawl
along on account of the roads. This is a
powerfully good cigar. Did they give them
away at that dinner?"

"I never saw so much backwoods in my
life. We haven't seen a light since we left
the garage."

"Truly rural," I snickered, thinking of
the perfectly good towns we had missed.
"But the stars are beautiful. There is some-
thing about New Hampshire stars—"

"I always thought New Hampshire was
a small state but a good one," he said.
"Now I see it all different. It's a large
state but a poor one."

"It gets better farther on." I was at the
end of my smoke. "Hadn't we better be
moving?"

"Oh, Lord. Let him die," Govey groaned.
"What if he didn't do this particular mur-
der."

However he soon got over this pessimism
and hoisted himself on.

By and by we flowed out onto a state
road and I could tell that the governor was
feeling better about everything by the way
he loosened his hold on my spinal column.

"This won't do," I said to Agnes. "The
guy will be getting comfortable." So I fed
her some more of that gas that the State
of New Hampshire was buying and we
showed the governor what we could do. I
began to take chances on towns, too, and
we zipped through a couple of one-cylinder
places, though I doubt whether his nips
noticed anything but streaks. He didn't say
any more about stopping, but whether he
was satisfied I couldn't tell. He was doing
about eight groans to the mile.

We had hard surface mostly from then
on and I had nothing to do but keep her
sticking to the road and keep the little ding-
bod sticking to the sixty mark on the dial.
So I got to thinking sentimental about
Agnes. It was wonderful how she was act-
ing that night! She hadn't missed a beat
since we left Pa Dawson's front gate. You
might naturally think with a governor on
board and a condemned chauffeur off in
Colby waiting for *morning*, she would
choose this time to act up—at least blow
out a shoe. But not Agnes. I made up my
mind that if she got me through this all
right I would stick to her for life—Myrtle
or no Myrtle. A woman is only a woman,
but a good motorcycle is something you
can't pick off of any bush like a raspberry.

When we shot through Danville I could
see by the town hall clock that we were go-
ing to win by a mile. Why is it, I thought,
they go to work and turn out a thousand
motors just alike—same stuff, same work-
manship—and 999 are just plain cheese,
and the other is Agnes? And she is ticking
along like a Swiss watch when all the rest
are in the old ladies' home, I give it up.

Just as I was murmuring these tender
thoughts in Agnes's ear she gave a cough
and a couple of spits and her engine just
calmly laid down and died. The motor
stopped but Agnes didn't she kept going
like it was a habit that got fastened on her
when she was young. I put her in neutral
and I bet we went a quarter of a mile just
on our reputation.

"Anything wrong?" asked the com-
mander-in-chief.

"It's time for another smoke," I replied.
It was kind of true, at that. Though I
sometimes work in a garage I always try
to tell the truth in private life. "Just light
up and take it easy and I'll tinker a minute."
I thought I noticed a little hesitation.

"Oh, Agnes, Agnes! Just when I was
tooting your horn so hard. Myrtle wouldn't
go back on a guy like that." Sometimes it
helps to insult them a little. I know a fellow
who can never start his flivver in a cold
garage until he has cussed out the Ford
Motor Company for about five minutes. Kind of warms up the air; some people pour hot water on the intake manifold.

What ailed Agnes? Gas was plentiful, oil at a good level, wires all serene. I took my flashlight and after a while I found it—and it was good and deep.

"Anything serious?" the first-class passenger pestered.

"Not at all. It's a little hard to get at but of course I know my way around in there without a blue book. If you'll kindly hold the light we'll have her all right in no time."

I spread out the blanket and began to remove Agnes's internal organs. In half an hour I had pretty near a blanket full.

"Lord, man! Look at that." The governor pointed toward the east which had a suspicious gray look as if something was about to happen to it.

"Yes," I said calmly, "it generally rises about this time of night. Well, it looks as though we'd have a nice day."

"What kind of day is Pitkin going to have?" he asked. "Do you realize that at five o'clock—" and so forth and so on.

I was worried. Now I had Agnes's ailment I didn't know what to do with it. If I couldn't think of something quick, Pitkin wouldn't have any kind of a day at all.

The governor fumbled in his pocket and drew out a package. In a minute I realized what he was putting into his statesmanlike face.

"Chewing-gun!" I shouted. "For God's sake, give me a piece."

"Just think of a governor chewing gum! In a minute I had mine in a wad. "Now, Agnes, try this."

It worked like a charm. I poked it in with a screw-driver and fixed a washer over it—as neat a little emergency job as you would ever want to see. Before long I had Agnes's principal parts put back. I gave her the cue and sure enough she came back with her old sweet song. I'll say that was beautiful music! I liked it a lot better than the birds which were beginning to sing in the trees above us. It was quite light when we climbed on.

"Now get a good grip on my floating ribs," I commanded. "We are about to drill a hole in the atmosphere."

I hear a guy made 100 an hour at Sheepshead Bay, but I bet he never had anything on us. At 4:37 with the sun coming up, we stopped in front of a gloomy stone building in Colby and a badly scrambled governor fell off and staggered up the steps.

People that are not used to riding on motorcycles get that way sometimes. I'd noticed that before. Personally, I calmly shut off the engine, fixed up the support and made Agnes all comfortable and then I felt something funny happening to my legs. I crumpled up and sort of coasted down through the New Hampshire dawn until I reached something solid and permanent. There I sat on the curb like a bag of oats and I wouldn't have moved a little finger if they had tried to make me the sure-enough Emperor of Switzerland.

In a week or ten days, seemed like, the governor came back and woke me up.

There were three or four young fellows with him all armed with newspapers.

"Tell the boys your name."

"Phelan."

"Is that all there is to it?" one bird said.

"Lawrence McNulty O'Phelan."

"L. M. N. O. P.—can you beat it?"

They all scribbled on their newspapers and asked me a lot of fool questions and I said it was nothing at all, and the governor was a dead sport and pretty soon I saw that I was being interfered for the papers like Jim Calkins of the Progress goes to the depot and asks people where they are going and what business they have doing so.

"You have saved a man's life, my brave fellow. Pitkin says he can prove now beyond doubt that he is innocent and of course he will have every chance. Come and see me in Concord this afternoon. Personally I'm going on the train."

"The train's all right if your time is your own," I responded. "But you're welcome to ride with me."

"No, thanks, Larry. I've got enough motorcycle in my system to last me a long, long time."

So saying he slipped me a bill.

I thanked him good-morning and chugged down the street in search of ham
and eggs. Henceforth I went to a garage and we changed Agnes’s chewing gum for something more substantial.

Later on I sauntered over to the capital at an easy 40, and I may have napped a little on the straightaways, though I never sleep sound on a motorcycle for fear of missing something, or hitting something. At Mike’s eating factory in Concord I washed up quite a little and went to the State House. I couldn’t wash my suit, could I? Yet the big guy in uniform took a look and said, “They generally deliver coal in the basement.”

“I’m a party by the name of Phelan,” I rejoined, “and the governor wants to see me.”

At that he turned fair and warmer, and why didn’t I say so an hour ago and he showed me to the big cheese’s office. The secretary party also acted like I was his rich uncle very poorly in health. Would I park in a leather chair until the governor was through wasting his time with the attorney general or should he go in and throw the guy out?

“I suppose you’ve seen how they played it up.” He wished three or four afternoon papers on me and there it was all in big headlines. “Bradley Risks Life to Save Condemned Man.” “Governor in Wild Night Ride to Stay Execution.” “Chewing Gum as Life-Saver.” And all stuff like that. They got their tail-light before their radiator and began with the happy ending and worked back.

“I guess that’s poor,” said the secretary, “with the convention only two weeks off and the election in November.”


I saw by the papers that the chief executive was a man of iron will, that Agnes was practically a man-killer wanted by the police in thirteen states, and that a queer party with an alphabetical name went along, collapsed at the prison door and then made twenty dollars worth of half-witted remarks. Just when my engine was beginning to smoke they opened the door and showed me into an office big enough to house a flock of Rolls Royces.

“Well, Larry,” said the governor, “you don’t look any the worse for it. How you feeling?”

“I was feeling all right until I read the papers.”

“Don’t mind them,” he lubricated. “It’s all in the political game. Here’s where I square myself with you. How about some kind of a job?” His idea of the way to soothe my ruffled feelings was to make me go to work. “I understand that you fought for your country in the War.” He looked at his secretary to make sure that he was getting this.

“Nary a fight. All I had to do was to ride a motorcycle about 26 hours a day.”

“I bet you hated that. How would you like it if I shifted Oswald somewhere and gave you the big car?”

“Chauffeur?” I detested. “No—much obliged, Governor. I don’t like these, you know, situations. Where you have to sit all the time. I like to move around a little once in a while. I’m funny that way.”

“Yes, I guess I booted that one,” said the governor, and then he went to work and invented a job. “What I really need is a kind of special messenger to carry papers—and bring me information. For instance about roads. Suppose I wanted to know the conditions of the highways between Plymouth and Burlingame—”

“Rotten!” I answered. “I can tell you now. This messenger business,” I inquired. “Now how would a person get around from place to place, and vice versa?”

“Motorcycle, of course. I suppose we could dig up sixty a week somewhere, eh, George? What kind of a machine do you want?”

“I'll stick to Agnes, if you don’t mind.”

“No, I don’t mind, as long as I don’t have to go along. Of course the state will keep her in gas and tires, but you’ll have to furnish the chewing gum. Sometimes you would have to go to other states—extradition papers and so on. You wouldn’t mind that?”

“Nosh,” I said, for I could not talk plain any more.

“There’s one thing, though. We’ll need fast work sometimes but I can’t have you
violating the speed laws. The sanctity of
the law—"
"No, that would never do," I gloomed.
I knew there was a catch in it somewhere.
"I'm afraid you'd have to wear a police
badge so the law wouldn't bother you."
A great man if there ever was one!
"When can you begin?"
"Me? I began last night."
"Very good. Rest up this afternoon and
report to George in the morning."

I GLOATED out of the office and back to
my Agnes, who was leaning against a
statue of a stiff-legged party in a frock
coat.
I took a good rest that afternoon like
the Governor ordered. All I did was to find
a rooming place over Mike's restaurant
and run down to my old home state to get a
couple collars and tell my folks I had en-
tered public life and they wouldn't have
me around the house all the time now. Also
I warned Jim Calkins not to put anything
in the Progress about my affair and I gave
him the details.

After supper I went down to tell Myrtle
that she was practically a member of my
family and get her ideas about the plans.
"Just think of it!" I exploded. "Sixty
bones a week and gas and nothing to do
but associate with mere governors and steer
old Agnes around New England and hand
the laugh to the jay cops. And Sunday off,
and we can take trips."
"We?" asked Myrtle, cold-watery. "Oh
—I see—you and Agnes."
"Now lookee here, Myrt. You told me
to get a job and I went right up to New
Hampshire and got one. By midnight, you
might say."
"I thought I said you could choose be-
tween me and Agnes. Did I or didn't I?"
"You might have mentioned something
of the sort, but—"
"Well, you chose Agnes, and I wish you
joy. Swell job for a husband to have, I
must say! You'd be at home about as much
as a deep sea fisherman. Me for Nixy
Biddlecome from now on. He claims he
can stand associating with me every day in
the week."

After a while I found out what Myrtle
meant, viz., she meant what she said.

And so I hit the trail for my favorite
state of New Hampshire, Agnes humming
a sweet little song of happiness to the echo-
ing hills. It was like one of those "quiet
nights" on the western front.

"It's a funny thing how everybody gets
what they want most out of this affair," I
drowsed. "This Pitkin gets a reprieve; the
governor gets a ten strike with the papers;
dad gets a pay-envelope in the family, and
poor Myrtle gets Nixy Biddlecome. Me, I
get Agnes."

"The Copper Chest"

by

WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

A pirate, they called him, a
bloody buccaneer . . . but
they could be wrong.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE
Dan Raynor's New Stetson Is Ventilated by Two Bullet Holes; Dick Redshirt Knows the Secret of the Hidden Lode; and Evil Men by Night Ride the Rainbow Mountain Trail

THE LIGHT ON RAINBOW MOUNTAIN

By JACkSON GREGORY

CHAPTER I

MISSED!

GRATEFUL to be done with the harsh, hot desert sweep, Dan Raynor rode into the cool shadowy fragrant ravine just as it grew dusk over the Tecolote Mountains. He fully expected within the hour to find a gem of a camp site, a place for his fire by a clear stream, forage for his horse. Tomorrow would be another day. But a man shouldn't be too sure even of another day. The brooding stillness was shattered by the crack of a rifle starting up wild echoes between the rocky sides of the ravine, a bullet split the air and two neat holes were drilled through the peak of Dan Raynor's brand-new dove-colored Stetson,

As though shot through the head he slid out of the saddle and flopped over into a
high growth of Jimson weed at the trail's edge. His only thought was that the fellow who had come that close to getting him the first shot would nail him dead center the next. His horse leaped forward as though to shoot out from under the empty saddle. He dashed some fifty yards farther up into the ravine, then stepped on a trailing rein, stopped and snorted, standing there wondering what it was all about.

So, too, did Dan Raynor wonder. He lay on his side, stone-still, peering through the weeds in the general direction from which he thought the shot had come. There was a notch in the forest growth up there, and he fancied it indicated a road under the pines; it was hard to see at all definitely through the intervening tangle, but in the shadows at which he stared with such steady frowning intentness he caught the merest suggestion of a cabin wall.

He lay still, dreading another shot and the impact of lead which would end the riddle for him before he ever came to guess what it was all about, yet he was sure that his best bet right now was to give his best imitation of a man beyond interest in riddles of any sort. For one thing, his would-be murderer had the advantage of being armed with a high-powered rifle while Dan's only weapon was the old-fashioned Colt slung under his left armpit. His own was still in its scabbard, slung to the saddle. Also, dark would come swiftly, and darkness evened up the differences between rifle and smaller gun.

"That was a long shot and a good one," he muttered, "especially considering the fact that I was moving along at a good clip in a light-and-shade that makes tricky shooting. Hope he's satisfied."

There was every likelihood that his assailant, even though of no mind to waste powder and lead, would be sufficiently curious to come along presently and look over his kill. So Raynor, after five minutes without stirring, moved gradually, and then only to the extent of sliding his gun out of its holster and into the grip of a hand hidden in the weeds. "Next time it'll be my innings to shoot first." That struck him as eminently fair. And he added to the Jimsons, "And I won't keep him waiting."

But no one came down from the ridge to see him, even when it grew dark down here in the bed of the ravine. Light still lingered on the ridges but was fast waning. Relaxing none of his caution, instead of rising where he was, he began inching away from the trail while lying almost flat. Some few moments only were required to bring him to the edge of a patch of brush. He wriggled into this and stood up only when he had gone a score of yards into an aspen grove down in a hollow. On the way he had retrieved his hat, but he was content to carry it in his hand. His head of dark close-cut hair offered but a poor target, while that dove-gray Stetson would constitute a palely glimmering one in the young starlight.

Before he quitted the shelter of the aspens
he thought things over coolly. The first quickening of the bloodstream, the recoil from near death and the blazing anger which had followed, were done with now. He merely meditated that he still had a choice of two trails. He could get his horse when it grew a little darker, turn tail and ride for a healthier country, or he could go straight ahead, find out what this was all about and, no doubt, do some lively poking into further danger. Thus far no harm was done save the air-holing of a new hat that he was inclined to be proud of. There was nothing to lose by turning back; as far as he could judge there was nothing to gain by going ahead.

"So, being dark enough now," he decided, "we'll go ahead."

THOUGH the cabin under the pines was not over two hundred yards from where he stood, he found it a slow, hard business to get to it. There was no trail that he could discover leading up the steep slope, and he decided that if there were a road, it must run along the ridge and down into another canyon. When he did finally pick his way through the dark into the small clearing at the edge of which the cabin crouched, a sturdy squat thing of small logs, he saw a faint glint of light. Within there was a single candle burning, or a dim lamp, and its rays wanly illuminated a square window flimsily curtained.

He approached warily. There was no sound of voices, no sound of any sort; were it not for the light he must have supposed the place deserted. It had the look of an abandoned place. He crept closer. It was only when he was close under the window that any sound reached him. A woman or a child, he couldn't tell which, was weeping. Never in his life had he heard such anguish made audible.

He stiffened with a sudden rigidity of muscles that was next door to a shudder. He waited for some other, some explanatory sound, perhaps a torrent of words from the one who wept, or a man's voice—he felt somehow sure that a man must be responsible for this heart-rending paroxysm of emotion. Presently he was greeted by a sudden silence, a silence so heavy, so absolute that it was like the hush of death itself. The silence persisted while he might have counted a hundred, and all the while he did not stir. Then he moved just enough to try to peer in at the window. But flimsy as was the curtain, the light within was so dim that he could make out nothing but the lamp itself on a table. Its chimney was so smoke-blackened that only a pallid sort of glow penetrated it; that and a flickering circle of light on a wide, knotty board in the low ceiling.

He stepped then to the door, rapped sharply and stepped aside as he knocked, not so soon oblivious of a rifle shot which must have come from this same door or from very near by. But there came no shot now, nor was there any response to his rapping. But his alert ears did catch a faint and unmistakable sound, a metallic click as a rifle was cocked.

"Hello, inside there!" he called.

He thought, though he was not in the least certain, that he heard a gasp. He waited a moment, then called again, "Hello, I say. What's going on in there?" And as an afterthought he added, "Any trouble here? Want any help, or don't you?"

The woman's voice answered him then, and it rang weirdly in his ears, as though it broke with hysteria or were the utterance of a mad woman. He started at the thought. Madness might explain much, perhaps everything.

Her voice, coming to him gaspingly, said: "Who are you?"

SHE seemed tremendously in earnest; it was as though everything on earth depended upon who he was. His answer told her little:

"A stranger. Happened to be passing by and saw your light."

"If you are—a stranger," was her somewhat perplexing rejoinder after a moment, "you can come in. The door is unlatched."

"You've a rifle in your hands," said Raynor.

"Yes."

"I have the peculiar feeling that when I open the door you'll take a shot at me."

She did not answer that, so he added briskly, "Suppose you open the door for me,
THE LIGHT ON RAINBOW MOUNTAIN

and come outside?” Though he waited more patiently this time for a reply, none came. He fell to frowning, less in irritation than in downright mystification. Unless the woman were mad, he could hit on no explanation. If she were mad, then what? It seemed inhuman to go off and leave her, for evidently she was alone and this was a lonely country. Yet on the other hand, had it been a question of laying a bet, he would have bet the boots he stood in that her finger was already on the trigger, the rifle muzzle covering the door.

“I’m not going to wait all night,” he told her tartly. Then he heard her weeping again and the sound hurt him. Hers were the hard, dry sobs which he knew must be shaking her whole body.

“Look here,” he said more gently than he had yet spoken, “you’re in some sort of trouble and I want to help you if I can. Pitch your rifle out through the window—you don’t need it—and I’ll come in.”

She tried to laugh her scorn at his suggestion, but it wasn’t much of a laugh.

“Lord love us, all her nerves are shot to glory,” muttered Dan Raynor. “Poor devil.”

She seemed to be getting some sort of a grip on herself. She spoke after a while, saying quite simply:

“You can come in safely if you are telling me the truth, if you are a stranger. And your voice does sound strange to me. But if you’re someone I know—and hate—I’ll shoot to kill the minute I see you.”

There was such finality in her utterance that he knew any further argument to be useless. He had his choice to open the door and take his chance, or to turn his back on her, go down to his horse where he had stopped on his way up to tether it, and to put this enigmatic country far behind him with all haste. As he had decided once before, so did he decide now.

“His is no place for me,” he grunted to himself, and flung open the cabin door.

Never more alertly on guard in every taut nerve, ready to leap back and to the side or to fire at whatever he might find confronting him, he did neither. He saw a figure crouching in the middle of the room where the dim lamplight was sufficient to pick out details. He saw the rifle aimed at his chest—and he saw the thing sprawled on the floor. Also, in that first swift glimpse he saw the heavy log chain and got just enough of the answer to start up other monstrous questions. Even though the stark horror of what he saw had not fully justified his decision, another fact would have convinced him.

As he stepped into the light, the rifle clattered to the plank flooring. The one who had held it, a slender young girl, started erect, lifted her arms, and then pitched forward in a dead faint.

CHAPTER II

ESCAPE!

HE CAME in, closed the door after him and stood staring.

“God help her!” he gasped. “If she was mad all along, here’s ample evidence of the fact. If she had just gone mad now, it’s what any sane person would have done. You’d be crazy not to go mad!”

One end of the long chain was about her waist, padlocked there. The other end was about the middle of a man. The man was huge, tall, big-boned, not unhandsome in a devilish sort of way; a man perhaps between thirty and forty years of age. But years didn’t count with him any longer. He was dead with a bullet through his brain.

“Well!” said Dan Raynor. At the moment thoughts didn’t click into words, there were too many impressions. The man was dead and it was a case of murder; or anyhow it would take a lot of tall believing to believe any other explanation. And it happened that, pinned safely inside Raynor’s shirt, snuggly out of sight and not intended to be displayed for at least a full two weeks, was the badge of his office, that of deputy sheriff. Hence one would suppose that this affair fell properly within his province. Yet it happened that he had crossed the county line ten miles back yonder in the desert, that he was in a county where he was without jurisdiction, and on top of that that he was on vacation.

“Murder, just the same,” he said, and looked at the girl.

Lying in a dead faint like that, as white as a sheet save for a long smudge on her
cheek, it was hard to judge her. Even her age was a question; he only knew that she looked young. Her hair was shoulder length, bronze in hue, and tumbled about her face as she lay crumpled on her side. Her lashes looked even darker than they were, drowned in their own inky shadows on her cheeks.

She was dressed in neat riding breeches and high-heeled black boots, with a little dark blouse that had almost no sleeves at all and was moderately low cut at the neck; he could see a wavering shadow marking the slow throb in her throat. She'd be pretty, he thought, if she didn't look so much like a dead girl. He wished her eyes were open.

No, he didn't! He could fancy the look in them when consciousness came surging back, the utter horror which, mad girl or sane, must fill them the instant after the first cloudiness passed from them.

He began hastily thinking of a way to get rid of that cursed chain, a way to do it quickly, to have it done and the man's body removed before she grew conscious again. His own body twitched. He said "Grrr!" in revulsion as he began to perceive all that she must have gone through here. Obviously the man had been dead for hours, twelve or even twenty-four of them, and what grim hours! Like a sojourn in hell they must have been. No matter who had shot the big, devilishly good-looking chap, this business of being manacled to his body, of not being able to break away from it, of being forced to keep looking at it all the time, of sensing it right there all the time—

HE SNAPPED his thoughts back toward a key for one or both the padlocks. Not expecting to find one, still he started a hasty search. He carried the lamp with him. As he did so he got to thinking of the girl again, how she must have hated to light it, how she must first for a little while have crouched in the dark, and how in the end the darkness must have been more hideous, with an imagination going mad, than the sight of the thing itself.

He didn't find the key, but he did find the file. It was one of the big inch-wide flat affairs that go along with men who live far from cities. It lay on the floor, one end of it pointing out like a finger from under the girl's boot. He set the lamp down on the floor and began to seek the link in the chain on which she must have been working. He found it where he looked first, where she'd naturally start, in the section of chain around her own slim waist. He said, "Poor little devil!" and set to work.

Thick and hard as the links were, she had filed one nearly through. And he knew that that must have meant hours and hours, God alone knew how many.

Before he cut through the weakened link and pried it open with a chisel he found in the tool box that protruded from under a bench by the window, he had formed his own idea of what had happened here. The man could easily have been a lady-killer, one of the type that women run after for their big handsome bodies and their arrogant faces. And he could have been, true to his type, one with a considerable aptitude for cruelty, mostly mental. Perhaps he and the girl were married? Perhaps she had just run off with him here? At any rate, a quarrel? A revulsion on her part, some truer knowledge of him, earned through the old bitter school? She would have left him? And he chained her to him, and jeered at her—and forgot the rifle in the corner? And she killed him, she on her part forgetting something? Forgetting that, though dead, he would still be bound to her?

Dan Raynor started to take her into his arms to move her from the floor over to the bunk in the corner, then thought it better not to stimulate any return of consciousness until he had removed the man's body. He went to a rear door, saw a small room there and a room beyond, investigated with the lamp and finally half carried and half dragged the stark form to the last little room, putting it down on a bunk and covering it with a blanket. Then he returned to the front room.

"It needn't necessarily be murder after all," he was thinking. "Sheer self-defense maybe? She couldn't have been the one who chained them together. He did that. Then she grabbed up the rifle and let him have it. Why not?"

She was on her feet as he came in, and the rifle was again in her hands. For an instant he thought that there could be no
earthly doubt of her madness, and that she
was going to kill him as already she had
killed one man.

Her eyes were large and now looked
enormous, almost round with dilation. Her
hands were shaking terribly. But she didn't
shoot. Instead she said huskily:
"You are the stranger. You didn't come
to harm me. You cut me free from—from
Dal Jethrow. You—you are the man I
shot at! I thought I had killed you."

He managed a crooked sort of smile. His
hat happened to be on his forehead; he
pulled it off, twirled it on a forefinger, and
said grinning at her:
"You spoiled a darned good hat, lady.
But that's all. Can I come on in, or will you
shoot?"

She flung the rifle from her, flung it so
violently that it clattered against the wall
before it lay once again on the floor.

Then she went to pieces as thorough-
goingly as any overwrought girl can go. Dan
Raynor was only twenty-seven and unmar-
rried, he had never had a sister. Although he
was at the outset utterly at a loss. The girl
wept and she laughed; at least he supposed
it was laughter. She was as near the ultimate
breaking point as a mortal can go and not
lose grip for all time on either health or
sanity.

He understood, though but vaguely at the
time, that she hadn't eaten and hadn't slept
and hadn't had a moment of anything but
horror for many an interminable hour. He
did the only thing he could think of. He
stepped forward and gathered her tight,
very tight, into his long arms, and held her
rather as though he meant to keep her where
she was. He shoved her face down against
his shoulder and said roughly, "Go ahead,
cry. You've got it coming, kid. Cry your
darned little head off."

She clung to him desperately. She said
incoherently, "I tried to kill you—I
thought you were Rance Cardyce coming
back. I thought you were dead—I was glad
—Oh, God, have mercy on me! Have
mercy!"

"Look here," said Raynor when he got a
chance to slip a word in edgewise, and that
was only after she had said a lot of other
things which made no sense in his ears,
you're up against it. You've been through
hell. You don't know what end you're
standing on. Now leave it to me. You are
going to lie down; you're going to bed and
to rest and sleep and—"

"For God's sake," she screamed. "Get me
away from here! Rest? Sleep?" She laughed
and sobbed the words out. "Get me away.
Quick. I can't stand any more of it!"

"Of course you can't," muttered Raynor.
And under his breath he demanded of no
one in particular:
"Who the hell could?"

"I'm free!" said the girl. "There's no
chain on me now, no chain tying me to—
I'm free! Why am I here? I am going—I've
got to get out into the open—under the
stars—if there are any stars!"

"There are stars all right," he told her
soothingly. "What's more, they're darned
pretty tonight. Come ahead; let's go."

She clung to his hand like a little child.
"Yes! Let's go."

"There's nothing here you want?"
She shuddered.

"Hurry, hurry! No, nothing here. Let's
go."

"I'll see that the doors and windows are
all shut," said Raynor.

He made all haste. She was outside when
he came out, standing erect and as stiff as a
statue, her head back, her hands lifted and
clapsed before her, her face upturned to the
clear sky with its earliest stars.

"Before we start anywhere," he said as he
closed the door after him, "do you want to
tell me anything? About—about him, you
know?" For he could not altogether escape
the fact that he was a deputy sheriff in one
county or another, and what after all did
county lines matter?

She answered him swiftly:
"He's Dal Jethrow. He's a brute, a fiend,
and devil. And I'm glad he's dead! Glad, hear
me?" she reached out and caught his hand,
hers own hand hugging it. "Take me away.
Hurry!"

"Right you are," said Raynor. He began
explaining: "I don't quite know where I'm
taking you. I've a horse down in the canyon,
down where you shot at me, you know.
We'll go down there, shall we? We'll pick
up my horse; we can then make better time whichever way you want to go."

"Yes, yes," she agreed impatiently. "Only let's hurry."

He wanted to ask: "Why did you kill him?" He wanted to urge: "We've got to arrange for somebody to take care of the body, you know." But his own inclinations were simply swept out to sea by the strong tide of her mightier emotions. He had to yield to her or to go off and leave her alone, or club her over the head and drag her back across the desert some forty miles to the nearest town. He did what any man, either wiser or less wise, would have done. He did what her urgency commanded.

They groped their way through the dark, they slid down steep declivities, they wormed through thickets and finally came down into the bed of the ravine where his horse was. He had almost to lift her bodily, no great weight in his arms, into the saddle. He carried a small roll behind the cantle, bedding and odds and ends; he fairly lifted her over that hazard.

"Which way?" asked Raynor. "This is a new country to me. Back to Tres Hermanos? It's a good forty miles across the sand."

"No. Oh, no! Not that way. That's where he is. Straight on ahead, into the mountains. I'll show you."

"That's where who is?" he asked.

"Cardyce. Rance Cardyce. He is the one—Will you hurry?"

"I certainly will!" answered Dan Raynor, as he caught the already familiar break in her voice. "We're on our way. All you've got to do is tell me where."

She sat very straight in the saddle. Her eyes were lifted to the sky, her hands clasped very tight on the saddle-horn. Dan Raynor could not but see how shapely she was, a sweet lithe young thing of lovely curves. He said to himself, "I wonder who the devil she is. And what she is."

"Don't be so stiff; don't sit so straight," he commanded her. "Rest."

"If I didn't keep my eyes on the stars," she said faintly, "I'd crumple up and die."

"Crumple," said Dan. "You won't die. Most likely you'll go to sleep. You haven't had any sleep for so long."

"Who are you?" she asked. This was the first time she had thought that far.

"I'm Dan Raynor, from Tres Hermanos," he told her. And asked as abruptly as she had, "You, who are you?"

"Me? My name is Wrenn."

"That's a bird of a name," said Dan.

"I'm Nancy Wrenn. And now can we hurry? Please!"

"It ought to be Jenny, you know," said Dan, and caught the bridle reins. "You just bet we'll hurry, Nancy Wrenn. But you've got to steer our course. Remember that I told you I was a stranger in these parts."

"I'm glad I didn't kill you," said Nancy. "So am I!" said Dan, and laughed. She started laughing with him, then suddenly lost her grip on the stars, on herself, on everything in the world save his saddle-horn to which she clung with both hands. She bowed her head and he heard again that sound which penetrated him like a physical pain, the sound of her dry, body-racking sobs. And he knew then that he had to get her somewhere, anywhere, to a place of rest and sleep or have a raving wild woman on his hands.

"Snap out of it, Nancy," he commanded sharply. "None of that. You're the pilot, remember. Where do we go from here? And get this if you can: I'm tuckered out, if you're not; I want to drop anchor pretty quick. Where's the spot?"

She straightened up and pointed ahead.

"Right along this canyon trail. It's not very far to a place I know; a place no one will look for us tonight. Do you see that clearing through the pines, right under that brightest star? That way."

"Steering by a star is good luck," he sang out cheerily. "Here we go."

As she had promised, it wasn't very far. But before they covered the few miles, perhaps half a dozen, Dan Raynor trudging along at her horse's head thought more than once of the answerless conundrum: "How far is far?" And he could see by the way the girl swayed in the saddle, clutching spasmodically now and then at the horn to save herself from falling, that the few miles grew infinitely long to her. "It'll do her good," he kept telling himself. "Get her so absolutely done in physically that she's got
to go to sleep. Maybe that'll save her from cracking up altogether."

Naturally he couldn't help asking within himself all the questions about her and about Dal Jethrow who lay dead back there in the cabin with a section of log chain about his middle, and about Rance Cardyce's part in all this. Of them all Rance Cardyce was the only one he had ever heard of; and it happened that he knew Cardyce not only by a reputation, none too good, but personally as one of the smoothest gamblers that had ever plied his profession in this particular part of the Southwest. But none of these questions did he put to her. He was content with silence, with noting out of the corner of a watchful eye how still her face was, lifted toward the sky, how her hands no longer trembled on the saddle-horn, how even they seemed less frantic in their clutch.

"Here we are," said Nancy Wrenn.

It was all that he could do to find the trail, fumbling for it in the dark. As far as he could make out they were in a tangle of brush and young aspens and ferns, with a creek tumbling over boulders somewhere near.

"We're here all right," he muttered, "but it looks to me like the middle of nowhere. Is there a house?"

"No house," said Nancy, and he heard her sigh which sounded to him like a first sign of relief and even relaxation. She slid down from the saddle. "I'll show you. Just follow me, Dan Raynor."

"That's what I seem to be doing, Nancy Wrenn," said Raynor.

CHAPTER III

THE SOLUTION

Leading his horse, Dan Raynor kept close to the girl's heels, afraid of losing her in the darkness. She hurried on ahead, almost running, and he was hard pressed to keep her in sight; she was just a swiftly moving blur among black shadows.

"If you want to give me the slip, you can do it here easy enough," he called to her. "I don't know the trail and I can't see it, and every minute I think I've lost you."

She stopped so suddenly that he bumped into her. She put back her hand and his grasped it. "You've got to be careful here," she said.

He could make out that they were in some deep-cleft gorge, the cliffs black against the sky ahead and to the right, the tumbling water on his left. Suddenly the way seemed to open before them, still beneath the overhang of precipitous mountain sides they had entered a small clearing.

"You'll have to leave your horse here," said Nancy.

He unsaddled, tethered his horse with his thirty-foot rope, slipped his rifle out of its scabbard and scooped up his pack, getting it balanced on his shoulder.

"We have to go slowly and carefully," she told him, and touched his hand again.

Soon, though he could see little, he understood why. Underfoot they had a narrow trail that was for the most part solid rock. It wound around the base of the cliff and presently he got a glimpse of the water in the gorge, very far down below, just a broken bit of dark mirror reflecting a trembling star. The sound of cascades over worn boulders was still clear and insistent in his ears but far away. A misstep here might send a man hundreds of feet straight down to his death.

"I thought you said we were there already," grunted Raynor.

"We are," said Nancy. "In only one minute now, honestly."

Close as she stood to him it was so dark there under the cliff that he could scarcely see her stoop and grope her way almost crawling into a clump of mountain laurel. But he kept close at her heels, having trouble with his pack among the branches. It was trouble however which was done within some six or eight feet, for then he came up against the rock wall.

"You've got to crawl some more," said Nancy's voice sounding faint and as though it came through the rocks. "This way."

Shoving the last of the laurels aside he found the black ragged hole into which she had crept, and followed on. "I haven't any matches," said Nancy, and he hurriedly swept one along his thigh. It burned steadily, and in its faint light he caught the general idea of the place they were in, a high
and dry cave of very considerable dimensions. There was some dry-as-tinder fuel scattered about, pine branches and knots and cones, and with a cheery, "This is fine!" he dumped his roll, gathered up a handful of the smaller stuff and started a fire.

SHE stood watching him, a dim and wavering little figure in the shifting fire glow, striking him as pitifully forlorn. Then as he stood up she sank down, sitting on his roll, her face in her hands.

"You picked the one chair you can't have," he laughed at her, "I'm going to open that pack right now. There are blankets that we'll spread out and you're going to have a big night's sleep on them. Also, there's a bit of a food pack; I'm going to cook you some high-grade coffee and some bacon and flapjacks that will make you glad you know me."

"I can't sleep!" she moaned, sitting there and rocking miserably. "I can't ever eat again."

"Is that so?" asked Dan Raynor. He stepped over to her in a businesslike manner, put his arms about her and lifted her up high in them, cast about for the spot to deposit her, and set her down, very gently, just on the farther side of his fire where a gently sloping bit of rock was almost like a bench.

Opening his roll, first of all he spread out his blankets close to where she crouched. Then, going back for frying pan and coffee pot, he said cheerily to her over his shoulder:

"You can stretch out on those blankets and take a bit of rest, Nancy. Or you can sit right where you are until supper's ready, when I'll come over and pick you up and put you into your bunk no matter what you say. And now you listen to me. Dal Jethrow is dead all right, but you said he had it coming to him. So what's to worry about? Things will work out. They always do, give 'em time."

"Ever notice?"

Then, without awaiting an answer which he was sure enough wasn't coming, he squatted over his supper preparations, his hat pushed far back, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, his eyes squinted against the smoke, and began singing to himself a little desert song, "Desert Moons."

"Desert Moons." He sang it softly. Were there ever moons like desert moons? Nancy Wrenn was very still. She listened to him, and when he grew silent he heard her sigh. The first sigh he had heard from her. She said almost under her breath:

"I love that. Sing it again."

He looked up from his cooking to laugh at her.

"Like the sketch, lady? Maybe I'll pass the hat after I've passed the coffee and bacon and flapjacks."

But he sang the little song again, thinking all the while, "Poor little kid! Poor little kid." That was what she was no matter though she had killed a man.

He fed her and she ate, not hungrily but obediently. He made the coffee, having water in his canteen, not too strong, though he believed coffee in itself could not keep her awake. Then, when she had finished, he made her lie down.

"But you?" she asked, "There are two blankets—"

"I'm squatting here on my heels by the fire for a spell," said Raynor, "After that I'm going to poke out and look at my horse. I'll bring the saddle in for a pillow; I'll bring some more wood while I'm at it. Then I'll curl up here by the fire. Good night, Nancy Wrenn."

"Good night, Dan Raynor," she answered him. "You are—you're just fine!"

SHE was so utterly worn out that despite the horrors creating such mad havoc in her overstimulated brain she went to sleep. Once asleep, she slept heavily for many hours. Twice only during the long and none too comfortable night he heard her moan softly; for the rest she slept in trancelike stillness.

At dawn he was up and about, moving silently. He looked down at her, her face placid now and very beautiful with her curly hair in a swirl across her cheek; her lips were slightly parted, color had come back into them, her breathing was slow and regular.

He tiptoed outside into the dawn light to look this country over by daylight. It proved
to be a wilder land of gorge and cliff and spire-like crag than he had guessed. He could see no way to go farther into it; surely one would have to turn back here, seeking some other way.

When, having watered his horse, he returned to the cave it was to find the girl still fast asleep. He went outside to make his own breakfast and to dawdle over his cigarette. Always his ears alert for any sound, but hours passed and none came. He began to grow alarmed when, long after midday, she had not awakened. He went into the cave again on tiptoe to stand a moment over her, looking down at her through the dim cave-light.

Her eyes were open. She had awakened only now. She stretched sleepily like any healthy young animal curling her back, reaching her arms out. She smiled up at him.

"I didn’t wake you?"

"No. You came just in time. Oh, Dan Raynor, you have been good to me! God sent you, I know. I would have died; I would have gone mad."

"And now you’re all right, as fit as a fiddle."

"Uuhh," she nodded. "As fit as two fiddles. Something happened to me while I was asleep, I guess. I remember the whole horrible thing, but a lot of its horror has gone."

"Bully for Nancy Wrenn! Now I’ll back out while you crawl out and pretend you’re combing your hair and all that. I’ll have you a breakfast in two shakes. Delicacies which maybe you’ve never tasted, coffee and bacon and—"

"Flapjacks—I know it! But you’ve eaten already?"

"Hours ago."

"What time is it?"

"After two. Nearly three."

She flung her covering blanket back and sprang up. Already both hands were at her hair.

"I know a way down to the creek," she said. "I’ll run down there and use it for wash basin, mirror and drinking cup. And I’ll be back in time to flip the flapjacks!"

And Dan Raynor, again squatting over a small fire, stabbed at slices of sizzling bacon and stirred his batter and sang softly about desert moons. There went a girl of whom he began to admit he approved. He hadn’t had time and opportunity to judge just how pretty she might be, but whether her pulchritude rated a hundred percent or a bare ninety, he was glad to know her. He was downright glad to be off here alone with her in the wilderness.

"She went through all the seven hells," he meditated, "and she came through shining. She’s real folks. A thoroughbred or I’m an Italian organ grinder. Nancy Wrenn— by thunder!"

WRENN? He began to remember. He’d heard that name. There was a fellow named Wrenn, a queer sort they said, a man who was different and—

But here she came, returning swiftly, and he thought her as radiant as any wilderness dawn. For the first time he realized how lovely she was. She was smiling; there were twin dimples; her bronzey hair curled wantonly; and her eyes were a sweet tender drawn-gray.

"Now I’ll tell you," said Nancy.

"Mind you," said Raynor, "I haven’t asked you. What’s more, I’m a deputy sheriff, though not in this county. On top of everything else there’s an old saying that whatever you say may be used against you."

"Not by you! You wouldn’t say anything to hurt me, would you, Dan Raynor?"

"Damned if I would!" said Raynor. He added with his rather remarkable grin, a crooked sort of thing yet eminently human, "You’ll pardon the French, won’t you?"

"Mm, it smells good," said Nancy, "Next time I’ll cook for you. I can, you know."

He served her and she, sitting on a rock with her plate on her knees and coffee cup at her side, ate with such fine appreciation that it made him hungry again just watching her.

"Fire away, Mr. Deputy Sheriff," said Nancy, busied on a crisp slice of bacon held between her pretty fingers. "What’s question number one?"

He asked her the very last question she could have possibly anticipated and, in fact, the very last question he would have supposed, say two seconds ago, that he would
put to her. But it happened that he was a young man of impulses, and he had a habit, good or bad, of obeying his impulse. He said bluntly:

"First question, Miss Nancy Wrenn: Do you think that there is any sort of possibility at all that, after you've got used to me, you could love me?"

She gasped. But she didn't look frightened. There was nothing in the man's whole attitude toward her to create alarm. Nor did she look shocked. Surprised? Maybe, maybe not. It's hard judging a girl's secret thought, especially when you don't know her very well, and the light is the uncertain one of a cave and a flickering fire.

Those big eyes of hers, wondrously grave at times and understanding, regarded him gravely a very long while. A newer brighter color came up into Nancy's cheeks. Before she could halfway dispose of that slim crispy slice of bacon she was blushing furiously.

She gulped, not over the bacon but over her words:

"I—I—I—" she said, and stopped, redder than a rose.

"I ought to be shot, I know it," grunted Dan Raynor, and had the actual grace to mean it.

"I was wondering the same thing, when you asked that question!" gasped Nancy.

He bore down upon her to sweep her up into his arms. But she stooped her head and lifted up her shoulders and said hurriedly:

"Please! Go back on the other side of the fire and sit down, Dan. Please."

Dan went to the other side of the fire and sat down on his heels.

"How old are you, Nancy Wrenn; six or sixteen or sixty?" he demanded.

"I'm twenty-two," said Nancy.

"I refuse to believe it!"

"I'll tell you the year I was born; can you count on your fingers?"

"Look here—" he began.

"Yes, I'm looking," said Nancy. She reached for her coffee, lifting the tin cup gingerly both because it was hot and she did not want to spill a single aromatic drop. "What is it, Dan?"

He picked up a twig and broke it between his fingers, then set in doing a systematic job of breaking the fragments neatly in two.

"There are some questions, I suppose," he said after a while. "You haven't told me why—why you killed him, Nancy."

"If ever in all the world there was a man who needed to be killed," she cried out, "it was Dal Jethrow!"

"I believe you, I saw what he looked like. As handsome a man as I ever saw but cruel and hard."

"A beast! Oh, if you only knew a tenth of it!"

"He was your—What was he to you, Nancy?"

"I've told you," said Nancy. "Just a brute beast."

"He wasn't—that is, you didn't—I mean, you weren't married to him?"

She looked at him aghast. Then, unexpectedly, she came close to breaking down again as she had done last night. But she got herself in hand. She bit her lips, and her eyes flashed and she just looked at him.

After a while, a long while during which he could find never a single word to say, she spoke. She said in a curiously far-away voice:

"I will have to tell you all that, won't I?"

"No, not unless you want to."

"It's not so much that I want to—it's hard talking about it, Dan—but I suppose we'd best get it over and done with, hadn't we? All right; here goes."

Dan Raynor got up and came around the fire to her; he put his hand on her arm as he said, meaning every word of it:

"Listen to me, Nancy my dear, I know a part of what you've been through and I can sort of figure beyond that. If you'd prefer—"

"Sit down, Dan," she said, and gave his hand a quick hard squeeze. "And please keep on your side of the fire! You—you do things to me. He, I mean Dal Jethrow, m-married my mother. My father is dead, you know."

"Oh," said Raynor. And added, "No.
I didn’t know. I’d just heard his name, that’s all.”

“Mama never really loved anybody but dad,” said Nancy, and for the first time Raynor discovered her chin and recognized its possibilities. “But she came to like Dal Jethrow. Everybody liked him, everybody who didn’t really know him. Women especially. Oh, he was a snake! Mama married him. Poor Mom. It was mostly loneliness, I think.”

She had to stop to sip at her tin coffee cup. Dan busied himself stirring a dying fire.

“Mama owns a lot of land, thousands of acres back in the Tecolotes,” said Nancy. “Dad always claimed there was gold on it. Off to the east of his lands is the old Happy Day mine, and it’s been running for sixty years. Off to the west are the Humdrum and the Golden Girl mines, and you know about them. Well, dad always said that on his land, right between them, was the real mother lode. He never had any money; he never seemed to care for money. Just the same he swore that my trip to Europe, my cars and dresses, were all right there, waiting for the time when I wanted them most.”

Raynor felt like bristling inside. Nothing for her to see or feel, but all of a sudden it seemed definitely settled to him that if anyone bought her cars and dresses and trips to Europe, well, Dan Raynor was the man to do it. Just how, he didn’t know.

“And so,” said Nancy, “you see how it was. She married Dal Jethrow because—well, just because she couldn’t help it, I guess. And from the first day, though she never said anything, I know she was sorry. It didn’t take long to find out just what Dal Jethrow was like! He, like dad and like others, Rance Cardyce for instance, believed that some day a pay strike would be made on mother’s land, and she’d be rich; it was the money he was after and he didn’t make any bones about it. And then, just the other day, old Dick Redshirt found the gold.”

“Dick Redshirt?”

“There are several Indians living back there in the mountains, and Dick Redshirt is a sort of head man among them. He loved my father more than anyone or any-

thing else on earth. When dad died Dick Redshirt felt that he was left behind as a sort of watchdog over mother. He found the gold, or at least claims he did. He came straight to her with word of it. He begged her not to say anything to anyone, meaning Dal Jethrow, of course, until she had gone outside and talked with a lawyer whom she could trust. And while the two were talking, Dal Jethrow came in on them. He had been just outside the window, listening. I heard such a commotion I ran in from the yard. I thought for a minute Dick Redshirt was going to kill Dal Jethrow. But he just stalked out and went off.”

“Where does Rance Cardyce come in?” he asked her.

“Everything seemed to happen that day,” said Nancy. “Cardyce came out to our place that same afternoon. He and Dal Jethrow seemed to hate each other like cat and dog, but I know that Jethrow owed Cardyce a lot of money; it was some sort of gambling debt. And Cardyce was getting ugly. He hinted at having something on Jethrow. By that time Jethrow, terribly excited over Dick Redshirt’s story, had started drinking. He and Cardyce had a long talk. They drove us out. I don’t know what was said. But Cardyce was cold sober and Jethrow was half drunk—”

SHE shrugged. Raynor suggested:

“And no doubt Jethrow spilled the beans?”

“I only know that Cardyce left that afternoon. Early the next morning Jethrow started out of the mountains, coming down this way, headed for Tres Hermanos where he wanted a talk with a promotor and with a mining engineer he put great stock in. He hadn’t been gone an hour when Dick Redshirt came looking for mother again. She had ridden up into the mountains to look at the spot where he claimed to have made his discovery, so he blurted out to me what he had in his mind. Dick Redshirt is pure fox! He may have managed to hear some of the talk between the two men, or maybe he knew more about them all the time than we did. Anyhow he insisted that Cardyce meant to eliminate Jethrow for good and all. Dick Redshirt said that Car-
dyce would be waiting for him somewhere along the trail and was going to kill him.

That way, somehow, muttered the old Indian, Cardyce would be the one to get the gold.”

“But I don’t see—”

“Neither do I. But I know Dick Redshirt. I had no love for Dal Jethrow; I tell you he was an unthinkable beast, and I would have been glad to know him dead. But I couldn’t sit still, knowing that he was going full tilt to his death. I tried to make Dick Redshirt ride hard to overtake him. He only laughed at me, and he doesn’t laugh often. He hoped the two would kill each other; anyhow, to have either one dead would be good.”

“So you rode instead? Rode to warn Jethrow—”

“And arrived down at the cabin where you found me too late! I heard a few angry words. The door was open, I saw Cardyce shoot Dal Jethrow through the head with a rifle.

“Then Cardyce saw me. For a minute I couldn’t move. He had the rifle in his hands. His face was white and his eyes glittered terribly and his mouth was half open and I knew that if I moved he would kill me too. I didn’t see how he could help it, for he knew I had seen.”

Dan wanted to come around the fire to her again then, but sat where he was, looking pretty grim about eyes and mouth. But of one thing he was glad.

“So it wasn’t you who killed Jethrow after all! That’s something for us to be glad of, Nancy.”

“Rance Cardyce just stood there looking at me for a long time. Then he told me to come on into the cabin. I was afraid to turn and run. I thought he would shoot me in the back. And I was afraid to go to him. But in the end I did. He sat down and smoked a dozen cigarettes, looking at me all the time, trying to decide what to do. Then he saw the heavy log chain that happened to be there. I saw the queer look come into his eyes. He started laughing. He said, ‘No one will come this way before I get back. Then I’ll have some other men with me. One of them will find you two here, chained together! They’ll have to

figure that Dal put the chain on, to keep you from running away from him! It’s just the sort of devilish thing he’d have done, if he’d thought of it. And they won’t blame you at all for killing him.’

“So he chained me to the dead man. He stopped before he went out. He said, ‘I won’t be back in a hurry. I’ll give you time to enjoy being with your little playmate. If you’re as crazy as a hoot owl when they find you so much the better. And mind this, if you don’t say anything about my having any hand in it, I’ll get you off clear. If you do accuse me, well, it’ll be just too bad for you. I’m going out right now to stack up an alibi that will stretch like good Para rubber. It’ll prove I never came out this way at all. Think it over,’ he laughed at me, and left in a hurry.”

“Then when you saw me coming—”

SHE shuddered.

“I was expecting him. I couldn’t think of anything else or see anything else but that mocking face of his. He wore a hat much like yours, too, and it was half dark in the canyon, and I was nearly crazy, Dan—”

“Someday, real soon,” said Dan Raynor softly, “I’d like to meet up with this Cardyce friend of yours.”

She sprang up in sudden alarm.

“You must be careful, Dan! He is worse than Jethrow, trickier and every bit as cruel and vindictive. If you two should meet—”

“I’m going along with you, Nancy Wrenn, and don’t you overlook that neat little fact. So it’s at least a sporting bet, isn’t it, that I’ll be seeing Cardyce? Look here; where’s your horse? Back down there at the cabin?”

“I had just dismounted in front of the door when Cardyce fired the shot that killed Dal Jethrow. I was riding a newly broke three-year-old. She jumped nearly out of her skin and started running. I suppose she has got all the way home long ago.”

That put a puzzled frown into his eyes.

“Why hasn’t someone come to look you up?”

“I don’t know. I can’t understand.”

“Tell me about the cabin where I found you?”
"Deserted a long while. I suppose Dal Jethrow had stopped there for a drink of water; there's a good well. I suppose Cardyce counted on that, knowing he ought to be thirsty after all his whiskey drinking the day before. I don't know."

"Let's go, shall we? Is there some way to get my horse up out of this canyon?" She nodded and said, "Yes, let's go. I'll show you the way." So he gathered up his belongings, roll and saddle and rifle, while she collected the cooking things, and they started. But again he said:

"I can't understand why someone hasn't come looking for you!"

"I can't either," said Nancy. "Something must have—Oh, let's hurry."

CHAPTER IV

DEEPER MYSTERY

SOMETIMES Nancy Wrenn rode, sometimes Dan Raynor, as they followed rough mountain trails; for the most part both walked, leading Raynor's horse. Both were tired and the sun was setting when they came into view of a green upland valley whose sheer beauty was breath-taking. A tiny gem of a lake flashed redly under the last slant rays of the sinking sun, a racing stream cut its clean winding track through the tall grass; in the far distance were black cliffs laced in a dozen places with white tumbling waterfalls; at the head of the lake, with a wide veranda overhanging the quiet water, was a rambling old house of logs.

"Home!" said Nancy, and weary as she was, brightened at the first glimpse. She explained softly, "Dad made it. He claimed it was the only spot in the world he could truly love."

"And small blame to him," said Raynor, looking down upon it from the bend in the trail. Timbered ridges shut it in, locking it away safely from the rest of the world.

So great was her eagerness that she was almost running when they came down into the valley. In fact she was running when twenty minutes later they came under the pines on the lake shore. Three collie dogs came bounding out to meet her; she stooped and patted one of them without stopping. Except for this canine welcome it struck Dan Raynor as a curiously quiet place.

"I'll take my horse around back and unsaddle," he said. "That will give you a few minutes alone with your mother first."

She flashed him a look of gratitude and ran up the wide puncheon steps. As she darted in the front doorway he lost sight of her, going around to the rear of the house. Faintly he heard her calling to her mother; he even heard the lively beat of her flying footsteps. But he didn't hear any immediate answering voice. And when he did hear one it was patently not that of Mrs. Wrenn. It was the guttural broken utterance of an Indian woman.

He found the small neat stable, built of logs like the house. He had no more than pulled the saddle and bridle off and was looking for the watering trough, when Nancy, having sped all the way through the house, came running down the back steps. Even in the dusk he could see the look of fright in her rounded eyes.

"Mother isn't here," she gasped. "She never came back after riding out alone the other morning to see what Dick Redshirt had found! Oh, Dan! I'm afraid!"

"Who was that you were talking with? Who told you all this?"

"It was old Tula. She's the cook and she doesn't seem to know anything or to care."

"No one else here?"

She shook her head.

"There's a girl, Jenny, old Tula's granddaughter, but she's gone. Tula said that she was afraid and ran off to the Indian camp."

"Afraid of what?" he demanded.

NANCY shivered. "Jenny said she could smell blood—"

He laughed at her, telling her despite his own apprehension that everything was all right. He'd put up his horse and together they'd have a talk with old Tula.

She was a very old woman, bent and bony, yet alert, quick in her motions, with jet black, beady bright eyes. She looked at the stranger in frank suspicion, sniffed and, whenever he asked a question, answered not him but Nancy.

Of Nancy's vanished mother they learned
nothing not already told. She had ridden away, she had not come back. No, her horse never came back either.

“Did my horse come home, Tula?” asked Nancy.

“Yep, Nan,” said the privileged Tula. “Come home.”

“Then why on earth—?” began Raynor, but changed his question to ask a hint sharply. “Where is Dick Redshirt?”

“Gone,” said Tula, staring straight at Nancy.

A few more questions elicited the information that Dick Redshirt had gone for his horse a little while after Nancy had ridden away. It was not known where he had gone, but he had ridden along what they called the Up Trail, and that trail, leading deeper into the mountains, was the one which Mrs. Wrenn had taken.

“It would look as though he rode after your mother, maybe to show her the exact spot,” suggested Raynor.

Tula lighted two coal oil lamps. Nancy hurried out to the back porch again and stood there staring off into the northern wilderness that was so swiftly being gathered into the dark. Raynor came out to her presently.

“After you’ve rested a bit and we’ve had something to eat,” he offered, knowing full well where all her heart must be right now, “we can ride the Up Trail ourselves—if you’ve the slightest idea where your mother went.”

“But that’s the trouble! I don’t even know where to look. You see, the trail runs straight to that gap that looks like a V against the sky; that way you come through Bright Morning Pass to the Flats. From there on there are a thousand trails, no trail in particular. One can go on north or turn anywhere either east or west.”

“But you think that your mother was headed for Dick Redshirt’s discovery, and you said it was on land that had belonged to your father.”

“He owned thousands of acres, I don’t even know how many. All his life he was acquiring land. Some of his places were only a section, others many sections, and they were scattered all through the mountains. Oh, if Dick Redshirt were only here!”

He asked, speaking as casually as he could:

“No one except your mother and Redshirt knows where he found gold?”

“No one. He wouldn’t have told a soul except mother, and there’s no one here for her to even think of telling. No one could possibly know unless—unless somehow Rance Cardyce found that out, too.”

They went back into the house and old Tula served them a hot supper of which both ate sparingly, though both should have been hungry, and strong coffee of which both took two cups. Raynor said when the dishes were being cleared away:

“I know of course how you feel; it’s tough sometimes just standing still, waiting for something to happen. You stay here and keep the home fires burning; your mother may pop back in at any moment. I’ll take a little ride up the trail, just on the off chance—”

She was curled up miserably on a broad window-seat, but sprang to her feet before he could finish.

“We’ll both go. You’re fine, Dan Raynor! At least we will be doing something, trying to do something.”

“Wait a minute! We’d better watch our step a bit, don’t you think, Nancy Wrenn? Can’t we think our way out a step or two ahead? It wouldn’t be like your mother, would it, to go off this way with no word to you? Of course not.” He trailed off as she shook her head and he saw from a quiver of her mouth and a starry brightness in her eyes that she was on the verge of tears. “So we’ve got to take it that she has been unavoidably detained. Now that’s really nothing to worry about, you know; she’s all right.”

“You’re trying to buck me up, but—”

“Slow does it! Detained, but not harmed. Somehow in all this you think you see the fine hand of Rance Cardyce, now don’t you?” She nodded miserably. “Right,” said Raynor briskly. “It looks that way I’ll admit; else there’d be too many coincidences in the wood pile all at once. Let’s say Cardyce has a hand in it; why? He’s after the money, isn’t he? First, last and all the time that’s what he’s after.”

“Yes. And that’s why—”
"So he might detain your mother, even forcibly. But harm her? Not for a minute. What good would that do him? He'd want her where no one else could get her, maybe; he'd want to make some sort of deal with her himself, wouldn't he? So you can be very, very sure he'd take the best of care of her."

She took a long deep breath, staring straight into his eyes all the time.

"Yes," she said. Then she added uneasily, "But Dick Redshirt? What about old Dick?"

He could only shake his head. That was another matter; Cardyce having already killed one man to come at his golden reward might think less than nothing of killing an old Indian.

"Here's what I'm driving at," he said. "If Cardyce is in this up to his ears, if he's on the lookout, if he should happen to see me poking along a mountain trail, it wouldn't mean a thing to him. If he saw you, well, he'd know that a part of his game has gone wrong and I don't know what he might do. In a word, there's no use your riding with me. It might possibly be into danger—"

"I wish we'd meet him on the trail," she cried out hotly. "You have your rifle—I'll run and get mine. I can shoot."

"Don't I know it?" Raynor grinned into her earnest face.

He picked up his hat, twirling it slowly on a forefinger in front of her eyes, admiring the two bullet holes, proof of her skill. But she exclaimed, "Don't!" and then spun about and ran out of the room. Almost immediately she was back carrying a light sporting rifle.

There were several saddle horses in the pasture just beyond a grove of pines. When Nancy began talking to them they gave over sniffing at a stranger and allowed themselves to be caught. Raynor saddled the two that the girl selected, and they rode out under the stars, following the Up Trail. But they had hardly started when Raynor said:

"You spoke of an Indian camp. If it's nearby, isn't there someone there we could send back to the cabin where we left Jethrow's body? And you know the authorities here will have to be notified."

"Yes," she nodded. "The camp is only a mile away, at the foot of the cliffs, and will take us only a few hundred yards from our trail. And also, I'd like to ask there. They may know something more than Tula does of Dick Redshirt. They might even have an idea where mother went."

The Indians, old, middle-aged, young and toddling, came silently out of their little huts at the sound of hoofbeats. Most of the huts were dark, formless black blots under the pines, but in two or three small fires glowed on the hearths, and in this light the dark still figures were only fitfully and indefinitely revealed. Nancy told them hurriedly what had happened to Dal Jethrow; a few grunts accepted the news and Dan Raynor noted that if those grunts expressed any emotion whatever it might have been satisfaction, but was certainly not sorrow.

"Joe," said Nancy to a gangling youth, "will you and Jim Dancy go to the cabin, and you, January, will you ride to the Happy Day mine? Tell Mr. Bade there all about everything, and he can telephone the sheriff."

Just then the single excited utterance made by any of them was a shrill screech from the girl Jenny. She announced that she knew what she was saying when she told them she smelled blood, and she could still smell blood in the air, and there were going to be more men killed, yes and maybe women too. All heard her out in silence. There were a few guttural grunts and the three men Nancy had designated went for their ponies.

As Nancy and Raynor rode back to their trail, heading upward toward Bright Morning Pass, the girl said with a shiver:

"I don't like Jenny's talking like that! She was right once, she gives me the creeps!"

The night was already both black with darkness and scintillant with stars. In the high arch of the clear sky the little points of the light flared like diamonds, while on earth, under the pines and in the winding trail through ravines and in the high pass, it was very dark. They had known at the
outset that there was scant hope of their coming upon any sort of information tonight. For a moment as they came up on the ridge their senses quickened and both alike felt that they were riding toward the truth and would find it. As they pressed along deeper into the mountainous country they realized more than ever the folly of this nocturnal adventure. Ahead of them were thousands of square miles upheaved into steep ridges and peaks, gouged and cleft into sheer chasms, and with all this under the mantle of night it was as though they played at blind man's buff with a limitless savage world.

"I had to come; I just couldn't help it," sighed Nancy as, with their horses reined in close together upon a high clearing upon the mountainside they stopped to glance in all directions over one of the wildest regions Raynor had ever seen. "We might as well go back."

"There's a shooting star," said Raynor. They watched it as it described its brief bright beautiful arc and then vanished.

"A shooting star means good luck, you know," he said cheerily. "Well, you're right. We can't do a thing before tomorrow. By then the sheriff—"

She caught his arm excitedly.

"Look! There's a light, over there, far off."

She tried to point it out to him. He strained his eyes into the black night but could see nothing.

"It's gone," she said, almost whispering, oddly impressed.

"Oh, I see it," said Raynor then. "There's another; there are several."

"No, no," said Nancy. "I didn't mean there. That's a little village; it's about ten miles from here. What I saw was a gleam of light off to the east of Canyon City, at least four or five miles from there, over where you see those biggest mountains against the sky."

"Maybe it'll come on again," he said.

They waited a long while without seeing it. Raynor's eyes drifted back to the little town that many years ago in its hopeful youth had so proudly named itself Canyon City.

"I've just thought of something, Nancy," he said slowly. "Rather I guess I'm just beginning to think of it. If Rance Cardyce has anything to do with the disappearances of both your mother and Dick Redshirt, how come? You told me that when you left home to follow Dal Jethrow, your mother had already left the house. Then you rode all the way to the place where Cardyce killed Jethrow; and you saw Cardyce kill him; so you know Cardyce was there long after your mother started into the mountains. Cardyce gave you the impression, didn't he, that he was on his way outside?"

"He must have turned straight back instead," she answered thoughtfully.

"If he came back to the house, someone might have seen him. He didn't want to be seen, did he? And you said too that he boasted of an alibi. Now where could he have gone, the nearest place, that he might have found men whom he knew, men of his sort, men who would swear anything if he paid them?"

He could just make out her little nod.

"Yes. He would have gone to Canyon City. It's not far from the Golden Girl mine. It's a wicked little place, there's a lot of gambling going on there, and Rance Cardyce must have friends there."

"Well, then? How about his having anything to do with your mother's being missing now? Perhaps he didn't have. But there's Dick Redshirt failing to turn up, too. It's quite logical that Redshirt might have ridden after your mother."

"You mean that mother must have ridden somewhere near Canyon City? And that Cardyce happened to see her—"

He could only shrug. "If by any chance any of your father's mineral lands are in that direction—well, we might as well ride that way as any. But when morning comes—"

"Look!" she cried again. "There it is—the light."

This time he saw it. "It's right under where our star went down," he said.

"Yes; that's how I happened to see it. And I know exactly where it is, though it's ten miles away! It is on dad's land. He had a little sort of a dugout up there, high up on Rainbow Mountain, it hasn't been
used for years. But that's where that light is."

"It's gone again," said Raynor.

They sat in silence a longer while this time, but the light did not shine for them again. Nancy stirred restlessly in her saddle.

"That's where mother is, Dan," she said as though she knew. "Maybe Rance Cardyce is there too, keeping her a prisoner until he can work out whatever devil's scheme he has in mind. Maybe Dick Redshirt—Shall we, Dan?"

"You're not made of steel and concrete, young woman! Have you forgotten you've been pretty severely used already? How far is it by trail? How long would it take us?"

"It's a roundabout way; you can't help that. It will take us two hours, and a little more. In the dark—well, three." He heard her indraw a deep breath; then her words came so eagerly, "Please, Dan! I know Mother is there!"—that he said heartily:

"I told you a star like that was good luck. Let's go."

CHAPTER V

CANYON CITY IS HOSTILE

As they rode on again Nancy led the way at a gallop, knowing the trail and having under her horse's feet a footing which permitted speed. But soon they dipped down into the tremendous gorge of Indian Creek, dipped into an almost inky darkness, and were forced to go at a snail's pace. Twice they dismounted, Nancy calling back warningly, where they had to inch along lest a misstep send them hurtling down the canyon side. They had already lost the faraway lights of the mountain village. If one rode straight on, or at least as straight as possible, to Canyon City he'd have no other glimpse of it until he was almost upon its one rutty street.

Half an hour later when they came up out of the gorge and into a plateau with the timber widely spaced, and they again rode abreast, Raynor asked whether their way, on to the dugout, would lead them near the hamlet.

"Yes; within a half mile of it, even if we don't want to go into the town," Nancy told him. "And I was just thinking—maybe you were thinking the same thing? If Rance Cardyce is up this way, maybe he will be keeping up his pretense of an alibi? Maybe he'll be where everyone can see him; and if he is there, well, we ought to know."

"He mustn't see you. He needn't know that you've ever got away and left the cabin where he thought you'd have to stay."

"He needn't see me. I could stop just at the edge of the village. There are some big trees there at the side of the road, and it will be too dark under them for anyone to see. You could ride on into town. There are only one or two places where he's likely to be both saloons and gambling places. And if he did see you, he couldn't know that you had seen me."

"Yes," said Raynor, answering a question over which she had not stopped. "I was thinking like that."

"We can let our horses out here for about a mile, she said and touched her horse with the spur. "After that we'll have narrow, dark trails again almost until we get there."

Then it was that they heard hoofbeats other than those of their own horses. With the same impulse they reined in, coming to a dead halt, listening and trying to locate the new sound.

"It's someone behind us, coming up out of the gorge," said Raynor, almost whispering. "Let's pull out from the trail, under those big trees, and see who it is. It just might be—"

In the depth of the ink-black shadows of the monster pines they sat silent in their saddles, their eyes turned toward the spot where the newcomer would first appear. Whoever this newcomer was, he rode in the greatest haste. His head and shoulders and the bobbing head of his horse were for an instant, hardly more, vaguely outlined against a section of sky which seemed to have slipped down between the serried ranks of banked timber. He came with a rush, he shot by, once he was on the plateau, like a dark comet.

"It's one of the Indians," said Nancy, and sounded mystified. "I can tell by the way he rides, not like any white man."
"It's no doubt that Indian boy—what did you call him, January?—that you told to ride over to the Happy Day mine."

"No. He wouldn't come this way at all. He would have turned off to the right three miles back. And January is as slim as a young poplar, and that Indian was short and thick, more like Tim High-Tom."

"He's short and thick, so they call him High-Tom!" Raynor chuckled and then said, "Let's be going, shall we? He's one man we'll never catch up with unless we want to ride our horses to death."

"Yes. Here we go, Dan Raynor." But as they sped along once more she was still thinking of that streak through the night where a man and horse went at such urgent speed, for she said, "I don't understand. Tom High-Tom is the laziest, dirtiest, lumperst Indian I know, and that is saying a lot. It generally takes him a week to turn his shadow around, and now he's riding as if he were going to a fire! Oh, well—"

TWICE after that they heard the clattering hoofs where, spurring on in advance, the Indian rode a rocky, echoing bit of trail. Then they lost all sound of him, and before long forgot him. For at last they saw, at no great distance, the lights of Canyon City.

Climbing from a ravine they had come out upon a road winding along the steep slope. The lights formed a constellation with a dense grouping occupying a very limited space, with scattered star-like points covering the mountain base beyond.

"I'll wait at the side of the road here," said Nancy as they came to the patch of big timber of which she had spoken. "We're almost in town. You're there in two minutes; it won't take you more than five or ten minutes to look in at the only two places where Rance Cardyce is at all likely to be, if he is showing himself off in public. Try the Yellow Gold first, then Johnny's Luck. And you'll be careful, Dan? And you won't say a word, if he is there—"

"Sit tight and be happy," he returned lightly. "I'll be seeing you, or life will have lost all its zip."

"He's a dear," whispered Nancy Wrenn to Maude Wrenn's daughter as she watched him ride away.

He found Canyon City just about what he expected it to be, a straggling lusty babe of a village, rough and ready and occupying itself at this time of night with its playthings along a short, crooked strip of rutty road. On the corner as he rocketed into town was the Yellow Gold Saloon. Sounds of revelry emerged through its swing doors. He heard a hum of voices with one or two strident tones as there always are to bespeak the loud voice and the empty mind, and there was a blare of good music from a radio. He swung down from the saddle, tethered his horse at the hitching rail, leaned his rifle against the wall in the dark, and dragged his spurs along inside.

It was a long bare room, floored with rough boards, dotted at the rear with small round tables, trimmed along one edge with a bar. There were in the place perhaps a dozen men, all looking to have crept out of the brush or out of hay stacks recently. Among those at the tables, drinking liquor which had nothing expensive about it until you paid, were three girls, rather dowdy professional entertainers.

As Raynor, to provide an excuse for entering, stepped to the bar, he raked the room with a glance. Though he knew Rance Cardyce only casually, he knew him well enough to pick him out of a crowd with a flick of the eye, for Rance Cardyce had his points, and was a man both physically and mentally to stand out like a red bean in a handful of white ones.

Cardyce wasn't in the room.

Raynor drank slowly, one would have said with relish and appreciation. As a matter of fact he scarcely knew what it was that he drank. There were of course card rooms in the back; Cardyce might be back there.

So he split his drink with a cigarette, slowly rolled, dallied with, and gave his attention to the rear of the place. There were two doors, one he discovered when a boy came in bearing sandwiches, led to some sort of kitchen or serving pantry. The other stood open upon a dark room.

The bartender, thinking that here might be a good spender once you got him started, invited, "Have another," but Raynor said,
"Next time, thanks," and went out. Diagonally across the street was Johnny's Luck. There were twice as many men in Johnny's Luck, there were five girls instead of three and they were a degree less dowdy, and there were two bartenders instead of one. In the rear wall there were three narrow doorways, and one of them was open upon a lighted room. He could catch glimpses of men in there about a table and heard a clack of poker chips. A chair scraped and Rance Cardyce stepped out into the main room.

HE WAS much the same type as Dal Jethrow, but as dark as the handsome Jethrow was fair. He wore his hat, a tall gray not unlike Dan Raynor's, at a cocky angle. There was a small but excellent diamond, the gambler's device, in the tie knotted below a soft, freshly laundered collar. He looked, as he always looked, alert. Beyond that, Rance Cardyce's expression was not to be deciphered. He didn't mind if men knew he was ready for whatever the next turn of the card might signify. He did mind if they ever knew what he was thinking about.

"Hello, Dan," he said as Dan went to the bar. "What are you doing up here? Off your beat, ain't you?"

"Hello, Cardyce," said Raynor. "Have a drink?"

"I've got a game on," said Cardyce. "Never drink when I'm already having a good time, you know. The boys have been taking me for a ride, so I just stepped out to get some more of what it takes." He had come along to the bar, and now said to the white-jacketed man facing him over the mahogany, "Let me have five hundred, Charlie."

"Sure, Mr. Cardyce," said Charlie. He shot the till open, took out an envelope, counted out ten fifty dollar bills and shoved them across the bar.

"Luck, Kid," said Cardyce over his shoulder, and returned to the card room. The door closed behind him.

"Funny that he came out just as I came in," thought Raynor. He also thought that of all men he had ever looked at, eye to eye, here was without doubt the coldest-blooded, the most mercenary and predatory — and one of the most acute.

Again, though of no mood for drinking, Dan Raynor was forced to order something, the bartender had an eye on him. But before he could make known his wishes a big burly chap who looked to be a mine mucker or timberjack, came rolling up to the bar. He clapped a familiar hand on Dan's shoulder, crying out hospitably:

"Hi, Stranger! Have one with me."

"I'm just having the one, thanks," said Raynor. "I've got to be moving along."

"I'n a hurry, huh? What's the hurry? Where you going?"

Raynor supposed him to be scuppers under in an alcoholic welter, so only laughed and said:

"Just moseying on, you know. Have one with me and I'll drift."

"Sure I will," cried the other, and smote the bar with a tremendous, hamlike hand. "Me'n you will drink the whole damn crowd under the tables, huh, pardner?"

Yes, he talked and acted like a man who had drunk deeply. But he didn't look it. Dan Raynor, staring at him narrowly, saw that his eyes were clear and steady and purposeful.

"Sure," he said. And to the bartender, since he meant to take no chance with strange drinks, he said, "Make it beer."

"Hell's bells," cried the man at his side, and began laughing. "He's jokin', Pete. Set us out a couple shots of the good old rye."

"Beer," said Raynor stiffly. "And I've got to be traveling."

"Me," said his new companion, "I'm George Culmer. George, for short. An' no friend o' mine drinks anything but the real stuff. Make it two whiskies, Pete."

PETE, seeming willing to oblige one and all, set out a small bottle of beer and a larger one of whiskey. As Raynor reached toward the smaller bottle George Culmer's brawny arm shot out, his big hand snatched, and he wrested the bottle out of Raynor's grasp, slamming it down behind the bar.

Raynor as a rule tried to keep a guard on a quick temper. Tonight, perhaps, he was high-strung. At any rate he had taken all from Culmer that he had any stomach
for. His fist shot out, taking the burly chap square under the chin, and knocking him flat.

In an instant the whole place was in an uproar. Culmer surged to his feet, clamoring for gore, and charged down upon Raynor like a mad bull. Dan sidestepped and brought up in a solid ring of men who had left whatever they were doing to crowd close for the fight. They shouted and they stamped and they cheered and they started offering bets even before they were quite clear who the contestants were. Then Culmer, catching himself up nimbly when Raynor stepped out of his reach, charged again. This time there was no side stepping, no giving back.

For five minutes it was a fight for men to remember and talk about. Culmer was far the bigger, heavier man, and was astonishingly light on his feet. His blows, several of which Dan Raynor avoided and several of which he took upon the upper body, were like a piston smashing; and he was cunning in sparring and parrying and getting out of the way. The one thing he lacked just then was an appreciation of the other man’s desperation. For Raynor wanted above all things to be back immediately with Nancy Wrenn.

It ended in a fashion which drew a gasp from the onlookers. It was that sheer desperation of Raynor’s which added just the rose leaf on top of the brimming glass. That this was no chance quarrel he knew full well. Unless he meant to let Rance Cardyce have the laugh on him for all time, he had best end things. He ended them. He feinted with his left, uncovered that burly square jaw of Culmer’s, and drove home with his right like a pile-driver. The big man went down like a slaughtered beef.

Raynor started toward the door. But a ring of men were closed in about him. He could scarcely stir. Some of them, he saw readily enough, were just gawking busybodies, but there were looks on a couple of faces which he did not fancy. Also the bartender began calling at him.

"Hi, stranger! You ain’t paid for this drink yet!"

Raynor flung him a crumpled dollar bill, with his left hand. His right snagged the gun out from under his armpit.

"Gangway," he commanded sharply. "I’m heading out of this right now, and I don’t want anybody in my way."

They fell back then, some with alacrity, but at least a couple of men slowly as if in doubt. He watched them narrowly. Those were the two men who like George Culmer had a look of purpose in their faces.

He won by them all, whirled, walked backward watching them and thus gained the door. At a run he crossed the street to his horse. He snatched up the rifle he had stood against the wall, vaulted into the saddle, and was off down the road like a streak.

When he arrived at the spot under the pines where he had left Nancy Wrenn he didn’t see her at first. He rode twenty yards farther, off the road. He stopped there and looked in all directions. Then he began calling softly, then louder. But before he called the third time he knew that she wouldn’t answer, that she was no longer here. Like her mother before her, like old Dick Redshirt, she was gone.

CHAPTER VI

DAN FINDS A CONFEDERATE

JUST as clearly as if he had seen the short, thick Indian Tom High-Tom at Rance Cardyce’s elbow, Dan Raynor knew what had happened. It would be like Cardyce, a gambler who took a gambler’s chance yet never missed an opportunity to stack the deck, to have posted a spy at the Wrenn home.

"Cardyce has got her now," muttered Raynor, and a sudden fury stormed along his bloodstream. It was not that he overlooked the fact that the gambler was still back there at Johnny’s Luck, or at least had been there only a moment ago. Cardyce could not be playing a lone hand in this latest skyscraping scheme of his. He would have close to him other men like big George Culmer.

There was no use wasting time here! He turned his horse with such a vigorous hand on the reins that the animal whirled
on two hind feet, pawing the air, and was off at a run. And at a run Raynor arrived again before the doors of Johnny’s Luck.

This time he didn’t stop to set his rifle aside. He carried it caught up under his left arm as he strode straight through the long room to the door at the back through which Cardyce had so recently stepped. He did not see big George Culmer, but he did see that every eye in the place followed him curiously, and that some eyes seemed friendly while others did not.

The card room door was closed. He opened it upon a dark empty room. He turned back to the bar.

“Where’s Rance Cardyce?” he asked the bartender.

That worthy gave his bar a swipe with a damp towel and shrugged.

“Dunno, pardner. He was in there. Must of got through playin’ an’ gone out the back door. Ain’t see him since you was here.”

Seeing all too plainly that nothing was to be gained by staying longer here, Dan Raynor went out to his horse. Before he had time to swing up into the saddle a hand plucked at his sleeve. He swung about, alert to his toes. A nondescript individual, half in shadow and half in the light from Johnny’s Luck, said sharply:

“That Rance Cardyce been doin’ you dirt, Kid? Took somethin’ from you, huh, maybe?”

“What do you know about it?” demanded Raynor. “And what do you know about Cardyce?”

The question opened sluice gates of the other’s bitterness. He named Rance Cardyce everything that crawled and was poisonous under sun, moon and stars.

“I know he’s been hangin’ around here. I know he’s got something up his sleeve, ’cause I know who he’s running with. He’s got not only that George Culmer that you knocked daylights out’n, but three-four like him. An’ I know jest a speck before you showed up there come an Injun ridin’ hell for leather, with some sort of word for Cardyce, something that put him on the jump. I seen him gang up with three-four
fellers, send 'em scootin', an' then he pops back to his game o' cards. That's what I know—"

"But you don't know where Cardyce is now?"

"Couldn't say exact, Stranger. But he rode out that way." He pointed along the road. "Headed north towards the mountains."

Raynor tried to read the look in the man's face; here might be another indication of Cardyce's forethought, placing a hireling here to lie for him. On the other hand the man's voice rang true. He was an actor of parts or was in fact full of hatred for the gambler—and he didn't have the look of anything but a human worm on whom at one time or another Cardyce had happened to tread.

"Which way is Rainbow Mountain?" asked Raynor.

"I don't think he went that way."

"Never mind! Point it out to me. Which one is it, that big fellow yonder?"

"That's him all right, Stranger. That's ol' Rainbow. But there ain't nobody—"

"There's a good trail?"

"Shore. Keep right along the road for a mile, then where there's a gully an' an ol' bridge you'll see a track, you turn there."

Raynor swung up into the saddle.

"If you're a friend of Cardyce's, go tell him where I've gone," he said curtly. "If you're not, you won't tell him anything."

He dipped forward in the saddle and shot away into the night.

Utterly at a loss for anything else to do, he thought only of pressing on to the old dugout which Nancy had told him was high up on Rainbow Mountain. Perhaps he could find it in the dark, perhaps not. All that he knew was that Cardyce must have Nancy now, and that there had been a light shining out twice on the mountain. A light which could have been caused by a man stepping out of a door from a room where a fire burned, which had suddenly been shut off when the door closed, which shone again when he reentered the cabin. She had told him it was a long-deserted place; then why occupied tonight? He couldn't think of anything harder to locate than a strange dark dugout on a strange dark mountain. Nor could he think of anything he could do better than seek it. When he thought of what already Nancy Wrenn had suffered at Rance Cardyce's hands, when he pictured her again in the man's merciless power, his blood ran cold.

Soon, however, he was done with all speed. He found the gully and the old bridge, and what looked like a very long-disused wagon track turning sharply off through the timber to the right, down into a dark ravine, then crookedly upward along the base of the mountain. Also he began to see wisdom in proceeding with something of caution. If Nancy's captors should be bringing her in this direction—one chance in a hundred, he told himself, yet the long shots did gallop home now and again—they might be somewhere behind him. For they would not have risked riding straight through Canyon City where some eye would have seen, and so would have been forced to a roundabout course across which his own had cut like a bow-string across the arc of a bent bow. He kept watching behind as well as in front; he listened with sharply analytical ear to every sound.

Night in the wilderness is always filled with strange sounds even when the air seems hushed; faint far-away noises that are hard to catalogue. But not once did Raynor hear what he harkened for so eagerly, the sound of shod hoofs or of men's voices.

Then the track he had followed dwindled away into a trail, and the trail began branching, and a branch which he followed for a while came to a dead end in a thicket where a spring was. After that he was more at a loss than ever.

"She said 'High up on Rainbow Mountain,'" he kept telling himself. "So I'll keep on, higher and higher. But on a mountain like this I'm as apt to miss the place by two miles as not.

Then presently came the time when he found that he could make less speed mounted than on foot. He selected a spot which even in the dark he could locate again, a bit of benchland below a rocky cliff, marked by a half dozen big pines. Here he
unsaddled and tethered his horse. From here he went on, straight up the mountain-side.

"I suppose I’m a fool for doing this," he groaned to himself, stopping to mop a streaming brow, for chilly as the night had grown, his body was glowing, the perspiration bursting out upon him. But fool or no fool, the thought of Nancy Wrenn at the mercy of Rance Cardyce, a man who had already indicated how much mercy he had for her, goaded him.

He wandered for hours, seeking everywhere. A dugout implied some sort of bank into which its rear end had burrowed, but old Rainbow’s sides were thick with gorges and gullies and such banks as he sought. He plowed through thickets, he rested at such times when he had to stop for breath and steady muscles, he went on again. Many were the hard-going miles that he covered that night on foot, zig-zagging this way and that.

He sat with his back to a big rock, and slowly rolled and lighted a cigarette. He was trying desperately to think, to think just one step ahead of Cardyce, if he couldn’t do that, then to think in step with Cardyce now. What was the gambler’s next move? Granted that he had coppered his bet, granted that he had both Nancy Wrenn and her mother, Maude Wrenn, in his power. What next? Not so much what would he do, as where would he go?

He was only dimly conscious of a quiet sort of rustling in the brush. It meant nothing to him at first, and he went on smoking and thinking, trying to think, rather. He had been hearing sounds like that all night. But after a little while he grew rigid; he snuffed his cigarette out against his boot heel, listening.

SUDDENLY the night was as still as it had been at any time, not a sound. It struck him that that soft stirring in the bushes had ceased altogether too abruptly. There was someone near him, someone who lay stone still, watching him.

"He saw me kill my cigarette," thought Dan Raynor. "He knows that I heard him. He’ll play dead dog for a while. And I’m double-dashed if I know where he is!"

He had stopped to rest near a trickle of water, a thin shallow overflow of some high spring. Seeking the dugout he always kept in mind that it would be somewhere near a water supply. Now that there was no other sound than its musical murmur and a sort of whispering where it ran over rocks and through tall grasses, it would have been easy to assure himself that he had heard nothing other than the brook itself. But he remained grimly positive that there had been another sound, and that it had stopped all too abruptly.

"There’s someone over there, not fifty steps away, in that thicket," he told himself, staring all the while into the darkness. "When I put my smoke out he lost me. He can’t see me any more than I can see him."

There followed a wearily long while of waiting during which he sat as motionless as the rock against which he leaned. Then at long last his patience was rewarded. He saw something moving, though he could not hear it, and the thing, whatever it was, startled him with its nearness. It was scarcely ten steps from where he crouched. It was just a shadow among shadows, but there happened to be a flat white rock in its path which glimmered ever so faintly in the starlight, and the ghostly glimmer vanished under some crawling form.

He brought his rifle up to his shoulder and called out sharply:

"Got you spotted! Got my sights lined on you. I’ll give you two seconds to stand up, with your hands in the air, or I’ll let you have it. Step lively!"

For answer he had a grunt. Then a voice huskily guttural, demanded:

"Who are you?"

"If it will help you any, I’m a stranger in these parts. My name happens to be Dan Raynor and I’m from Tres Hermanos. Now speak your piece, my snaky creeper, or I’ll drill you, so help me!"

There was a silence, then another grunt and thereafter a shadowy figure arose, seeming to come up stiffly and slowly.

Raynor could see better now. The man’s hands were up, higher than his shoulders. He came forward hesitantly, stumblingly,
rather. He was limping, almost dragging a leg.

Raynor’s heartbeat quickened. Poor as the light was he made out that he had to do with an Indian, one who looked as wrinkled and gnarled with age as the ancient wilderness mountain on whose flank he stood. And what old Indian should be prowling like this on Rainbow Mountain at this hour of night, except Dick Redshirt?

He asked quickly:

"And you? Who are you?"

"Me Dick Redshirt."

"Thank God!" cried Raynor. And when the old man, slowly allowing his lifted hands to come down, stood there staring at him, he added, "I am a friend, Dick Redshirt. A friend of Miss Nancy Wrenn’s."

"No frien’ Rance Cardyce?"

"No," Dan assured him. "And I know you’re not."

Dick Redshirt squatted down, his grunt was almost a groan.

"Leg hurt," he explained. "Cardyce shoot, purty near kill. Dam’." He spat.

"Tell me about it," said Raynor eagerly.

"And about Mrs. Wrenn, Nancy’s mother. You know, don’t you?"

The old Indian lay flat on his back, resting a moment. Then he told what he knew. He began by saying that the morning Dal Jethrow rode away—

AND Raynor cut in, saying, "To his death, Dick. Cardyce killed him that day."

"That’s good," said Dick unemotionally, and went on with his recital.

That morning Dick Redshirt discovered that Nancy’s mother, all eagerness to see for herself how much truth there was in the old Indian’s tale of gold discovered, had ridden off to Rainbow, and Dick Redshirt learned of the fact only a full hour or more after her departure. He went for a horse to follow her. It was his thought that there was every chance she’d fail to find the spot he had told her of, that she’d waste a day and then come back to accuse him of one more tall Indian lie.

But with an Indianesque sort of humor, he thought it would be fun to let her make a fool of herself, seeking in the wrong places at first, and so he followed leisurely, simply making sure that he came up with her before she returned. So he jogged along, riding slowly but keeping a shrewd eye upon any trail she might turn into coming home. Thus the day was well advanced when he caught the first sight of her.

From one ridge he saw her riding over the crest of another, two miles away. Well, she was headed right, so he followed along in his leisurely way, giving her ample time to realize that she should have asked Dick Redshirt to ride along with her.

When he came up with her it was here, on Rainbow Mountain. And he came only in the nick of time to see what was going on, too late to be of any further service to her than getting himself shot in the leg and, incidentally, left for dead. He saw Rance Cardyce, riding a sweat-lathered horse, emerge suddenly from the mouth of a wooded canyon and grasp her bridle reins when she would have passed hurriedly on.

And Cardyce saw him at the same moment. The gambler meant business, it would seem, and no matter what the costs was driving straight ahead to his objective. He jerked his rifle out of his scabbard and fired. Dick Redshirt took the bullet in the outer part of his thigh and promptly did a nosedive out of the saddle. Falling, he struck his head on a jagged rock, so that when Cardyce came hurriedly to make sure of him he was unconscious and the blood covering his face gave the impression he had been shot through the head. Dick Redshirt knew something of this, because when a blurred consciousness returned he was in time to see Cardyce, rifle in hand, stalking away from him, going back to the white-faced terrified woman.

"After that, no see ‘em,” the Indian grunted disgustedly. "Me, purty sick, dam-fool horse run away, walk slow, lay down.”

He spat. "Dam’."

Then hurriedly Raynor told of the disappearance of Nancy Wrenn, of Cardyce’s recent appearance in Canyon City, of the fact that he had no doubt been warned and advised by Tom High-Tom. Dick Redshirt nodded sombly.

"Tom High-Tom no good. All time
Rance Cardyce give 'em whiskey. That why.

"Now what?" demanded Raynor sharply.
"What'll we do, Dick? Where has Cardyce taken them? Where and how does he think he can hide them out? We'll have the whole country looking for them tomorrow."
"Morrow, mebbe so too late," said Dick.
"Tonight, we hurry. We go see. What your name?"

"Raynor, Dan Raynor. I'm from Tres Hermanos. A deputy sheriff down there."
Dick Redshirt got stiffly to his feet, using his rifle as a staff and a prop to get up.
"We go look see, Dan. Dugout, maybe."
"Far, Dick?" asked Raynor.
"Not far. Dam' close. We go."

CHAPTER VII

THE DUGOUT REVEALS MORE TROUBLE

They made their way through the purple night, moving slowly and guarded under the star-sprinkled canopy, with the old Indian leading the way in utter silence save when occasionally he relieved himself of a little grunt of pain. Within a quarter of an hour Dick Redshirt stopped, grasped Raynor's sleeve and pointed.
"There," he whispered. "You see 'em? Big white rock one side, big white dead tree the other side, black spot in the middle? Dugout there."

It was very still there on the high mountain flank. Far off, very far off, in the wilderness a timber wolf's howl sliced through the silence. Then, nearby, as though mocking the wolf, a little owl hooted. There were no other sounds, nor was there any light or any sign of life about that black spot which indicated the dugout.
"Gone, guess so," grunted the Indian.
"Cardyce smart man. Sure, gone."

"It seems to be our job to find out," retorted Dan Raynor, and added, "Yes, Cardyce is smart all right, maybe just smart enough to lie still here in the dark waiting for us."

"You go see," said the old man curtly.
"He kill you, I play dead dog, I kill him."
"That'll help me a lot, won't it," snorted Dan Raynor. But with rifle gripped in both hands he stepped along toward the dugout door. Dick Redshirt leaned back against a tree, raised his own rifle and watched him interestedly.

Raynor tiptoed to the closed door and stopped there, listening. There was no chink of light, no whisper of sound. He shrugged.

There was no use standing outside all night, waiting. He had his choice, to keep an eye on the place until day came, to get his answer through the patient method, or to find out now.

He struck against the heavy door with his rifle butt.
"Hello inside," he sang out.

He thought that Nancy Wrenn or her mother, if either or both were imprisoned here, would surely call out to him. When no answer came he tried the door. There was a heavy wooden latch; it lifted readily under his fingers. He flung the door open. It was pitch dark inside, a dark as hushed as that of a tomb.

He was thinking, "Rance Cardyce may be within ten feet of me now, ready to blaze away at me the first split second he sees something moving, or he may be miles away! I've got to know!" And then old Dick Redshirt crept up to him and plucked him by the sleeve.

"Think so gone," he whispered. "Find out, like this way."

He had picked up a dry, resinous pine cone. He stepped away from the door, pressed tight against the front wall, and set fire to his cone with the first match. Then, never showing his body to any that might be inside, he tossed the blazing cone in at the door. It thudded and rolled half across the floor; where it came to rest it shot up a brightly blazing light.

At first in the flare of the pitchy torch which Dick Redshirt's pine cone had become the place looked to be empty. Dan Raynor was about to take the first step forward when again the old Indian plucked at his sleeve. Dan stiffened as he saw what the keen Indian eyes had discovered, what the thin old hand was pointing out. There, close to one of the half log and half earthen walls lay a body, whether of man or woman he could not at first make out in the eerie
shadows set into a sort of devil's dance by the flickering light.

"Go slow," muttered Redshirt, knowing Cardyce and his ways well. "Mebbeso trap. Dam' smart."

So they went slowly and together, Dick's rifle muzzle nosing by Dan Raynor's side, covering the figure on the floor but ready to turn instantly in any direction.

RAYNOR'S heart was in his mouth until he saw that it was a man lying there. Assured that save for this single occupant the dugout was empty, he stepped more briskly forward. As he did so the man lying prone stirred and groaned and half turned over. His eyes opened staring first at the blazing cone so close to them, then at the newcomers.

Here was another Indian, short, stocky, with the same sort of face his primitive stock must have worn a thousand years ago. Dick Redshirt, peering closer, made a strange sound in his withered old throat.

"Tom High-Tom," he grunted.

"He has been battered over the head," said a perplexed Raynor. "There is a blood trickle down his forehead and he's all trussed up like a turkey ready to go into the oven. Tied hand and foot—"

"Me untie," said Redshirt, and squatted down, setting to work with quick clever fingers. He began making small dry chuckling noises. It must have been his own peculiar brand of laughter. "Tie 'em good, somebody," he said. "Break his head first, tie 'em up nex', make dam' sure. Cardyce maybe."

"Rance Cardyce, dam'," said Tom High-Tom. He sat up when partly freed and clapped both hands to his head. Dick Redshirt busied himself with the rope about High Tom's legs.

"What happened?" demanded Raynor. "What about Mrs. Wrenn and her daughter? Where's Cardyce now?"

Before the man could speak Dick Redshirt finished with the ropes and sat back, rocking gently on his heels; he cut in, shooting quick sharp questions at the other. And for a while Raynor had to stand back and hear an incomprehensible gush of words in the garbled mother tongue of these two aborigines. Then Dick Redshirt got up and spat and translated, giving him curtly the gist of Tom High-Tom's sputtered tale.

High-Tom confessed lugubriously at the outset that he had been in Cardyce's pay. He had hurried to Canyon City to carry the gambler word of the news brought by Raynor and Nancy Wrenn. Then he had come straight up here to the dugout, as ordered to do, and had waited, not knowing what was next. It was not long, he said, before Cardyce appeared, bringing Nancy Wrenn with him. Tom High-Tom heard what they said. He learned for the first time that Cardyce also had Mrs. Wrenn a captive somewhere.

Now it would seem that he had not counted on this sort of thing from Cardyce; had not thought that he would ever go so far as to put his hands on either of these women. Tom High-Tom objected and grew hard to handle. Rance Cardyce was in no mood for objections or delay.

"That's all he know," said Redshirt. "Cardyce whang on the head with six-gun. Tom High-Tom wake up like this, an' purty dam' sick. Cardyce and Mrs. Maude an' Miss Nanny, they all gone. Dam'."

"But where?" Raynor cried out, angry and worried and impatient and bewildered, all rudderless at sea in a storm of emotion as he realized what it must mean to Nancy Wrenn to be again in the gambler's hands. "Damn it!" he said violently. "She saw him kill Dal Jethrow. He knows that she'll tell all she knows, to save his own hide he'll have to go on—"

He flinched from putting the rest of it into words. He glared at his two companions as though he held them responsible. They, perfectly stolid, stared back at him. Tom High-Tom turned away and began stamping out the burning cone.

"No good too much light now," he muttered.

Dick Redshirt began asking him questions again. Tom High-Tom answered with short savage-sounding sentences.

"If we only had any idea where Cardyce would go—"

"We talk," said Dick Redshirt. "Me an' High-Tom, we talk. Think so we find 'em. High-Tom smart boy. He hear Cardyce say
something to Miss Nanny, talk about Mrs. Maude. Mebbeso we go find. High-Tom he show."

"Me," said High-Tom, "sure find. Kill Rance Cardyce now."

A first wave of high hope came flooding through Dan Raynor as he made a swift demand for more details. They were given him by the old Indian, speaking gravely and slowly. There was an old tunnel in the bank of Saddlerock Canyon where years before Nancy's father had sunk a prospect shaft. That place was close to one of the high trails from Canyon City over the mountain to Mormon's Gulch and therefore readily reached on horseback. There they would seek for the missing ones. Best of all the place was at no great distance from the dugout, a mile or a mile and a half, no more.

WITHOUT further words they started.

Dan Raynor would have set the pace had he the knowledge of the terrain, but as it was kept close behind Tom High-Tom who led the way. Old Dick Redshirt came limping along behind him. Raynor could hear him stumble in the dark and mutter.

Even without a bullet-scored leg it was none too easy going, sidling along the steep slope, going down into wash-outs, climbing again more steadily than ever, plowing through brushy thickets, negotiating big boulders and jagged splinters of rock which had in some long-ago come crashing down from the rugged crest of old Rainbow. Once Raynor thought that he heard Dick fall sprawling. He wanted to call back to him but did not dare to raise his voice, not knowing how close Cardyce might be. As he hung on his heel a moment he heard the fallen man calling to him, hissing sibilantly, rather, as he too was cautious about being overheard.

Raynor turned back promptly. He heard Tom High-Tom also come to a dead halt, then return hurriedly to learn what had gone wrong. When the two stooped over Dick Redshirt where he had fallen, staring up at them he said in what sounded a thoroughly disgusted tone of voice:

"Leg no good now. No can do; bimeby die purty dam' quick. Dan, you tell me, where your horse? I go back now. I like die my place."

Dan couldn't believe he was as badly off as all that, yet he knew better than to argue with one of this breed, and besides he was eager to press on. So he told Dick Redshirt where the horse was. Dick grunted his understanding, rose awkwardly using his rifle as a lever and turned slowly.

"Luck, Dick," whispered Raynor, and tried to make a whisper sound cheery. "You'll make it back home in great shape. We'll be with you before long." He added curtly to Tom High-Tom, "Hurry! Let's get going again."

Tom High-Tom led the way again. Over his shoulder he said, "Him no good anyhow, too old," and so disposed of his tribesman, merely adding as an afterthought as he stepped along, "We go faster now."

And for a little while they did make better speed and Raynor found it all he could do to keep the vague form of his guide in sight, to keep close so not to lose him in the dark. Down in a dark hollow High-Tom waited for him, stopping to point down into a thickly wooded canyon, then to swing his arm in a wide sweep and at the end to point to a sort of notch in the ridge slightly beyond and higher up.

"That's where you think they are?" Raynor whispered.

"Sure," whispered High-Tom. "Think so. Old mine up there."

"Let's hurry, then! It won't take us ten minutes."

"Sure. Hurry now. Ten minutes, all done. Kill Rance Cardyce."

They passed silently down into the darkest of the canyon, a narrow, steep-banked gash in the mountain overhung with interfacing branches, so dark at times that Raynor had to grope his way and lost sight entirely of the Indian only a few paces ahead. Progress now was slow and difficult, with rounded, water-worn rocks underfoot. At every step Raynor peered to right and left, hoping for a tell-tale glint of light, hoping for the sound of voices, most of all for the voice of Nancy Wrenn.

"Ss!" commanded the Indian, rigid and still as Raynor bumped into him. He had stopped in a tiny clear space the size of a
room. It was a degree less dark there. Raynor could make out his bulky form quite distinctly.

"What is it?" he whispered back, as tense as the other.

Tom High-Tom lifted his arm again, pointing. This time however he pointed down the mountainside.

"Look!" he commanded. "Listen!"

Raynor pivoted, peering back the way they had come. As he stood there for scarcely more than an instant, a queer prickly feeling stole over him, an odd sensation, that it was his back that was toward the danger, and at his back was only Tom High-Tom.

He whirled, but just too late. He saw the Indian's clubbed rifle swung up over his head. He tried to dodge. The blow descended, and all that Dan Raynor knew, as a greater, stiller blackness than ever engulfed him, was that it was Tom High-Tom who had stricken him down.

Where he fell he lay like a dead man.

CHAPTER VIII

PRISONERS

WITHIN the tunnel it was like a small room. Rance Cardyce had hung a big square of canvas over the entrance-way. He had a small fire of ripe pine blazing against one wall. Against the other, their arms tight clasped about each other, were Nancy Wrenn and her mother. Squatting on the floor, between them and the only exit, were two men. One was that hulking George Culmer with whom Dan Raynor had had trouble at Johnny's Luck, the other was a small dark wiry half-breed border ruffian who named himself José Hidalgo, and whom most men called Joe Dally.

Rance Cardyce, with all the insufferable vanity of a gambler of his type, fancying himself an aristocrat, affected to treat Mrs. Wrenn as he supposed a gentleman would comport himself toward a lady. He spoke softly, with all outward pretence at courtesy—for which Nancy Wrenn would have gloried in seeing him under a horsewhip.

"But my dear Mrs. Wrenn!" he was ex-postulating. "Really, don't you see that de-

spite my dislike for the task, I'm forced in the matter? It happens that I am absolutely desperate for a large sum of money, a very very large sum; even my life itself hangs upon my getting it and getting it promptly." He shrugged elaborately as he lighted a fresh cigarette from the butt of a half-burned one. "Were it not for the fact that I am between the devil and the deep blue sea—"

"Hell," snorted big George Culmer. "Let me get her white gullet in these two hands o' mine—" He displayed them, the thick fingers wide spaced. "Cut out the soft stuff, Cardyce. We'll be in hot water if we don't get a move on."

"Keep your mouth shut, Culmer," said Cardyce coolly, but heard him out first, perhaps for the effect of such words as George Culmer would speak upon the two captives. They did cling closer. They were both fighting hard to keep the fear out of their eyes, a fear grown desperate.

Joe Dally, squatting like a frog, gave a quick little flirt of a supple wrist. He was holding a knife and it flipped up in a small bright circle, to be caught neatly by the haft as it came down. Joe Dally grinned widely, displaying his glisteningly white teeth under a small neat black mustache.

"Sst!" he said. "Wan leettle scr-ratch, like theese, on the face—wan nother scr-ratch on the leelly-white t'roat—Sst!" He laughed softly. "That's all, Señor Cardyce. Jus' queek an' no troubl."

"I don't want any killings tonight, Joe," said Cardyce, having given him also ample time for speech. "No killings at all un—"

He didn't say unless.

"No keel," laughed Joe pleasantly. He explained again. Just little shallow slashes, on the face, on the throat, hardly deeper than skin-deep; perhaps a little slice off a nose—"

Nancy said in a voice which surprised her with its quality of firmness and which made her mother look at her wond-eringly:

"It's a gambler's bluff, Rance Cardyce, and we know it, and so it doesn't win any jackpots. We both know that, though you caught me, you had to let Dan Raynor go free. There is Dick Redshirt, too, to count
THE LIGHT ON RAINBOW MOUNTAIN

on. They know, and when the whole country knows—"

Cardyce was not so soft spoken with Nancy. He jerked her up with a jeer:
"Your Dick Redshirt won't be coming—ever. I heard just a little while ago, in town, that he had, he had met with an accident."

"You—you—you murdering devil!"
"Nancy!" whispered her mother warningly.

"No," said Cardyce coolly. "I never killed a man yet, except in self defense and fair fight."

"You killed Dal Jethrow! I saw you!"

He RAISED his brows and mocked her with his dark eyes, eyes which glittered now in the fitful firelight yet looked as cold as death.

"No. I did not kill him. If he is dead, if you know he is dead, well then, I suppose you killed him yourself. You hated him enough, as everyone, your mother included, knows."

"And if you've killed Dick Redshirt, too—"

"Sh!" cried Cardyce sharply, and swung about toward the entrance, listening, his hand up commanding silence.

They were all so tense that none needed the command; hushed, without stirring hand or foot, scarcely breathing, every single one of them listened for some sound, listened with ears straining against the silence. Then they heard what Cardyce had heard before them, a long, peculiar whistle.

Cardyce, for once showing emotion which this time was one of elation, whirled upon George and little Joe Dally.

"That's Tom High-Tom!" he exclaimed, and seemed to have some knowledge unshared by the rest of them of the significance of the Indian's call. "You two boys hot-foot down there to meet him. I'll take care of things here. Beat it! And keep your eyes peeled."

They looked at him wonderingly, then went out together.

Nancy and her mother were standing now, rigid and alarmed, not knowing what fresh disaster threatened but judging from Rance Cardyce's air of triumph that Tom High-Tom's signal boded nothing good to them.

Then after a moment Nancy's mother spoke. She was a small pretty woman, young-looking, much like Nancy; her voice though low-pitched was steady and managed to express not only grief but some steadiness of will.

"Rance Cardyce," she said slowly, "if this is true, if you have killed poor old Dick Redshirt—"

"Didn't I say that I hadn't killed him?" jeered Cardyce.

"But—well, if he is dead—"

He laughed at her and shrugged.

"Come, my dear," he said lightly, "Suppose he is dead? It's just one less Indian in the world that has plenty of them, that's glad to see the last of them. What of it?"

"Dick was the only one who knew—the only one who could have shown us where the gold is!"

He pounced on her. He caught her by
the arm and shook her in a violent outburst of rage. Rance Cardyce's nerves were at violin pitch tonight.

"You lie!" he stormed at her. Forgotten was all his pose toward her. "And you can't lie to me and get away with it, Maude Wrenn! Redshirt told you; you know where the gold is. I say you know!"

"You are hurting me," cried Mrs. Wrenn.

"You know. I tell you. You do know, don't you?"

"No, I do not know. You watched me today. You spied on me. You saw that I wandered from place to place. Dick told me, but he was looking queerly at me when he did. I know Dick. It was like him to tell me wrong, to see if I'd go without him, then to follow me. And you killed him. You killed the only man who knew!"

He glared at her as though he wanted nothing else in life now but to kill her. But he got himself in hand and lighted yet another cigarette, and remained silent and thoughtful.

Presently they heard the shuffle and stumble of oncoming steps. Then the canvas door was shoved aside and three men entered bearing a fourth whom all at the moment thought dead. Big George Culmer and little Joe Dally and the Indian Tom High-Tom placed Dan Raynor's unconscious form on the floor.

"Who in hell?" demanded Cardyce. He looked close. "It's Raynor. That crazy fool Raynor. Why, here's luck! Good boy, Tom High-Tom!"

STIFLING a scream Nancy ran to where Dan Raynor lay and dropped down on her knees at his side.

"Dan!" she whispered. "Oh, Dan! You're not dead! You can't be! Oh, Dan—"

"But he is dead, my little dear," Cardyce snapped at her. "And there, if you please, goes the only friend you had left to call on. With Raynor out of it, with Dick Redshirt dead—"

"Dick no dead," spoke up High-Tom. "Not yet anyhow."

"What?" exclaimed the gambler. "You're crazy!"

"No crazy. We fix trap to ketch this man. He come dugout. He find me like you say, all tied up with blood on face, rabbit blood, he can't tell!" Tom High-Tom indulged in what went for a grin. "But funny thing, Dick Redshirt come-along same time. That why I don't bump this man down there. Both got guns; no can do—"

"But Redshirt?" cried Cardyce. "Where's Redshirt? Not dead? Where, then?"

"Go back. Hurt bad. Get horse, this man's horse, ride home, Dam'."

"And now, Mr. Cardyce," said Nancy's mother quietly, "you see that your plans are all gone wrong! Dick Redshirt has ridden away; no matter how badly he is, he will tell all that he knows—there'll be forty men looking for you before daybreak!"

Nancy didn't hear a word they were saying. She had Dan Raynor's head in her lap. She put her cheek against his lips, trying to feel some faint flutter of breath. She slipped her hand down inside his shirt, desperately trying to feel the beating of his heart. And she did feel the heartbeat, and her own heart nearly burst with joy, and she kept her head down, her cheek against his lips still, lest any see the glad light in her eyes.

Cardyce stood silent a while, deep in frowning thought. Then he jerked his head up and again was his old confident self, a man to dictate and to win on to ultimate victory despite obstacles.

"Boys," he said curtly, "we're in this now up to our ears, too deep to pull out. And we don't need to pull out. It's our good luck after all that Redshirt's alive; he's the only man who knows where the gold is. But we've got to remember he's wild on the hoof, and that he'll be sending men up here as Mrs. Wrenn has so sweetly reminded us, and that we've got to get out of this place in a fat hurry. We'll pile onto our horses and be at Sol Bartholomew's place within the hour. He'll take care of you boys there, and of the women, too, and I'll be on my way to gather Dick Redshirt in before he does any real damage. And I'll gage out of him all we want to know! He knows where the yellow stuff is, and he's going to tell me!"

DAN RAYNOR felt himself coming up slowly out of profound purple depths. Perhaps his first thought, as his brain cleared, should have been of Tom High-
Tom, the squat brute who had so treacherously struck him down. But he had been thinking so long of Nancy Wrenn, a girl who with her first uncertain smile had got among his heartstrings, and who somehow had stayed there, that his thoughts were all of her now. And the funny part of it all was that he labored under the absurd impression that he was with her, that she was close, that her arms were about him.

He lifted his hand weakly to his brow. His head seemed bursting.

Cardyce saw the movement and swung about, as quick as light.

"I thought this man was dead."

"You leave him alone!" cried Nancy, and leaned even closer over him as to shield his body with her own.

Before he knew what it was all about Dan Raynor felt himself jerked up to his feet, a man at each side of him. He saw Nancy first of all. She was real then, really here, and not a dream! Her eyes and his clung together, clung like hands that meant never to let go. Then he saw another woman, a pretty little thing who looked enough like Nancy Wrenn to be her sister. Oh, her mother! And one of the men holding him was that same burly George Culmer whom he remembered, and the other was a small, wiry halfbreed with an animal mouth shadowed by a tiny neat mustache.

"Cardyce!" he muttered. "Look here—"

"Hammer him over the head if he makes any trouble—or better, put a bullet in his brain," commanded Cardyce, already holding the canvas aside. "Bring him along."

"You brutes!" exclaimed Nancy. "Don't you see that you're hurting him? Don't you realize that he is badly hurt? Let me help him on one side."

"Oho!" said Cardyce, and laughed, not because of any mirth within him but to mock the girl. "So that's the way the wind blows, is it? Two little playmates?"

"He has been good to me," said Nancy warmly.

"Let's step, boys," said Cardyce. "Let her cling to him if it makes her happy; she can help steer him along and that gives us one more man with both hands free. Coming, Mrs. Wrenn?"

He watched them all pass outside, Joe Dally first, then Dan Raynor staggering along between Nancy and Tom High-Tom, with Mrs. Wrenn at Nancy's side, then big George Culmer. He himself came close behind.

"We'll grab the horses and split the wind," was all he had to add.

One of Nancy's hands was on Dan Raynor's arm, supporting him. He managed, and with no great difficulty, to find her other hand. He squeezed her fingers tight, tighter as strength began flowing back into him, and his strength flowed back all the faster from the warm pressure she returned.

"All right, Nancy?" he asked her softly.

"You?" she whispered. "All right, Dan? Not terribly hurt?"

"Just a crack over the head. I'm all right."

"Make 'em shut up, George," called Cardyce, "or pry 'em apart. We'll go quietly out of this."

"Stow the gab, you two," growled George Culmer, close behind them.

But in the dark their hands, unseen, could still clutch, hands giving each other strength, encouragement, hope.

Before they had gone a hundred yards a curt word from Cardyce stopped them.

"Look here," he said, and from his tone it was clear he addressed his three retainers, Culmer and Joe Dally and Tom High-Tom. "As soon as we get into our saddles we're going to scam, and don't forget it. You'll go one way, on to Bart's place, and I'll go after Dick Redshirt. Now get this: Bart has a place to hole you up as long as necessary, but you can count on me being back in a few hours. We've got a chance to play this out in either of two ways. If I'm in luck in opening Redshirt's mouth and then shutting it—there are lots of ways to do that—we'll still play for the whole works and there'll be millions in it. If I miss a bet, well, anyway we'll turn enough of a deal so that there'll be ten grand for each one of you boys, and that's not bad for a night's work!"

"Ten grand? How much dollars?" mumbled Tom High-Tom.

"Ten thousand, you fool. Now shut up and listen. Tell Bartholomew the whole thing. He'll know what to do. Just get this in your nut. Either this woman signs papers
giving us the whole mine, or if we’re rushed, she’s going to write a letter to her banker-promoter friend down in Tres Hermanos to rush up here to close a big mining deal, with a hundred thousand in cash in his jeans. Got it?”

“Let’s go—queek!” cried Joe Dally.

Climbing upslope with the canyon on one side, they came presently into a hollow lying just below the crest of the ridge, a grassy half-acre with a small stream and a bit of a pool reflecting stars waveringly and overshadowed by a grove of ragged, wind-blown cedars.

“Saddle up in a hurry, boys,” called Cardycy.

Little Joe Dally, a happy man under certain circumstances, started singing a lilting and sentimental little southern love song, all silken caresses. Already he was spending his golden fortune, showering “geefts” on his Morena. George Culmer growled at him, “Shut up, you damn little fool!”

Joe Dally shut up quickly enough, but it was not because of George Culmer’s command. It was something altogether different, a thing to stop the little cutthroat in the middle of a crooning note, to send him on a run darting among the trees, to leave him slack-jawed. He began cursing wildly, never thinking of keeping his voice down, gibbering with rage and dread.

“What the hell?” muttered big George Culmer.

But already he guessed and within two minutes all knew. The horses which they had left here, tethered so securely, were gone.

CHAPTER IX

DICK REDSHIRT TURNS THE TABLES

THERE was a moment of dead silence, a feeling of disaster in the air, utter confusion. Rance Cardycy flew into a towering rage, blaming every man of them since he did not know whom to blame. With the horses gone, what became of his smooth-running plan for the night? It would be a long hard walk to Bartholomew’s, and the night wouldn’t last forever! Already it seemed to him the stars were paling. And, without a horse, how was he to overtake Dick Redshirt in time?

He whirled about upon Dan Raynor.

“Damn you, Raynor! You did this for us—”

Raynor, fresh vigor pouring into him at every moment out in the fresh air, could only laugh at him—and wonder. He, like the others, was mystified. Nancy Wrenn, whose hand was still tight-clasped in his, began whispering to him, but her words were lost in the explosive sound of Cardycy’s swift commands.

“Steady, boys!” he told them. “We’ll make this yet; it’s as good as in the bag. I’ve the idea and— But first, straight on up to the top of the ridge; we’ll find tracks in the road up there and know which way the horses went. And then— Well, get going!”

They moved on, more swiftly now, passing through the grove and climbing steeply once more, with the mountain crest outlined against the purple heavens just above them. They proceeded much in the same order as upon leaving the old mine shaft, Joe Dally pushing on ahead. Presently they saw his silhouette definitely outlined against a starry sky.

There was a rifle shot, coming from what particular hidden spot none knew, and little Joe Dally stopped where he was, a clean cut black outline of a man, suddenly grown motionless and rigid. Then, with never a sound from him, he tossed up both arms, twisted half around and fell, a dead weight, among the broken boulders.

Where before there had been a moment of confusion and a sense of disaster, now was thunderstruck consternation that briefly rooted every man of them to his place. Of them all it was Dan Raynor who first broke free of the spell. Here was unexpected help of some sort, here the hand of a friend, here a chance to turn the tables entirely.

The man nearest him, the man gripping his arm all the time, at first by way of support and then guarding him, was Tom High-Tom. The Indian, gaping and staring in all directions, held his rifle loosely in one hand. Raynor jerked free, came upon the Indian from behind, snatched his rifle from him and swung it high, like a war club. And, even as he brought it smashing down,
it flashed through his head that it was thus and with the same weapon, that the man had dealt with him. He struck with all his might, and Tom High-Tom went down without a gurgle.

Joe Dally was down. Tom High-Tom was down. There remained but big George Culmer and Rance Cardyce now!

Then the hidden rifle cracked again. There was an orange spurt of flame, right from a flat-topped boulder which was overhung and flanked by sturdy thick-leaved mountain laurels. This time they all heard the scream of the bullet, hissing like the flight of an angry hornet.

Forgotten by both Cardyce and Culmer was all thought of their captives now. Their only possible concern was to seek to save their own lives. They were in the open, their assailant cunningly concealed. The two had been standing close together, now they sprang apart, racing for cover.

That rifle spat at them again. A cry of pain broke from Culmer and he staggered and fell. But in an instant he was up again, headed for the nearby thicket of mesquite. Once again the rifle spoke, and along with the reverberating explosion, the air was split by a queer, throbbing blood-curdling yell that came from behind the big boulder among the laurels, the gloaty yell of old Indian Dick Redshirt, once more on the warpath.

With a last wild leap Culmer plunged into his thicket, but he went into it headfirst to lie twitching a moment, then to grow still.

A part of this Dan Raynor had seen and sensed; his mind, however, was on Cardyce breaking for cover.

"Cardyce!" he shouted warningly. "Cardyce! Stop and fight it out, man, or I'll nail you on the run!"

Cardyce stopped and whirled and fired, all at once and yet with an accuracy which bespoke his command of a cool and steady nerve. Dan Raynor felt the shock and ugly burning gouge of lead, but now he like the gambler was himself again. As Cardyce fired, Raynor's finger pressed the trigger of Tom High-Tom's rifle.

Raynor staggered backward under the impact of the gambler's bullet, slipped down to his knees, steadied himself and raised his rifle. Cardyce stood a moment, swaying, then crashed to the ground.

After a dizzy moment Dan Raynor got to his feet and started toward the fallen man. Nancy Wren came running to him, her arms about him, as she helped hold him up and begged him to tell her he wasn't badly hurt.

"Stand aside, Nancy girl," he said thickly. "I've got to make sure of that snake. He may be just fooling; it would be like him. Stand aside, I don't want you hurt."

He shook her off and strode on. And when he came close he saw Cardyce make a quick, convulsive movement to rise.

"Lie still, Cardyce," he commanded sternly. "I'm taking no more chances with you. Drop that gun or, so help me, I'll let you have it square through the head!"

"Your hand tops mine, Kid," he said faintly. "Rake in the chips."

It was an exultant, gloating and altogether joyously vindictive old savage that bore down upon them when old Dick Redshirt came hobbling out of his lair.

"Me, dam' good shot by night-time," he chuckled. "Before-time, ketch 'em plenty deer like that. Tonight, got good luck!"

And by way to be sure a thoroughly good job had been made of it, he demanded, "All dead now? One-to-t'ree-four?"

"Dick! God bless you, Oh, God bless you!" cried Nancy's mother and ran to him and put her arms about the old fellow, and began sobbing on his heaving chest.

"Dick," muttered Dan Raynor, "You're all the aces there are!"

Nancy would thank Dick later and no doubt would spoil him all the rest of his life. Just now however her solicitude was all for Dan Raynor. She knew that he had barely recovered from one attack on his life to be wounded by Cardyce. She saw that he had one hand pressed against his side, that he was leaning heavily now on his rifle.

"Dan," she said tremulously, "tell me—where is it? It isn't—"

"I'm all right," he told her quickly. "It's on my left side. The bullet just skated around on my ribs and bounced off. And we've got to watch what we're doing yet.
There's Cardyce alive, you know, and High-Tom—"

"High-Tom no dead?" muttered Dick Redshirt, and sounded hurt. "Rance Cardyce no dead, too? What's matter, Dan? Kill 'em now, quick. Me!"

Dan shivered. The old devil meant it.

"No," he said. "No, Dick. Two of them are dead enough, Culmer and that little man. Better keep these two alive. We'll make them talk later on."

OLD DICK spat in disgust. Then he shrugged and after that laughed.

"But tell me, Dick," said a still puzzled Raynor. "where'd you come from? I thought you had headed for home?"

Dick's laugh became a delighted chuckle.

"Dick Redshirt dam' smart," he answered. "All time know Tom High-Tom bad Injun an' dam' liar. When we take off ropes down at cabin, I feel ropes pretty loose. He make ropes lie, too. So I play good joke on Tom High-Tom, an' I say I go home, an' I sneak after you on snake's belly! Oh oh!"

"You old devil! You knew all the time he meant to kill me!"

"That all right, Dan," chuckled Redshirt. "You no friend long-time to me anyhow. Bime-by Tom High-Tom kill you, I kill Tom High-Tom, so that all right. An' he go 'head, I follow, I find Nancy sure an' her mamma."

"Well, it worked out all right," conceded Dan Raynor with a grunt.

They went to where Rance Cardyce lay. He had twisted over on his back and was staring straight up at the swiftly whitening stars.

"Going to let your old Indian put me out of my misery, I suppose," he said sneeringly.

"No," said Dan. "We'll get you out of this and to a doctor. We'll make a well man of you yet, Cardyce. And you are going to hang. I guess you know that."

Cardyce, with more strength than they had thought to find in him, managed a laugh of snorts.

"I'll never hang for Dal Jethrow's murder, Kid. I've got an alibi—"

"Who's your alibi?" demanded Raynor sharply.

"Why Culmer and Joe Dally. They—" He broke short off. Almost in a whisper he said, "Dead? Both of them?"

"Dead, Cardyce."

Slowly Cardyce pulled up one arm, covering his face from them, shutting out his own view of theRetreating stars.

"I go get horses now," said Dick Redshirt. "Not far, I hide 'em. We go home now. Sleepy."

THEY turned Cardyce and High-Tom over to peace officers in Canyon City in the faint, early dawn. And then the four, Dick Redshirt and Mrs. Wrenn riding ahead, Nancy and Dan getting farther and farther behind them, they returned to the Wrenn home.

Dan had received first-aid treatment in the little town, his wound washed and iodined and tightly bandaged. "It's nothing," he laughed into the worried faces of Nancy and her mother. But they vowed it was something; and that he was coming home with them and straight to bed. They'd send for a doctor. As for a nurse—

"I'm going to nurse you myself, Dan," said Nancy, and though her lip trembled her eyes were shining-bright.

"If you do," he warned her, "I'm going to play sick man as long as the law allows!"

Then they fell to talking about a great mystery. How long was it that they had known each other? Was it just yesterday that he had ridden into her life?

"And got a hole shot through my hat."

"Don't, Dan!" She leaned toward him from her saddle and placed her fingers on his lips. For that, she got them kissed.

"Look at the sky, Dan. The sun's coming up soon, all pink and gold, now—"

She was so close that he could put his arm about her; their stirrups clicked together.

"You were right, Dan, about the lucky star."

"It's lucky to ride under stars like that," he said. "Luckier though to ride into a daybreak like this. Oh, Nancy—"

"Yes, Dan?" whispered Nancy Wrenn.
OUT WITH THE WAGON

By Clarence E. Mulford

TH' CIRCLE riders have drawn in an' made another gather:
They're holdin' all th' cattle on th' slope.
They're turnin' in their hosses now, tired an' all a-lather,
An' choosin' fresh ones fast as they can rope.

Th' piñon fires are burnin' good, like little spots of hell,
An' brandin' irons are gettin' all aglow;
Th' ropers an' th' flankers, an' iron men, as well,
Are waitin' for th' stream of calves to flow.

Th' mother cows are dodgin'—their calves are dodgin', too—
A-weavin' toward th' middle of th' press.
They might as well quit tryin' to fool a round-up crew,
Where every cuttin' hoss is claimed th' best.

Th' steers are workin' outward, th' cows are workin' in.
Th' dust is spreadin' high an' wide an' thick;
Th' cows an' calves are bawlin', but through th' dust an' din
They're drifted toward th' edges smooth an' quick.

Th' ropers dash behind them, a-ridin' hard an' fast,
An' head them 'cross th' clear with canny skill;
Th' braided ropes are swingin' an' straightnin' in th' cast,
An' frightened calves are bawlin' fit to kill.

There ain't no use of dodgin', not when a roper throws—
They might as well quit humpin' as they slide.
A flanker's hand is movin' an' down th' rope it goes:
A helper turns th' mother's charge aside.

Th' flanker's knees are bendin'. He gets a belly holt,
An' swings th' frightened calf into th' air;
Th' calf is still a-bawlin' until he feels th' jolt
That stuns him till th' iron bites through hair.

The' flanker's knee is lifted. He lets his laig holts go.
Th' calf gets up an' starts a wobbly run.
Th' iron man moves backward, th' flanker's grin is slow.
Th' tally man says, "Crescent, tally one!"
MISTER, as soon as I seen Doc haul off and knock that bird for a row of Abyssinian ash-cans, I went cold all over! Don’t pay anybody to slug a officer of the Hongkong police, because them babies are British and terrible strict about little things like that, but for Doc to do it was plumb suicidal. My gosh, wasn’t we in bad enough already?

That was a funny thing about me and old Doc Sewell; whatever part of the world we was in we just couldn’t seem to get on with the local cops. Not that we looked for trouble. A more peacefuller pair than us you couldn’t hope to find, and all we wanted was to be let alone to mind our own business. But would them flatfeet let us be? Not on your life! Persecution, that’s what it was.

And it wasn’t as if we’d pulled off anything raw since we’d been in Hongkong. Leastways, not very raw. Of course there had been a bit of trouble over a chunk of jade that we’d sold to a fat dealer in the Wanchai district, considerable suspicion bein’ cast upon us over a doubt as to where this here jade had come from in the first
place. But that was only a very minor affair and they wasn't able to prove anything anyway. And although we did get in a fight with a couple lascar firemen one night and beat 'em up pretty bad, that was only high spirits, and if you can't beat up a lascar every now and then, where the Sam Hill is a guy to go for a bit of clean fun?

Well, whatever the reason, the fact remains that we was about as popular with the Hongkong force as a couple wet dogs at a Government House reception, and we was warned that if we didn't mind our p's and q's something very serious and lamentable would happen to us. And then Doc had to go and complicate things by socking somebody really important.

It was the kid that got us into the jam in the first place. He was a snub-nosed, grubby little devil, and when we first seen him he was playin' with a bunch of Chinese brats down by the Hai Ping wharf in Kowloon. His clothes was in a terrible state, and there was so much dust and sunburn on him that you had to look at him twice to make sure he was white. The way he bossed them Chink kids around was a treat to watch, and his language was something scandalous. You could tell he'd been around the docks a lot.

"He'll have an awful fine flow by the time he's grewed up," I remarks.

"It's criminal!" snorts Doc, disgusted. "His parents ought to be jailed for letting him run wild like that. He looks like a mighty fine boy, too, if he only had a chance. That's how kids grow up wrong, Casaldy!"

"You ought to know," I says.

JUST then a feller in a peaked cap, shuffled by. He was bleary-eyed and half-drunk—a down-and-out white man if ever there was one. Soon as the kid seen him he yelled, "Hey, Dad, wait for me!" and ran after him and took hold of his hand. The drunk mumbled something and shook him off, so the kid trotted back and began to play again.

"Poor little devil," mutters Doc. "With a father like that what chance has he?" Pullin' a coin outa his pocket he flipped it in the air for the bunch to scramble for.

Man, them kids was after it like starvin' dogs fightin' for a chunk of meat, but though the white one was the youngest and smallest of the lot, he got it all right!

When me and Doc drifted into the Red Lily Tea House in a narrower street back of the wharf, the kid must've followed us, because we hadn't been there long before we seen him dodging about among the tables chasin' a big yaller mongrel hound and tryin' to tie a piece of string around its neck.

"I like these Chinese tea houses," says Doc, easing himself back in his chair and mopping his fat neck. He looked around at the assorted bunch of Chinks sippin' at their tea and munching sweetmeats and gos-sipin', and a grin split across his hard old mug. "The essential flavor of the Orient, Casaldy. A man can think in a place like this."

"Well, we sure need to do a bit of thinking," I grunts. "We gotta raise the wind somehow. At the present moment our finances is so low they're practically minus!"

"Maybe we ought to move on," sighs Doc. "Canton or Swatow or somewhere. In our business we can't afford to stay in one place very long. Stagnation is fatal."

ALL of a sudden we heard a yelp, a howl, and a helluva crash, and when we looked around there was a big, important lookin' Chinaman flat on his back on the floor, clutching at his pigtail and yellin' blue murder. His mandarin hat had fell off, and tied to the end of his pigtail, juggin' and scrambling to get loose, was the big yeller hound. Right beside him, jumpin' up and down and whooping with delight was that little devil of a kid. Of course there was some excuse for the kid, because you hardly ever see a guy with a pigtail in Southern China, and the sight of this long one hanging over the back of a chair must've been too much for him.

Well, you never seen such a hullabaloo as was kicked up. Attendants come at the run and cut the dog loose, the dog got frantic and bit the mandarin, and the mandarin got to his feet and went for the kid and slapped him across the face. Man, but he was hoppin' mad! Y'see, mandarins are awful proud, and this one's dignity had
been shot all to hell. The kid was game though, and instead of bawling he kicked the Chink on the shins. The mandarin went livid and twisted the kid’s ear real savage, and when the kid screamed he just went right on a-twisting it.

That was too much for Doc. He jumped up and pushed the palm of his big hand in the mandarin’s face and gave him a shove that sent him staggerin’ into a table, knockin’ over cups of tea into the laps of the Chinks sitting there. They joined in the uproar, and the riot was on!

NATURALLY, most of the Chinks sided with the mandarin, and me and Doc was considerable outnumbered. Still, by the time the police rushed in we’d got right down to it, and was holdin’ our own. The trouble was, though, that Doc had got so warmed up that everybody looked alike to him, and when the cops horned in and tried to calm him down, he turned on them too. There was four of ’em—a officer in a white helmet, and three ordinary ones. It was just like Doc to choose the officer. He let fly with a sizzling haymaker that caught this poor gink square in the mush and laid him out colder’n a flop-house supper.

Mister, I seen the seriousness of the situation immediate. A joke’s a joke, but you couldn’t laugh a thing like this off!

“You big ape!” I yelps. “Come on, let’s get outa here!”

We’d never’ done it if the Chinks hadn’t got in the cops’ way, but somehow we made the street, them hounds of the law right on our heels. We dove up a nanner alley opposite, then took a zigzag course and doubled back on our tracks towards the docks.

Now me and Doc had been chased by the cops so often in so many different parts of the world that we’d developed considerable speed and cunning, and by the time we’d reached the Hai Ping wharf we’d shook off the pursuit—at least, for the time bein’. We slipped into a nanner space between two high piles of bales, near where a freighter was being loaded, and got our breath.

“You done it now!” I says. “They’ll comb the city for us!”

“It was worth it,” says Doc. “One of the nicest blows I’ve ever struck, Casaldy. Sweet and free and clean. He never knew what hit him.”

“Listen,” I says, “stop scratching yourself on the back and come down to earth. Don’t you realize that these Britishers look upon a cop as almost sacred? Why, they’ll sling you in the Bastille if you as much as make a face at one of them babies!”

“Well, I said it was about time we left Hongkong,” comes back Doc. “Maybe a change of air would do us both good.”

“What are we gonna use for money?” I wants to know.

“The Devil will look after his own,” says Doc, makin’ himself comfortable on top of a bale. “Anyway, we’d better stay here for an hour or two until the hunt dies down.”

IT GOT dark soon, but they went on loading that freighter by the light of powerful electric lamps. The winches were rattling, and we could see ’em swinging big cases into the open hold. Across the waters of the harbor, on the island of Hongkong itself, the city was a blaze of lights.

“It’s mighty pretty round here,” I says.

“In some ways I’ll be sorta sorry to leave.”


“What are you talking about?” I grunts.

“On that crate,” points out Doc. “That’s where the cargo’s bound for. Macassar, Celebes, the East Indies.”

“What of it?”

“Why shouldn’t we stow away on that boat?” asked Doc. “We could slip aboard tonight somehow. Macassar isn’t a bad spot, and they don’t know us there.”

“Mm,” I says, a bit doubtful; “it may be all right, but they treat stowaways awful rough by all accounts.”

“They treat you rough in these Hongkong jails, too,” says Doc.

Of course, we wouldn’t have chose this here S. S. Ranee if we’d known what it was gonna be like, but when you’re only one jump ahead of the cops you do your choosing first and your regretting afterwards. We got aboard by shinin’ up a hawser to the after deck. They was workin’ on the hold forard, and the after part of the ship was
Rough Passage

in darkness except for one light on the poop deck. From there we sneaked up to the boat deck and crawled into one of the starboard boats, unlashing a corner of the tarpaulin and pullin' it back into place after us. It was a swell hiding place, and by peeping over the top we could get a good view of the wharf and see what was goin' on. Of course, we couldn't have managed it so easy if it had been a liner, but freighters are usually more easy-goin' and don't keep such a strict watch.

We didn't get a lotta sleep that night. The planks of that boat were mighty hard, and all night long the steam winches were whistling and clanking. It was morning before they finally battened down the hatches.

The Renee was carryin' passengers beside cargo. We seen 'em come aboard bright and early—about fifty Chinks.

"Cools for the rubber plantations probably," says Doc. "We'll be shoving off soon.

"Can't be too soon for me," I says. "It's warm enough in here now. What's it gonna be like when the sun gets up? Yeah, and I'm perishin' for a drink as it is."

"There should be a water-breaker in the locker," points out Doc. He broke open the locker, but the breaker looked like it hadn't seen water since the great flood. Doc carried on somethin' terrible. "Scandalous!" he mutters. "Criminal negligence! They ought to tighten up the regulations and prosecute some of these companies. It's dead against the law, Casaldy!"

When finally we did move, and while we was watching the hawser being cast off, who should we see standin' on the edge of the dock waving to somebody on the ship but the kid that was the cause of all the trouble. He didn't seem no worse for the slapping the mandarin had give him; he looked just as dirty and sassy and pugnacious as ever.

"The little limb of Satan!" husks Doc, almost affectionate. "You know, Casaldy, a man should have kids of his own to keep him young."

We kept low for a bit. We didn't want to be spotted till we'd got well out past the Lyeemun Straits. Pretty soon the ship begun to roll and pitch real heavy as she passed abeam of the Green Island Lighthouse. The wind was getting up, too.

"We're in for some dirty weather," says Doc.

We heard some of the crew movin' about close by us, but nobody looked in our boat. Well, we waited a long, long time, and at last we decided we might as well show ourselves. We crawled out, and one of the seamen, a lascar, stared at us, then let out a holler. Our sudden appearance caused considerable of a sensation. Two or three other lascars popped up to have a look at us, and pretty soon the mate arrived.

One look at this bird, and my heart went down plunk! He was young to hold a mate's ticket, but he looked big and tough enough to bite chunks out of an anchor.

"Well, well, I didn't know we were carrying any white passengers," he says, with a cold sorta grin. He looked us up and down, then shook his head. "You chose the wrong ship to stow away on, my laddy-bucks!"

"We're willing to work our passage," says Doc.

"You bet your sweet life you'll work your passage!" snarls the mate, stickin' out a chin like the toe of a boot. He jumped forward and caught Doc by the collar. "Takin' it on the run, eh? Come on, you fat baboon, start talkin'! Who did you murder?"

"One of these tough bucko mates, huh?" growls Doc, and with the words he jerked loose and took a swing at the mate's jaw.

That was the worst of Doc; he didn't have no control. Instead of keeping his head he'd fly off the handle without thinking of the regrettable consequences. He was as good a roughhouse fighter as ever I seen, but at the moment he wasn't in no shape to take on a tough assignment like this. He was stiff and cramped from bein' cooped up in the boat, and all wore out by the heat, with his tongue hangin' out for want of a drink. The mate ducked, and Doc missed him by a mile. Doc was shaky on his pins, and before he could recover his balance the mate brung up a fist like a chunk of lignite and slugg'd him behind the ear. Doc give a funny little grunt and pitched
forward on his face, out to the wide, wide world.

THE mate turned to me. "Do you want to start anything, brother?" he asks softly.

I shook my head. I ain’t yeller, but Doc always said a guy should know his own limitations, and this husky young gorilla was so far outside my limit he was practically immune. He sent a lascar for a bucket of water, slung it over Doc’s head, and when Doc showed signs of coming outa the chloroform, hauled him to his feet. Then, with Doc reelin’ like a drunk, he marched us both up to the bridge.

“What’s this, Mr. Harbord?” says the captain.

“Stowaways, sir,” says the mate. “Hidden in a starboard boat.”

The captain stared at us very peculiar and muttered somethin’ under his breath. Now Harbord was just plain tough, but the captain was worse than tough, A different breed. A long-faced cuss with mean little eyes set close to a big nose, a shifty look, and a cruel mouth.

“If you’d kept a sharper lookout, mister, they wouldn’t’ve been able to get aboard!” snaps the captain.

HARBORD flushed, but he didn’t say anything. From the way he glared, though, it was easy to see he didn’t have no time for the captain.

“What are your names?” barks the captain.

We told him. He asked us a lot more questions, and wanted to know whether we were dodging the police. We told him we wasn’t, and was only lookin’ for passage to Macassar. He seemed awful suspicious about us.

“All right, take ’em away,” he ends up.

“Put ’em in your watch, mister, and keep ’em busy!”

HARBORD did just that! Boy howdy, that was one of the toughest days I ever spent. We scrubbed decks, peeled onions in the cook’s galley, polished brasswork, run errands, and then did a little hull-stoning in our spare time. And we had to like it! Yeah, and what made it worse was that towards evening we run into a howling storm, and the old tub rolled till you’d swear she was gonna capsizze. Somethin’ seemed to go wrong with the engines, and it looked like we was makin’ mighty little progress.

“What sort of a hell-ship have we picked out?” I groans, as we crawls into our bunks in the fo’c’lse with the rest of the lascar crew jabberin’ among the...selves and lookin’ pretty hostile.

“I’ll get even with Harbord if it’s the last thing I ever do!” swears Doc. “Nobody can play horse with me and get away with it! Of course, I can’t do anything yet, but we’re not going to be on this hooker forever!” He mutters and grumbles some more. “You know, Casaldy, I could swear I’ve seen him somewhere before.”

“HARBORD?” I says. “Yeah, now you come to speak about it I believe I have, too.” I tried to place him, but I couldn’t, and I was so doggone tired I soon fell asleep.

Next morning it was rougher’n ever, and the ship begun to take a list to port. Me and Doc was down on the after well-deck when Harbord and the captain—his name was Loman—had the father and mother of a row.

HARBORD wanted to open up the hold and have a shot at shifting the cargo back into position. Loman wouldn’t have it. He claimed the cargo wasn’t shifted serious, being cases of machinery. Not like as if it had been grain or rice.

“Well, there’d be no harm in having the hatches off and taking a look,” says the mate.

“You’ll leave the hatches be, mister!” roars the captain.

“We’ll be in a bad way with a list like this if the weather gets any worse,” points out the mate. “We can’t afford to take risks.”

“Were can’t!” snarls Loman. “While I’m skipper of this ship I’ll take any risk I damned well please!”

He said somethin’ else that we didn’t catch, and HARBORD’s fightin’ mug set hard and ugly. For a minute I thought he was gonna take a crack at the captain, but he sorta got hold of himself, and stumped off mutterin’ under his breath.

Well, he had to find someone to work his feelin’s off on, and naturally he
picked on me and Doc. He rode us and cussed us till human nature couldn’t stand it no longer, and Doc finally blew up. This time I didn’t blame him. He’d only straightened up from his scrubbin’ to stare at a big sailing junk beating up towards us on the port quarter when the mate yelled at him to get on with his work, and topped it off by calling him a few sour names that even I hadn’t heard before. Doc got to his feet slow and deliberate. He had a fine command of language himself, and he certainly did let himself go.

“If you’re any sort of a man at all,” he ends up, “you’ll step up here and we’ll fight it out fair and square. But being what you are,” and Doc spat, you’ll probably get the rest of the crew to help and have me ironed in the fore-peak.”

The mate looked around. There was no one about save a lascar, and he ordered him forrard. He waited till the guy had gone.

“I don’t need any help,” he tells Doc.

“And if anyone does happen along before I’ve finished knocking your ugly head off, I’ll warn ’em not to interfere!”

For the next few minutes I took time off. It ain’t every day a guy has the privilege of watchin’ a couple man-eatin’ bearcats like Doc and Harbord tangle horns, and this had all the earmarks of bein’ a real sockdolager. They was well matched, big, tough, fast on their feet and full of mayhem and slaughter. Harbord was younger, of course, but Doc had the experience, and was in lots better shape than when Harbord had slugged him before.

They didn’t waste no time with any fancy sparrin’, they just laid back their ears and waded right in, bang, crash, socko! And could they hit hard! Say, it sounded just like two big horses kickin’ each other. Harbord got home a couple good ones on Doc’s face, and raised a lump over his right eye as big as a egg. Doc banged away at the mate’s body, and had him grunting like a pig. Doc always hammered at the body. It didn’t show much, but it did more damage, and now and then he’d slug one in higher up. In less than a minute they was both splattered with blood and mussed up considerable. They fell into a clinch, and Doc tried to bang the mate’s head against the bulk-head, but Harbord swung round and they fell to the deck, slashing and worrying like a pair of wildcats.

ORD knows how it would’ve ended if there hadn’t come a sudden interruption. Up for’ard a shot rang out, and somebody screamed. Then there was a volley of shots, a loud yelling and a rush of feet. The second mate, a guy named Anderson, come running along the main deck shouting “Mr. Harbord! Mr. Harbord!” at the top of his voice. He reached the ladder to the well-deck just as someone at the far end of the main deck fired at him. The bullet seemed to catch him in the middle of the back, for he jerked round and flopped head-over-heels down the steps like a shot rabbit. Even now I can hear that horrid bumping, slitherin’ noise his body made coming down.

It had happened so quick that for a moment or two I could only stand and stare, Doc and Harbord scrambled up, panting. The din at the other end of the ship grew louder, and the bell on the bridge rang crazily. It didn’t take the mate long to figure out what was happening.

“Pirated, by God!” he bellers.

He rushed for the ladder and jumped up to the main deck three steps at a time. Hardly knowin’ what we was doin’, me and Doc followed him. A Chink was comin’ towards Harbord brandishing a gun. Harbord just lowered his head and charged. The Chink, took aback, fired. Harbord staggered a bit, but went on. Before the Chink could fire again the mate had closed with him, As they struggled Doc come up, got his big hands round the Chink’s neck, pulled him backwards and smashed him in a heap against the rail. Harbord dived up a passage-way for his cabin, which was close handy, and came out again with a gun. Blood was stainin’ his shirt where a bullet had plugged him. Doc picked up the Chink’s gun, and the three of us went on.

Mister, hell was loose in the Ranee! It didn’t take much to see that the pirates had played their old trick of comin’ aboard as harmless passengers, and now that they’d broke loose they was shooting down all the white officers and any of the lascars that showed fight. We seen something else too
— the big junk we'd spotted before was bearing down on us fast, her lateen sail bellying in the wind and keelin' her over, and by the way some of the yeller devils was signalin' to her from the rail she was in cahoots with 'em. It looked like the Ranee Chinks had waited till they sighted her before doin' their stuff, and they'd certainly timed it well. As we reached the ladder to the for'ard well-deck the engines stopped.

"They've got to the engine room!" husks the mate.

On the well-deck a big bunch of pirates, every one of 'em with a gun, was roundin' up the lascars and herding 'em below. The mate cut loose with his heavy automatic and dropped a couple of 'em. Some of the others fired back, and come surging up the ladder after us. Harbord blazed into the middle of 'em, and as they swapped shots, lead whined off the bulkheads and kicked splinters from the deck. Harbord, hit in the head, crumpled up and lay still, his smokin' guns still in his hand. Doc fired twice, emptying his gun, and the last of the bunch flung his arms out and flopped backward like a shot bird.

Another Chink sneaked out of an alleyway behind us, and me and Doc dodged back and ducked up the companionway to the boat-deck. There was too many of 'em, we didn't have no ammunition, and there wasn't nothing at all we could do but run for it.

**WE HEARD** the high-pitched singing crackle of the transmitter comin' from the wireless shack ahead of us. Just before we reached it somebody inside give a funny little gurgling cough, and the transmitter stopped. There was a crash and jangle of instruments, and a slit-eyed bozo stepped outa the open door wiping a thin knife on his sleeve. He was small and wiry, and didn't have no expression on his flat face. He stopped dead when he seen us, and at the same time I dived for his knees and brought him down with a thump. Doc slammed him with his gun butt and stretched him cold. Me and Doc made a good team, though I say it myself.

We stopped long enough to look through
the door. There was the operator lyin' dead across the table, and a lot of the instruments were ripped loose and flung on the floor.

"The murdering, cold-blooded devils!" rasps Doc. "You know what to expect if they catch us, Casaldy. They'll shoot us down like rats, and watch us kick. And before they've finished they'll hunt through this ship from stem to stern. Our only chance is to hole up in some place where they won't find us."

We ran aft and scrambled down to the after well-deck again. It looked like the pirates hadn't got this far yet, they was too busy for'er.

"What about the number three hold?" I suggest. "There's sure to be some space between the cargo we c'n wriggle into, and they're not likely to search it right down to the bilges."

Doc nods, "All right."

The hatch on number three had been stoved in some time or other, and instead of a proper cover there was a roof of heavy beams and canvas held down with iron weights. We managed to shift one of the beams a little, and I wriggled in and dropped into a large case. It wasn't much of a drop, as the hold was piled up almost to deck level. Doc followed, and struck a match.

The stowaways had made a bad job of that hold. The cases at the top was packed so bad they slid and bumped and scraped every time the ship rolled.

"Watch out you don't get crushed," warns Doc. "They're heavy enough to squash you like a beetle."

We crawled around by the light of matches, tryin' to find the spider ladder to the lower decks. We trod on one case that had been smashed up considerable, the top and one side all cracked and splintered. Doc got hold of one length of broken wood and wrenched it free.

"If the worst comes to the worst, this wouldn't make a bad weapon," he says, hefting it. Then he let a whistle of surprise outa him. The match spluttered out. "Quick, give us a light here!" he mutters, fumbling for another match.

I struck one and held it close. I seen...
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something black and shiny. Doc got his hands to it and yanked it out, and his breath sucked in between his teeth.

"Look!" he breathes. "The case is full of 'em!"

"Tommy-guns!" I yelps.

"Keep quiet, you damn fool!" rasps Doc.

"I wish we had a real light here. You keep striking matches till I've examined them properly."

WELL, that was one time that all them strict regulations about not strikin' lights anywhere near holds got shot all to hell!

"The latest German pattern," says Doc.

"Gun-running, ch?"

"How do you know?" I says. "It may be on the up and up."

"When they ship guns as straight cargo they don't pack 'em in crates labeled machinery," snorts Doc. "And what would an outfit like the Kandang Rubber Company want with sub machine-guns? Pretty slick," he goes on. "Most of this is machinery all right. Probably just an odd case of guns here and there." He rummaged about some more. "Ah, here we are! Clips of ammunition in the back of the case, all nicely done up in water-proof packages. And the guns already assembled. Smothered in grease, but ready to use right away. There's something fishy about that. If I could only think what it is." He gives a low chuckle. "'It's an ill wind—' You know the rest, Casady. What could be sweeter?"

"What do you mean?" I says.

"I mean that though we're only a couple of stowaways on the run, we hold all the aces," comes back Doc. "Up to now we've been persons of no importance on this packet. Lower than cockroaches. Kicked and cuffed from hell to breakfast. Now's our chance to go over big! To put ourselves in the news! These are the deadliest one-man weapons in the world, Casady. We'll crawl out of here and blast those yellow devils high, wide and handsome! We'll give 'em hell, and hot lead and the wrath to come!"

"Sounds all right," I agrees. "We could do with some help though."

"Too bad they got Harbord," says Doc.
"He would’ve liked this. A real man, that, even if he was a bit too rough for comfort. Funny I can’t remember where I’ve seen him before."

All the time he was talkin’ he was busy wiping the grease off two of the guns, and loading ‘em. It wasn’t easy, seein’ that this particular brand of automatic was new to us, and that we didn’t have nothin’ but the flicker of matches to work by.

When we was ready we clambered outa the hold. Things had quietened down, and it looked like all resistance had been overcome. The junk was standing in close on the lee side. We started forward, guns ready, our pockets crammed with ammunition clips. We’d hardly gone ten yards before we seen half a dozen Chinks comin’ towards us along the promenade of the main deck, with the captain himself marching in front of ‘em. We dived for the cover of the winch engine. I got into a comfortable position and then got ready to cut loose.

"Mind you don’t bit Loman," says Doc. "They’ve probably got their gats rammed into his spine. Wonder what they want with him?"

They’d seen us move, and two of ‘em run in front to investigate. I got a clear bead on ‘em and gave ‘em a short burst. They gave a funny sorta jerk, and collapsed like a coupla empty sacks. The others pulled up short, kinda bewildered. Then we got a helluva shock, for the captain yelled at them, waved to ‘em to take cover, and pulling out a gun, took a pot shot at us, at the same time ducking for cover himself! From behind a bollard he begun to shout out something I couldn’t understand.

"My God, Casaldy, he’s urging them on!" husks Doc. "Telling them to work up closer before they rush us!" He gave that harsh laugh of his. "Well, now we know why he wouldn’t let Harbord have the hatch off and look at the cargo!"

There wasn’t no doubt about it, mister, he was on their side, all right! He led the rush when it come a few minutes later, blazing at us like mad and howling like a demon. And of course we got him. We got ‘em all. They couldn’t stand up before them..."
spitting Tommy guns, not at that range. We ripped 'em to pieces and dropped 'em in their tracks. The ones for'ard had heard the firing, and it wasn't long before they come scramperin' up.

Man, them pirates done their best to get us. I'll say that for 'em. They tried to rush us like the others had done, but they soon learnt better. Then they scattered and tried to snipe us, but their revolvers wasn't accurate enough for that, and we sprayed 'em good and plenty. There was dead Chinamen all over the deck.

Me and Doc wasn't killers, but after what we'd seen 'em do we burnt 'em down without battin' an eyelash.

We only had to remember Harbord, and the second mate, to say nothin' of the radio operation and a lot of other poor devils we hadn't seen.

We was thinkin' of leavin' cover and going after 'em, but all of a sudden we seen they was beating it of their own accord. All that was left, anyway. They'd swung a lifeboat out on the port side and was tumbling into it. Then they rowed like mad to the junk and scrambled aboard, and the junk hoisted sail, swung round and went scootin' off before the wind. They was in considerable of a hurry, and we soon seen why. Away in the distance on the starboard side was the gray smudge of a naval boat of some kind. We went to the rail and watched her; she seemed to be comin' up fast.

"That operator must have got out his SOS before he was killed," says Doc. "Well, that's that, Casaldy."

BEHIND us we heard a groan. It was the captain. He was on his back, shot up bad. His body looked paralyzed, and only his eyes and mouth moved. When we bent over him he glared up at us and cursed us, and I never seen such a look in a man's eyes before. Doc caught my sleeve and pulled me away.

"We can't do anything for him," he says. "And anyway, there are better men than him to attend first."

Still carrying them guns in case there was any stray pirates still aboard, we went down below and turned the lascars loose.
They had been locked in the saloon and was scared stiff.

Pretty soon a destroyer foamed up alongside, lowered a boat and sent a bunch of armed sailors aboard. The English lieutenant in charge looked at us kinda suspicious. We must’ve looked tough. Doc’s face was puffed up and bruised from his scrap with Harbord, and I was bleeding from where a bullet had nicked me a trifle in the neck. I noticed the loot eyeing them Tommy guns too.

“Well, when did this affair start?” he barks. “What happened?”

We started to tell him, but he cut us short. “Where’s your captain?” he says. After all, I don’t suppose piracy and murder was anything new to him. Not in them seas.

We took him to Loman. He was almost gone, but when he seen us he made one final effort.

“Those two—they got me,” he gasps, pointing with his chin towards us. “Stowaways. Owed me—a grudge. Took advantage of—the piracy—to murder me.”

Them was his last words. You’d think when a guy was dyin’ he’d do his best to straighten up what he’d done, but not Loman. He went with a black lie on his lips, and a curse in the way he looked at Doc and me.

We swore he was lyin’, and we give that hard-faced Britisher the true story, but the hell of it was that when we come to tell it, it sounded mighty thin. We had to admit we was stowaways right enough, and that we was on the run from the cops. That part would’ve had to come out sooner or later, anyway.

WE TOLD the same story to the commander of the destroyer when we was took aboard her, and it didn’t go down no better with him. You see, we didn’t have no witnesses.

“Are you trying to tell me that the master of this vessel was in league with the pirates?” he snorts. “That he connived at shipping the guns, at the pirating of his own ship and the murder of the officers under him?”

“Just that,” says Doc. “Every man has
his price, and I bet they paid him plenty. You know yourself just how much guns like these would be worth to pirates."

"You can tell that at the inquiry back in Hongkong," says the commander, kinda grim. "I'll put an officer and some of my crew aboard the Ranee to help take her back, and you'll be under arrest."

So instead of landing at Kowloon as conquering heroes, me and Doc went down the gang-plank handcuffed like a couple thugs! They must've wirelessed the news ahead, for there was quite a crowd round the Hai Ping wharf waiting to see the Ranee berth. And of course, the cops were waiting for us.

And there, waitin' to come up the gang-plank as we went down, was that darned kid again! Seemed like we run into him wherever we went. He seemed to be in charge of a cop, and we wondered what the Sam Hill he was goin' aboard for. When he seen us handcuffed he got pretty much excited.

"Where you goin'?" he calls out after us. "What've you done? Where are they takin' you?"

Doc shook his head kinda sorrowful, and the cops hurried us off up the Nangpo Road and slung us in the can.

"For once," says Doc, sittin' on the edge of the board bed and taking his old bald head in his hands, "we were on the side of the angels, and look where it's got us!"

"You said we'd put ourselves in the news," I says, bitter. "Well, we sure have!"

"They won't press a murder charge," says Doc, "because they have no supporting evidence, but just the suspicion of it'll make things bad for us. They'll get us for assaulting the police and for stowing away, and they'll soak it to us just as hard as the law allows."

And then next morning, when we'd give up all hope, they unlocked the cell door and told us we could beat it.

"A friend of yours has gone bail for you," the station officer says. "And owing to a statement he has made in hospital, all charges but the one of assault will be dropped."

Well, you c'n bet that was jake with us! But all the same we was puzzled. "I didn't think we had no friends," I says. "Who is it?"

"Name of Richard Harbord," says the copper.

"But Harbord's dead!" yelps Doc. "We saw him killed! Shot through the head!"

"Apparently it only grooved the skull," says the officer. "We took his son, young Joey, to see him as soon as the Ranee docked, and it was through Joey that Mr. Harbord learned you were in trouble."

"The kid!" I husks. "That ragged little devil is Harbord's son? Why, we heard him call some old dead-beat down by the wharf 'dad!'"

"Oh, that would probably be old Dad Mullins, one of the night watchmen," says the officer. "Everybody around here knows Joey Harbord. Has no mother, and his father lets him run a bit wild."

"So that's why we thought we'd seen Harbord before," grunts Doc. "It was his likeness to the kid we noticed."

We went to see Harbord in the Victoria Hospital, and though his head was all bound up and we was warned we mustn't talk too much, he told us how he'd seen Loman hobnobbing with the pirates. He'd been lyin' there on deck weak and almost unconscious, hardly able to move, but he'd seen enough to prove our story was true. He seemed very grateful to us, and the funny thing was, mister, that it wasn't our helpin' him against the Chinks that had gone down big with him; it was our goin' to the rescue of the kid in the fuss with the mandarin in the tea house.

"I'll see that they give you a square deal," he promises us.

"Talking about Joey," remarks Doc, "you ought to keep him under control a bit more. You don't want him to grow up a roughneck, drifting bum like me, do you?"

Harbord looked Doc over, and his hard face split in a grin. "Hell, no!" he says.
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