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EVERY WEEK

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# Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

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APRIL 21, 1923

No. 1



## Squaw Mine

BY

Joseph B. Ames

Author of "Moran of Saddle Butte," "The Bladed Barrier," etc.

### CHAPTER I.

#### HATCHETT.

**T**HE little town of Hatchett, hugging the wide bend of Snake River, lay drowsing in the heat of a cloudless midsummer morning. Few people were in sight along the wide, slightly curving main street which paralleled the river bank, and for this Dan Moran was distinctly thankful. His acquaintance here was fairly general, and there were several persons in particular whom, at the present moment, he was exceedingly anxious to avoid. Indeed, save for the necessity of buying certain supplies essential

to their enterprise, he would have been inclined to keep the settlement at a respectful distance, even at the cost of some rough and exceedingly toilsome riding.

Sitting her small, well-made roan beside him, Shirley Rives was oppressed by no such doubts or anxieties. The day was perfect; they had escaped from a situation of great difficulty and hazard and were leaving behind forever conditions which had weighed down her spirits for very many days. Moreover, though she scarcely admitted it even to herself, she found a distinct pleasure in the presence of this big, handsome, competent young man, whom, in spite of whose more than questionable record,



she trusted so entirely. Taken all in all—despite a sleepless, troubled night—she was in the best of spirits. Her eyes sparkled; under the golden tan of her shapely oval face a becoming touch of color glowed. Even this straggling line of log and timber structures, crude and unlovely as they were, seemed to please her.

"Why, it's a metropolis!" she exclaimed, lips parting in a whimsical smile. "It's perfect ages since I've seen anything like this. Makes me think of those red-letter days when I used to go into Louisville to shop. Aren't you thrilled, dad? Or are you afraid I'll run wild and spend all our money in the department stores?"

Colonel Rives chuckled. "Not very. I've been here only once before, but, as I remember, the one general store specializes more on hardware and groceries and cowboy rigging than anything that would tempt you beyond endurance. That's right, isn't it, Moran?"

From under drooping lashes Dan swiftly raked the open door of the saloon they were passing and then glanced sidewise.

"C'rect," he agreed laconically. "It's mostly a man's town, though I reckon you might find a few necessities—if you ain't too particular."

The girl sighed in mock disappointment. "What a shame! And I'd counted on having a gorgeous spurge after all these self-denying months. You mean to say there's only *one* store? What are all those other places then?"

"Saloons mostly and a coupla dance halls. There's a blacksmith shop down the road a ways, an' that joint, with the false front an' tumble-down porch, is a fourth-rate eatin' house. The rest are mostly jest houses."

"But where is everybody? I haven't seen more than six people at the very most, and one of them—that man asleep on the eating-house porch looks more like a sack of meal, with a whiskered

pumpkin sitting on top, than anything I can think of."

Moran grinned, as he pictured Jed Zeek's rage, could he have heard this unflattering description. Already he was aware that the proprietor of The Elite was not asleep at all, but for some moments had been regarding them stealthily from under his dragged-down hat brim. Of this, however, Dan gave no sign. After all he could scarcely have hoped to pass through Hatchett without attracting the observation of this gossipy, inquisitive person, whose whole life seemed devoted to prying into the affairs of others. They would have to make the best of the situation and trust to luck to escape the attention of that other, a much more dangerous individual, whom he had in mind.

"Hatchett don't really wake up till sundown," he answered the girl, pulling up before a narrow, squat building wedged in between the eating house and a long, two-story frame affair which had a more pretentious air than any of the others. "Then's when the boys drift in, an' some nights yuh might almost think yuh were on the gay white way. This is the store."

As he swung out of the saddle and came around to help Miss Rives dismount, he was struck anew with a keen appreciation of her fresh young beauty. In spite of a sleepless night and of all the poignant fears and worries which must have tormented her through the dark hours, her lovely face showed scarcely a trace of fatigue. Her eyes sparkled; her rippling bronze hair was carefully arranged; even the simple blouse looked crisp and fresh. How she had managed it, Moran—conscious suddenly of the two-days stubble disfiguring his chin—could not imagine.

For an instant he found it in his heart to wish that she did not present a figure so daintily feminine and alluring, so completely, almost startlingly out of keeping against this drab and sordid

background. It was going to increase their difficulties, and, too late, he wished he had left the other two outside the town and come in alone to make his purchases. Even at the cost of a long and difficult detour it would have been well worth while.

Moran, however, was not the sort to waste time lamenting his mistakes. A swift, searching glance at the long building to the right of Timmons' store encouraged him. There was no one to be seen either through the open door or at any of the windows. With no appearance of hurry, yet without wasting any time, he tied the horses to the hitching rack and followed the girl and her father into the store.

Awakening from a drowse, Bill Timmons scrambled out of a chair and stumbled forward, his sleep-dulled eyes widening at the sight of the radiant vision confronting him. Being a susceptible person, he fairly fell over himself in his eagerness to attend to Miss Rives' wants, leaving her two male companions to poke about unregarded through his cluttered stock.

Moran was just as well pleased. The nature of the implements and some of the supplies they needed, made it evident that they intended to do some placer mining. Of course it would be necessary for Timmons to look them over while footing up the bill, but Dan had a feeling that, mixed in with other purchases, they wouldn't be quite so noticeable, as if each one had to be hunted out separately by the proprietor.

He went about his work with expedition, and by the time Shirley had finished with her purchases he had assembled the bulk of what they needed in a heap on the floor. To this Timmons added some provisions and one or two other things Dan had not been able to find, and with much scratching of the head he set about adding up the amount. When he finally announced it, Moran was smitten by a sudden conviction.

"Lemme foot it up, will yuh?" he requested briefly. "Seems like quite a lot more'n I expected."

But though he did find two errors in addition, the reduction was so slight as to make little material difference. After a momentary hesitation he drew Colonel Rives to one side.

"Yuh didn't happen to overlook any coin when we pooled our cash this mornin', did yuh, colonel?" he inquired.

"No, suh. You have every dollah I possess."

"I was afraid so," commented Moran. "As it turns out, it ain't enough to pay for this junk by around twenty plunks, an' yet I don't see how we're gonna get along with less."

"There's the—a—gold," suggested Colonel Rives after a momentary pause. "I presume he would accept some of that as payment."

"He shore would, but that's jest what I'm aimin' to avoid. We can get away with that prospector yarn without attractin' no attention; plenty o' men drift off into the mountains every season. But if any of the crowd here get the notion we've already made a strike——"

With an eloquent shrug, he broke off, observed Timmons again in conversation with Miss Rives, and went on in a lower tone:

"Reckon we'll have to chance it, though. We've got to have this stuff, an' after all we don't need to use any o' them big nuggets. Better slip it out while he ain't lookin'."

The older man nodded, shifted his position slightly, and, delving into a capacious pocket, drew forth a medium-sized canvas bag, grimy from much handling and firmly tied about the mouth with rawhide. It was the same bag which had cost John Blake, the prospector, his life, and which, as he lay dying, he had pressed on Shirley Rives, together with the details of his amazing discovery of the famous Lost Squaw

Mine. The colonel's long, thin fingers plucked the knot loose and, with his back to the absorbed Timmons, drew out half a dozen smooth, irregular fragments of yellow metal.

"Will that be enough?" he whispered.

Moran took them. "Plenty," he nodded, appraising them with a practiced eye. "Yuh might start loadin' up, while I settle with him. It's gonna be some job gettin' everythin' on them hawses, but I reckon we can do it."

Shirley turned, as he came up, and, as he caught her eye, Dan telegraphed a silent request that she would continue to devote herself to Timmons. Whether or not she understood his reason, she seemed to catch his meaning and with scarcely a pause went on with her light, airy chatter, to which Timmons, on the other side of the rough counter, listened eagerly, apparently oblivious to everything else. Mechanically he weighed the bits of gold, counted over the worn bills and silver, and made change, his slightly bulging blue eyes returning, fascinated, every other minute to Miss Rives' charming face.

"Yuh may as well stay here outa the sun, while we pack up," Moran told her, concealing his satisfaction under a casual manner. "We won't be more'n ten or fifteen minutes."

Without comment she nodded carelessly, but Moran caught a momentary intelligent flash of her eyes, as he bent to gather up a load. As he passed out into the street, her voice followed him.

"But, how wonderful, Mr. Timmons! I had no idea it was so gay here. Do tell me——"

"Some girl!" reflected Dan grimly. "She's got his number all right. Now if we can only slip away without running into Asher——"

As he worked rapidly with the colonel, fastening up their purchases and lashing them on the backs of the already fairly well-laden spare horses, his spirits began to rise. Zeek had given up all

pretence at slumber and sat tilted back against the wall, a tattered newspaper spread on his fat knees. Not a move escaped him, but, on the other side of the store, Ormsby Asher's dance hall, saloon and gambling place, drowsed in the sun, empty of any sign of life.

"Another five minutes and we'll be on our way," muttered Moran, tying the last knot expertly.

Straightening up he turned and walked swiftly into the store. He had expected Shirley to be ready to depart at once, but apparently she had just spied some gauntlets and was engaged in trying on a pair. Dan could scarcely drag her away from this occupation, nor would it be wise to betray the impatience he felt at even this brief delay. He was thankful enough, however, when he had paid for the gloves, and Shirley, with a friendly good-by to the stricken Timmons, walked with him toward the door.

"Everything's ready for us to start," he explained, "so I reckon we'd better not waste any time gettin' off. I don't know how long——"

He paused abruptly, eyes narrowing a little, muscles about his jaw tightening at the sight of the figure standing composedly beside the hitching rack. Tall and lean he was, with a narrow, wrinkled, hawklike face, dominated by a pair of coldly brilliant eyes. And, somehow, to Dan the mere sight of that gaunt shape, clad in a black frock coat, the narrow string tie showing above a shirt front of immaculate whiteness, seemed to bring an actual chill note into the sunlit, summer picture.

## CHAPTER II.

ORMSBY ASHER.

MORAN'S instinctive halt was only momentary; the outward sign of his disquiet was no more than a flash of light across his hastily composed face.

"Hello, Asher," he drawled, moving



toward the older man, with every appearance of pleasure at the encounter. "I was jest goin' to look yuh up. How's tricks?"

Ormsby Asher's gaze, which had been fixed on Shirley Rives, shifted to Moran's face. "About as usual," he returned slowly. "Haven't seen you around Hatchett in some time, have I?"

Moran lowered one eye significantly. His brain was working swiftly, and already he had decided on the one possible line to take with Asher.

"Been pretty busy over at Saddle Butte," he returned easily.

"Ah!" Asher stroked his long black mustache with a lean, attenuated, blue-veined hand, on one finger of which sparkled a diamond of unusual size and fire. His slightly narrowed eyes flashed momentarily to the girl and back again. "Introduce me to your friends," he suggested smoothly.

Though disliking the necessity, Dan complied readily enough.

"Colonel, meet Ormsby Asher, the king pin of Hatchett. Miss Rives—Mr. Asher."

Asher shook hands with the Southerner and turning to the girl removed his wide-brimmed black hat, revealing a smooth, glistening expanse of dark hair liberally sprinkled with gray. This time his clasp was more prolonged, and Moran, watching Shirley, noticed that she stiffened a little, the color deepening in her face.

"Delighted, ma'am," said Asher in a smooth, purring voice. "This is an unexpected pleasure. I hope you're going to spend a little time in town!"

Shirley hesitated, and Moran made haste to answer.

"Not jest now. We're on our way to Thunder Creek, but I reckon we'll be back an' forth considerable in the next month or so."

The immobility of Asher's long, thin face scarcely altered, but the searching, speculative glance he bent on Moran

was tinged with veiled suspicion. Dan returned it steadily, his expression ingenuous and open.

"I see," murmured the older man. Appraisingly he glanced sidewise at the laden pack horses. "Sorry we can't entertain you, ma'am," he went on to Shirley, who had stepped over to her horse. "We'll have to make up for that later. Allow me."

The girl had already turned her stirrup, but, before she could do more, Asher was at her side, assisting her into the saddle. As she gathered up the reins, he turned to Moran.

"I'll have a word with you before you go," he said briefly.

Dan made no objection, and the two walked over to a patch of shade cast by the projecting front of Timmons' store. Timmons himself stood in the doorway, regarding them curiously, but Asher's voice was pitched too low to carry even that short distance.

"Well?" he questioned briefly. "What's the game?"

Moran did not pretend to misunderstand him. He smiled slightly and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I had a little run in with 'Spike' an' decided to hit the trail," he explained.

"H'm! But who are these people? Where'd you meet up with 'em? Where are you going and—what for?"

Moran had been expecting the question and was ready with his answer. He knew Asher, and he had not missed that flashing sidelong glance at the loads carried by the two pack horses, the nature of which was only too readily apparent.

"They're from the South, I understand," he returned with an air of ready frankness. "He's out here for his health. They been livin' the other side of the range, between here an' Clayton. The ol' man's been playin' around prospectin', mostly to pass the time, I expect, but so far he ain't met up with anythin'



riotous. When I run into 'em a couple days ago, he got to askin' me about likely places an' all that. One thing led to another, an' finally he made me an offer to take 'em through the Thunder Creek country an' stick with 'em a spell." Dan paused to glance over his shoulder and then gave a chuckle. "Seein' as I was headin' in that direction, I didn't mind bein' paid for it," he concluded, straddling his legs and hooking both thumbs into his chap belt.

Asher caressed his mustache meditatively, his steady glance fixed intently on Moran's face.

"He'd got money then?" he mused aloud.

"Must have some. He forked out a month's pay, which was all the time I agreed to give him. I'm sick of brandin' an' drivin' steers to Silvertown an' takin' Spike Mogridge's back talk. It'll be a nice rest."

The pause which followed was so prolonged that Dan found it difficult to retain his bland and careless expression under the other's searching stare. What was passing, he wondered uneasily, behind those hard, brilliant, calculating eyes? Would Asher accept his explanation, or would he probe deeper? He was not afraid of the man himself, in spite of the gambler's unsavory reputation. But if Asher ever found out where they really were heading for, and why, his influence with the distinctly hard crowd that made Hatchett their headquarters, would make him an even greater menace to their plans than the Saddle Butte outlaws.

Suddenly Asher's tall, gaunt frame relaxed, and he raised one shaggy eyebrow in a characteristic manner. "You'll be ridin' in soon," he said in a confidential undertone. "Thunder Creek ain't so far off. Find out a little more about the old buck, and how we heeled he is. Then come and see me."

Without waiting for a reply he turned and walked back toward the hitching

rack, thus missing a sudden hard glint which flashed irresistibly into Moran's gray eyes. Dan banished it with a deliberate effort, but, as he followed the gambler, a faint touch of color tinged the clear bronze of his clean-cut face.

"Like nothing, I will!" he told himself angrily. "I shore would admire to put yuh wise to jest what's passin' through my mind, yuh sneakin' polecat!"

But the realization that he had apparently gained his point and dulled the gambler's suspicions, caused Moran's irritation quickly to ebb. After all to have beaten Ormsby Asher at his own game of deceit, was much more satisfying than giving way to mere purposeless temper. And the thought of Asher's rage when, after a week or two of silence, he investigated the neighborhood of Thunder Creek to find no trace whatever of the little party, warmed the cockles of Dan's heart.

The farewells were brief—no longer, indeed, than it took Moran to untie the horses and swing into the saddle. Shirley seemed particularly eager to be off, though Dan noticed that she replied pleasantly enough to Asher's soft-voiced remarks. But, as she set off down the street between the two men, her cheeks were tinged with unwonted color, and her lips set firmly.

Standing motionless beside the hitching rack, Asher's inscrutable glance followed the trio for a moment or two. Then he took a cigar from his vest pocket and, biting off the end, thrust it between his lips. As he was feeling for a match, his glance encountered that of Bill Timmons, whose pale-blue eyes expressed unusual interest and alertness.

"Some dame, I'll tell the world!" stated the storekeeper emphatically.

Asher made no comment. When his cigar was lighted, he crossed the strip of hard-packed earth and paused beside the open door.

"What's they buy, Bill?" he inquired succinctly.

Timmons stared. "Who? Them? Why—er——" He scratched his head and looked a trifle foolish. "Why, it was some canned good an'—a—shells an' a coupla coils o' rope, an'——"

"Didn't I see a shovel and a pick in that pack?" interrupted Asher.

"Why shore! I clean forgot them. They got a coupla pans, too. Reckon they must be gonna prospect some'ers. Wonder where Moran picked 'em up? Thought he was over to——"

He paused, struck by a curious expression on Asher's face, and mechanically followed the direction of the gambler's fixed gaze. For a moment he could not see what there was inside the store to attract the older man's attention. Then he discovered that, instead of putting away the money Moran had given him, he had left it lying on the rough counter within plain sight of the door.

"Gosh darn it!" he grunted, turning abruptly back into the store. "I thought I put that in the drawer."

On a ragged scrap of paper, to one side of the bills and loose silver, lay the six smooth bits of gold, scarcely larger than grains of rice. Timmons' conscience smote him, as he realized how easily a gust of wind might have scattered them, and he was reaching out hastily, when Asher's fingers closed about his wrist.

"Where'd you get that?"

"What? The gold? Why, Moran give it to me in part payment for the stuff he bought. Yuh don't mean to say it—it ain't—the real thing?"

Asher, who had taken up one of the pieces and was examining it closely, returned it to the paper.

"Looks all right to me," he said curtly, a look of thoughtful speculation in his cold eyes. "Did Moran have it in his clothes, or did he get it from the old man?"

Timmons looked blank. "Yuh got me, Orms. Moran handed it over with the

rest o' the coin. I dunno how he come by it. How would I?"

Asher gave a disgusted snort. "You don't know much, and that's a fact," he said acidly. "Truth is, you were so busy gaping at that girl, it's wonder to me you could make change. I'll bet they didn't pay for half the junk they took away."

Leaving Timmons to consider this unpleasant possibility at leisure, he left the store and, walking rapidly down the street, entered the gambling hall. The room, which was long and low, with a bar across one end and a number of tables set around the sides, was unoccupied, save for a blond young man in his shirt sleeves, who sat with his feet on a table, reading a tattered magazine.

"Where's Foss?" demanded Asher, pausing in front of him.

As "Blondy" Jessup looked up, something in his employer's eyes wiped the expression of boredom from his fresh, pink face.

"Out back, I reckon. Anythin' wrong? Want me to hollar for him?"

"No," returned Asher curtly. "I'll go myself."

Pushing through a swinging door at one side of the bar, he traversed a short, narrow hallway and passed into the open at the rear of the building.

A barn and several smaller sheds stood there, and beside them was a well-made corral, containing half a dozen horses. Squatting in the shade of the range of buildings, deftly plying a harness needle to the ripped skirt of a saddle propped in front of him, was a man of twenty-eight or so, slight, though full of chest, wiry, with a skin tanned to leather, and muscular, capable brown hands. As Asher appeared, he raised his eyes without lifting his head and followed the gambler's approach across the yard.

"How soon can you hit the trail?" inquired Asher without preamble, as he paused in front of the other.

"Five minutes," returned Foss McCoy with equal brevity.

"Good. You know Moran from Saddle Butte?"

McCoy nodded.

"Well, he's just left here heading west with an old party named Rives, his daughter, and two pack horses. Says he's going to Thunder Creek to prospect. I want to know if he's telling me the truth."

McCoy stabbed the needle into the leather and rose to his feet, with a lithe movement of the hips. Erect he looked taller and more lank. A curious ridged scar slanting downward from one corner of his mouth, gave his face an unpleasant, almost sinister cast.

"I get yuh!" he said tersely, pulling his hat forward over a mop of sandy hair. "You'll have to come acrost, Orms. I'm stoney."

Without comment Asher drew out a roll of bills, peeled off several, and handed them to his henchman.

"Don't let him know you're trailing him," he cautioned. "And don't come back 'till you've got something to tell. If they settle down at Thunder Creek, all right. If not, I want to know where they're going, and what they're after. And, Foss, remember they call that feller 'Lightning'."

McCoy's lips twisted in a crooked smile, and he hitched up his cartridge belt. "Don't worry none," he shrugged. "I ain't so slow m'self. Well, I'll saddle up an' cut stick."

Asher nodded and moved slowly toward the house. At the door he paused to knock the ash from his cigar and glanced toward the corral. For a moment he stood watching the swift, efficient movements of his henchman. Then his lids narrowed, and his lips curled briefly in a smile of satisfaction. Re-entering the big room he paused at the corner of the bar and consulted his watch.

"Nell Driscoll been in this morning?"

Blondy Jessup, polishing an already sufficiently clean glass, shrugged his shoulders. "Haven't seen her," he returned.

"H'm! She was to be here before noon. After dinner you better straddle a cayuse and slide out there. Tell her I've got to see her some time to-day about her father's estate."

Blondy's blue eyes widened. "Estate! What do yuh mean by that, Orms? Ol' Rafe Driscoll didn't leave nothin' but debts. He went an' drank up every cent he had, right alongside this here bar. Yuh got a mortgage on the house an' contents, ain't yuh?"

For a long moment Asher stood regarding him in silence. Then he took the cigar from his mouth and daintily flicked away the ash.

"You can start right after dinner and be back in about an hour," he commented gently.

Jessup flushed, and his lids fluttered uneasily under that steady, penetrating stare.

"Aw' right, aw' right," he muttered. "I—I'll tell her."

Asher quirked one eyebrow and, stepping behind the bar, poured himself a small drink, delicately adding a dash of water.

"I thought you would," he murmured.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE FACE IN THE WINDOW.

NONE of the three spoke until they were well clear of the last house. Then Shirley turned suddenly to Moran, her face still faintly flushed.

"What a perfectly hateful man!" she declared emphatically. "There's something about him that gives me the shivers."

"I'm mighty glad yuh didn't show it," said Moran approvingly. "Yuh shore backed up my hand to the queen's taste. For a coupla minutes I sorta had cold feet, wonderin' if yu'd catch on."



"About the man in the store, you mean? I guessed, of course, that you wanted me to keep his attention occupied. Wasn't he silly?" She giggled at the recollection, and then her face grew serious. "But, Asher—there was no premeditation about that, I assure you. I treated him as decently as I could because—well, he—he frightened me, somehow."

"He's mean all through an' dangerous," declared Moran. "He practically owns Hatchett, an' he's the head of a gang that's got the Saddle Butte crowd beat a mile."

He paused, flushing at the sudden recollection of his own recent connection with that very gang, and he shot a swift sidelong glance at the girl's face. What he saw there seemed to restore his self-confidence.

"I reckon they're worse, jest because they ain't so raw," he went on thoughtfully. "Asher's got a grip on all the town officials, and they say even the sheriff's in with the bunch. They get away with murder under cover of the law, an' at a pinch they ain't none too particular about stickin' at even that."

"I see," commented Colonel Rives. "That was why you were so friendly with the gentleman."

"You said it! I made a big mistake bringin' yuh two into town at all. I'd oughta have known better, but goin' around would have meant an extra two days of mighty hard travelin', so I took a chance of slippin' through without his seein' us. Trouble was this happened to be one of his days for gettin' up early."

"But what did it really matter, if he did see us?" demanded Shirley. "Surely people just passing through the town aren't in any danger from him."

Moran met her glance steadily, a little whimsical twinkle in his clear, gray eyes.

"To begin with, people like you don't pass through Hatchett very often," he told her quietly. "Beside which, he's known me before as one of the bunch

from Saddle Butte. The combination right away set him thinkin'. He decided I was up to some crooked game on my own an' expected I'd try an' hide it from him. He couldn't help see some of the stuff we'd packed—those picks an' shovels give us away right off—so I had to make up a yarn that would fit the fact without lettin' slip anythin' that was really important. I told him a good yarn, an' I think he bit," he concluded, "though it's mighty hard to tell jest what's goin' on back of Orms Asher's iron face. O' course we ain't goin' within forty miles of Thunder Creek; that's way off to the northeast. He may get suspicious later, but, if he only lays off us for twenty-four hours, I'll gamble we'll be so well lost back in the Rattlesnake Hills that he'll need an airplane to find us."

"If that's the case, I should say we'd be to'ably safe from the attentions of this gentleman," observed Colonel Rives. "I was watching him rather closely, and he didn't look to me like a man whose suspicions were aroused."

"He wouldn't?" commented Dan grimly. "Like I said, he ain't showin' his hand—any. Still, no use losin' sleep over it. I wouldn't fret none at all if yuh an' me was on our own."

"In other words, you wish I wasn't along," put in Shirley quickly.

"Well, no—I wouldn't go so far's to say quite that," drawled Moran, his eyes twinkling.

"Perhaps not, but I dare say you're thinking it. Dad, speak up and take my part. Tell this—this doubtful person how used I am to roughing it, how well I can cook, and all the rest of it. You've said so to me often enough. Why, I even seem to remember an occasion when you called me a bright ray of sunshine around the house—though it was only a cabin."

"Quite so, my dear; I admit all of that," returned her father dryly. "The trouble is that where we're heading for



there isn't any cabin, or anything approaching a shelter. Of course I'm not suggesting that you leave us; there's no place for you to go. Moran and I can put up with anything, but you——"

"Nonsense!" cut in the girl emphatically. "One might think I was a delicate, hothouse flower. It's summer, and it doesn't take long to put up a shelter. Besides, I can stand as much as you any day, dad, so there! Almost anything, in fact," she added frankly, "except being starved to death."

"I know," declared Moran, on whom she had cast a pointed glance. "I'm hollow to the heels, myself. If yuh can hold out for another mile, we'll stop at Rafe Driscoll's place an' get him to rustle us some chuck. We could open a coupla cans right here, but I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to drop in on Rafe an' let slip the news we're headin' for Thunder Creek. It'll get back to Asher quick enough. Rafe spends his spare time—which is consid'able—loafin' around the saloons in Hatchett, an' after a few drinks he's liable to spill out everything that's on his mind."

"Perhaps he won't be home."

"It ain't likely he's started the rounds this early. Anyhow, if he's away, Nell 'll treat us right."

Miss Rives raised her eyebrows. "Nell?"

"His daughter. She's a nice kid—a whole lot too good for that rummy. Yuh can see the house now—jest beyond that bunch o' cotton woods."

They had just rounded a sharp bend in the trail, which followed the curve of the river and now lay ahead of them for a considerable distance, in an almost straight line. Following the direction Moran indicated, Shirley had no difficulty in picking out the low, log structure nestling against a background of green. It seemed an attractive site for a home, she thought, facing the placid river, with its marching growth of red willows and cottonwoods. Behind it

lay sun-drenched meadows which reached to the base of the rugged, pine-clad hills, three miles or more away, that formed the western boundary of this wide fertile basin, of which Hatchett was the center.

As they drew nearer, Shirley regarded the cabin with interest, speculating as to the character of its occupants. Remembering what Moran had said of Rafe Driscoll, she was not surprised to note the tumbledown condition of the house and smaller outbuildings. There was a general air of shiftlessness about the whole place which was mitigated only by a well-tended flower bed across the front and a mass of sturdy morning glories, covered with brilliant blue and pink blossoms, clambering over one window.

"The girl, of course," thought Shirley, as she followed Moran's example and dismounted. "Poor thing! What a life she must lead. Is it a ranch?" she inquired aloud.

"Used to be. They tell me Rafe had a good payin' proposition when he first started, but it's pretty much gone to pot. Last time I was here, he had only three, four horses an' a few head o' cattle left."

He rapped briskly on the closed door, and to Shirley the sound seemed to reverberate through the house, with a curious hollow emptiness. Both windows, she noticed, were tightly closed.

"It looks as if there wasn't anybody home," she commented, when a minute or two had passed in silence.

Dan nodded, but rapped again. An instant later Shirley, happening to glance toward the window above which the morning glories clustered, was aware of a face staring at her through the small-paned, wavering glass. A rather thin, oval face it was, shadowed by a wide hat brim; but, before Shirley had time to notice any further details, it vanished.

"Why!" she cried out in surprise. "There is some one——"

Abruptly she broke off, as the door swung slowly open, and a girl stood on the threshold. A very pretty girl indeed, Shirley decided at once, in spite of the dusky shadows under her blue eyes and a curious, unnatural pallor which seemed to bring out certain sharp lines—one might have thought them hard, even tense—about her shapely mouth and chin.

"Howdy!" Moran greeted her pleasantly. "I thought— Say, yuh jest goin' out, ain't yuh?"

"I was."

The girl's voice was low and husky. As she spoke, her gaze shifted for an instant from Moran to Shirley Rives. It was the briefest possible glance, yet it was enough to make Shirley catch her breath, so strained and hunted was the expression she read in those blue depths.

"We—we won't bother yuh then," said Moran hesitatingly. "I jest thought mebbe we could get a bite to eat, but I s'pose yore father ain't home?"

The girl's eyes widened, and her pallor vanished before a flood of crimson which surged to the very roots of her striking hair—hair so exquisitely fair that it had passed the golden state and shone with a pale, silvery luster. For an instant she stood stricken, staring at Moran with startled surprise and incredulity.

"My father!" she repeated at length in a strange tone. Again she hesitated briefly and bit her lip. "Why, he—he's been dead a month."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE EVIL SHADOW.

**I**T was Shirley who broke the momentary shocked silence which followed the announcement.

"Oh!" she cried impulsively. "Oh—my dear!"

Dan's jaw dropped, and the color deepened under his tan. "I shore am sorry, Nell," he told the girl awkwardly.

"I—I hadn't heard a word about it. Haven't been near Hatchett in three, four months, yuh know."

She took his proffered hand. "It had to come, I s'pose," she said, a touch of bitterness in her voice. "You know the way he—he—"

"Uh-huh," said Moran, as she paused. "It shore is a rotten shame. Well, we won't bother yuh none, Nell. We can easy camp out along the road."

He was turning away, when the girl suddenly halted him.

"You'll do no such thing," she said quickly. "I'm not in such a rush I can't stop and cook a bite o' dinner. You come right in—all of you. Perhaps you'd better put the horses in the corral first."

Watching her, Shirley was bewildered at the surprising transformation. She spoke firmly and decisively. The pallor had vanished from her face, which glowed with a delicate wild-rose pink. Her eyes had quite lost that strained, hunted look; there was relief—yes, actual relief—in their clear depths.

"Are you quite certain——" protested Miss Rives.

"Of course, I am. It won't be a mite o' trouble. Though I'm not sure"—her color deepened a trifle—"there's very much in the house just now."

"If that's all, we can help out easily," said Shirley suddenly making up her mind. "We've plenty of canned things and bacon and—— Dad, get some canned corn and bacon and coffee out of the pack, will you, before you take the horses around."

Colonel Rives complied, and, with her arms full, Shirley followed Nell Driscoll, who had gone ahead, she said, to start a fire. But, as Shirley stepped into the kitchen a few minutes later, Nell was just coming out of another room, the door of which she closed sharply behind her.

Wondering a little, Shirley set down her bundles, and the two at once kindled a fire in the range and started to prepare

the meal. It was very quickly evident that even in this short interval Nell Driscoll's attitude had changed again. She talked spasmodically, asking no questions of the other girl, showing little curiosity in her presence here or ultimate destination, seeming, indeed, absorbed in her own thoughts. But every movement was almost feverishly swift, as if, Shirley thought, in spite of the careless chatter with which she strove to fill the awkward pauses, the girl was frantically anxious for the meal to be over so that she could get away.

Puzzled and a little troubled, Shirley did her best to hurry things, and between them the cooking was finished with uncommon dispatch. As soon as the other dishes were on the table, she left Nell to remove the bacon from the skillet and turned toward the back door to summon the two men, who were outside talking. She had scarcely taken three steps, when a stifled gasp made her turn swiftly.

Close to one end of the stove a window overlooked the long straight stretch of trail leading back to Hatchett. Out of this window Nell was staring, face pallid, eyes dilated and full of terror.

"Oh!" she moaned. "O-h!"

Shirley flew across the room. "What is it?" she cried, peering over the girl's rigid shoulder.

A man was loping toward the cabin along the sunlit trail—young, handsome and very blond. He looked harmless enough, and Shirley, getting no answer to her question, repeated it. Nell turned and looked into her face.

"I'm afraid," she whispered in a stricken voice.

"Afraid! Of him? What do you mean? What can he— Why, D—Dan's here, and dad. Surely you don't think they'd stand still and let any one—"

Nell moistened her lips. "You don't understand. He's Blondy Jessup, one of Asher's men."

In spite of her assurance, a little chill crept over Shirley's spine. Asher! Vividly she recalled a certain expression in those coldly brilliant eyes, as they had looked her up and down that morning, and some of her bright color faded.

"But—but what's he want?"

Nell turned and looked at her steadily. "Jessups? Nothing. He's been sent, that's all, to get me to come down to Hatchett. I know."

Shirley's hands clenched, and her lips tightened. "But—but how— A place like this! Surely there are people who—who would prevent—"

"You don't know Ormsby Asher," the girl told her bitterly. "He owns the town and always, some way or other, gets what he wants. That's what makes me so afraid. That's why—" She hesitated an instant and then went on recklessly. "I may as well say it. When you came, I had my horse saddled and was all ready to run away. If only I'd gone—"

She broke off with a half sob. Shirley, her eyes fixed on the approaching Jessup, was thinking rapidly.

"Couldn't you put him off?" she asked presently. "Say you'll ride in after dinner, and then— Or, if you couldn't get rid of him that way, Moran and dad could hold him up and— and leave him here tied up, while we— Perhaps that's the best way after all. I'll call them, and—"

As she turned, Nell caught her arm. "Wait," she urged in a firmer voice. "I've got an idea. I just remembered. You dish up the bacon, an' let me talk to him."

Already Jessup had reached the front of the cabin and was leisurely dismounting. As Shirley mechanically forked the bacon out of the skillet, marveling a little at Nell's sudden courage, she anxiously watched the girl step toward the door. A moment later Blondy stood on the threshold, his bold eyes sweeping the room in evident surprise.



"Hello, Nell!" he said, though his glance was fixed approvingly on Shirley Rives. "Ain't yuh had dinner yet."

"I've got company, an' we're a little late," returned the girl evenly. She stood close to the door, so that it was impossible, without crowding around her, for Jessup to step into the room. "Anything special you wanted?"

The man gave a slightly irritated laugh. "Well, yes, there is," he returned shortly. "Seems like yuh might ask a fellah to come in an' set down, after ridin' all the way out here."

"I didn't know you needed asking," retorted the girl, with a very realistic imitation of a smile. "Come in of course, if you want to. Moran's out back waitin' for dinner. I was just goin' to call him in."

Shirley, fussing at the table, saw the man give a little start, swiftly suppressed, and straighten slightly.

"Moran?" he repeated. "Yuh mean—Dan Moran?"

"Sure," nodded Nell, a touch almost of malice in her sweet voice. "Come on in an' have dinner with us."

Instead of acquiescing, Blondy took a quick step backward. "'Fraid I can't to-day," he said hastily. "I was jest kiddin' when I said that. I've et already, an' I gotta get back to tend bar. Asher wanted I should ask yuh to come in an'—an' see him this afternoon. He wants yuh 'special about—about yore dad's estate."

"Oh!" Nell's hands, hanging at her sides, clenched spasmodically, but her voice did not falter. "I was coming this mornin', but I got held up. Tell him I'll be in as soon as I get things washed up. By—three o'clock, anyhow."

"Aw right." Blondy was already swinging into the saddle. "Yuh'll shorely come? He says it's important."

The girl swallowed hard and caught the edge of the door jamb with one hand. "Oh, yes," she called after him, "I'll surely come."

With a thud of hoofs Jessup flashed past the window. Nell turned a white face on Shirley.

"You see," she whispered. "I knew it was something like that. 'He's——'"

She broke off, as Moran darted into the room and crossed swiftly to the end window.

"Who was that?" he demanded. "Huh! Blondy Jessup!" he exclaimed before Nell could answer. He turned a puzzled face toward the girl. "What in thunder was that four-flusher doin' here?"

Nell's color deepened slightly, but without faltering she told him what had happened.

"I remembered hearing, the last time you were here, that you an' he had a run in, an' he got the worst of it," she concluded. "That's why I told him you were outside. But for that he'd have stayed an' made sure I—I rode into Hatchett. Asher——" She paused, biting her lips. "He's been pestering me ever since—I'm afraid of him, and when you came, I was all ready to run away."

"Away? From here? Yuh mean yuh'd leave yore home an' everythin' an' beat it because of him?"

Nell laughed mirthlessly. "It isn't my home. Dad had it mortgaged up to the hilt, an' Asher owns everything. But, even if it wasn't that way, I—I'd go."

Moran's eyes narrowed. "Where to?" "I—I don't know exactly. I thought I'd go first to the Bar S. Mrs. Haight's been a good friend to me the few times we've met, and she hates Asher. She'd take me in, I'm sure, 'till I could think what to do."

"The Bar S! Why, that's over on the edge of the Rattlesnake Hills. We're headin' in that direction. Yuh could come along with us."

He paused, flashing an inquiring glance at Shirley, who nodded ready acquiescence.



"Of course," she agreed. "That's the very thing. But hadn't we better eat our dinner before it's cold?"

"We had," said Moran. "An' we don't want to lose any time tuckin' it away, either. Blondy's a poor prune, but he ain't quite ready for the bug house. He'll spill out everythin' he's seen, the minute he gets back to town, an' yuh can't tell what notions that'll put into Asher's head. Sooner we fan the breeze from here the better."

## CHAPTER V.

### RESENTMENT.

NO time was lost following his suggestion. They did not even wait to clean up, but the moment dinner was finished Nell fetched from the next room a bundle containing the few personal belongings she had already packed up. Her horse stood in the corral saddled, and they mounted and were off.

About three miles beyond the cabin the trail forked. One branch continued westward, while the other turned abruptly to the right, following the curve of the river. The latter branch led toward Thunder Creek, and Moran followed it for nearly two miles to a point where a spine of exposed rock cut across it. Here, under his direction, the whole party left the trail and pushed through the brush in a southwesterly direction which would bring them out at length into that rougher, mountainous track leading toward the Bar S and the Rattlesnake Hills.

It was hard going, and they made slow progress. Indeed, Colonel Rives mildly questioned the necessity of wasting so much time and effort to hide their trail. But Moran had his own reasons for acting in this fashion.

As a matter of fact, that pleasant sense of having pulled the wool over Ormsby Asher's eyes had been of short duration. Instinct, coupled with a past knowledge of the man, told him that the

brains of that band of sleek crooks and criminals which dominated Hatchett, was not to be so easily deceived, and the appearance of Blondy Jessup served merely to strengthen his doubts. He could not quite believe that Asher's henchman had come all this way merely to bring that message to Nell Driscoll, though of course it might be barely possible. At all events it put him even more on his guard, made him remember that there were others beside Jessup ready and eager at all times to obey Ashe's behest, caused him at every favorable elevation or other point of vantage to keep a close, though unobtrusive, lookout toward the rear.

But even his keen eyes detected nothing in the least suspicious. If they were being followed, the unknown individual was using extraordinary skill and cleverness to remain unseen. Dan would very much have liked to take reassurance from this apparent proof that he was wrong, but somehow it gave him little real comfort.

It was nearly four o'clock when they gained the other trail and set their faces toward the rugged hills and rocky slopes, most of them covered by a heavy forest growth, which loomed up to the westward.

Through this increasingly rough wilderness the narrow track twisted its sinuous way. Unlike the lower trail it was not a thoroughfare, leading only to the Bar S and one or two smaller outfits beyond. And, since the owners of these ranches preferred to ship their cattle from Fanning, a flourishing railroad town in the next county, beyond the sphere of Ormsby Asher's influence, it was little used.

The sun had slid down behind the jagged sky line, when the little party halted on the rim of a long and very narrow valley which spread its attenuated length of verdure between two irregular lines of rocky hills, which were almost mountains. To the southward

especially the jagged outlines of piled granite, some of them gaunt and bare, others clothed with a heavy growth of spruce and pine and cedar, rose, tier on tier, in intricate confusion. Here and there an isolated peak glided fantastically by the dying sun, was etched boldly against the sky line. Moran's eyes sparkled, as he realized that somewhere in that chaotic wilderness lay the source of the Moon River, and with it that rich treasure they had come to seek.

Slow and tedious was the descent into the Bar S valley, but the worst was over when they gained the level. It was not quite dark when they pulled up before a comfortable and commodious ranch house which, with its accompanying sheds and bunk house and other buildings, nestled close to the foot of the Rattlesnake Hills. From the rear door a bristling terrier rushed out, yelping hysterically. He was closely followed by a tall, broad-shouldered person in boots and overalls and wearing a wide-brimmed felt hat. Until she spoke, Shirley and her father quite failed to realize that it was Mrs. Haight.

"Howdy," she greeted them in a deep, mellow voice, peering through the dusk. "Pat! Quit that racket!" She made a threatening sweep of her hand at the dog. "Climb down, strangers, an'—Why, land sake! If it ain't Nell Driscoll!"

Nell slid out of her saddle and approached the older woman. For a few minutes she spoke rapidly in a low tone, her explanations punctuated at intervals by an angry rumble from Mrs. Haight.

"Why, shore yuh can!" exclaimed the latter at length. "Stay as long as yuh like; I'll be plumb glad to have yore comp'ny. Yuh needn't be scared o' that snake Asher, neither. I shore would admire to have him come snoopin' around the Bar S. He'd get his come-uppins, believe me. What about your friends? Ain't they comin' in?"

Shirley, who was the nearest, met her  
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glance with a smile. "We'd be awfully glad to," she said promptly. They had discussed the question along the way and decided that they might bespeak Mrs. Haight's hospitality for the night at least. "If you could put us up over night, without too much trouble——"

"Shucks! No trouble at all. Yo're welcome. It ain't of'en anybody drops in, an' I'm mighty glad to have yuh. Come right in, an' we'll start supper, while yore men look after the nags."

She turned toward the open door, the others following. On the threshold she halted, her strong, wholesome, weather-beaten face clearly outlined in the mellow glow streaming from the lighted room.

"The corral's jest a step down the slope, this side o' the bunk house," she explained, glancing toward the two men. "If yuh need any help or want anythin', get one o' the boys——"

Abruptly she broke off, her narrowing gaze fixed intently on Moran, whose face was for the first time really visible.

"Why—why—yuh——" She broke off in puzzled surprise. Suddenly recognition flashed into her snapping eyes, and her face hardened. "Yuh're Moran from Saddle Butte," she said harshly.

"You've hit the li'le black bull's-eye, ma'am," drawled Dan quietly, though he felt the color rising into his face. "From is right."

"But what——" Mrs. Haight paused, her keen suspicious glance flashing from one face to another. It came to rest on Shirley, who had dismounted, and, lingering there a space, softened somewhat. "Waal, you'd better put the horses up," she ended curtly and, turning, thumped into the kitchen.

In silence Moran took the bridle of Shirley's roan and rode off toward the corral, Colonel Rives following with the two other horses. By this time it was so dark that a lantern was necessary, and the curious looks and chilly manner of the men in the bunk house, whither

Dan went to get one, did not tend to restore his good humor. He was sensible enough to realize that the behavior of Mrs. Haight and her punchers was no more than natural. They had known him only as a member of a gang of outlaws and cattle thieves who were a scourge to the neighboring country—as an ally, if not a friend, of Ormsby Asher, with whom the whole outfit was continually at odds. How could he expect to be treated otherwise than with cold suspicion?

But for all that he felt sore and disgruntled, as he and Colonel Rives unsaddled, fed and watered the horses almost in silence. Had he not genuinely given up the old life and turned against his former associates totally and completely—even to the extent of raising up a dozen or more bitter enemies, any one of whom would undoubtedly shoot him on sight? What more could he do? And where was the justice in treating him still as if he were an outcast, not fit for association with decent people? Into the colonel's abstraction he read a new reserve, if not suspicion, and, as the two walked back to the ranch house, Dan's mind was full of bitterness and sharp resentment.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SEPARATION.

WHAT he found there did not tend to soothe his troubled spirit. Mrs. Haight stood over the stove, lips compressed and eyes determined. Nell's pretty, tanned face was uneasy and uncertain. Shirley, flushed and rebellious, stood beside the neatly spread table. As the men entered, she flushed a swift glance at Moran, but looked away before he could read the expression in her brown eyes.

"Talkin' me over," thought Dan, his lips curling slightly. "Well, they're shore welcome to."

The sense of restraint, so plainly evi-

denced, lasted throughout the meal, which was presently served. There was little conversation, and it was spasmodic and palpably forced. Moran made no effort to ease the situation. His sore resentment gained strength and force, and, by the time the table was cleared and the dishes cleaned up, he was ready at the slightest provocation to fling up the whole business on which they were embarked. For a moment he thought that provocation was coming, as Mrs. Haight clattered the last dish onto a shelf beside the stove and turned toward them, her square, weather-beaten face resolute and determined.

"The girls have been tellin' me what yore plannin' for," she said, eying Moran squarely. "I ain't got nothin' to say about you two men goin' off into the mountains prospectin', no matter how much of a fool business I may think it is. But this I will say: It ain't fit for a young girl to trapse off into the wilds with two men, even if one of 'em is her father. She'd much better stay right here an' keep Nell an' me comp'ny."

So that was it! He wasn't to be trusted with the girl! Moran bit his lips and with an effort refrained from giving voice to what was in his mind. Colonel Rives stared at his hostess in surprise and swiftly growing approval.

"You mean you'd be willing to have her stay here with you?" he asked doubtfully. "It might be weeks or even months before——"

"That's nothing to me," cut in Mrs. Haight, subsiding heavily into a stout chair. "There's plenty o' room, an' I'll be right glad to have her. She may find it dull"—with a significant glance at Shirley—"but it'd be a great sight better for her than campin' out in that rough, wild——"

"It isn't that, Mrs. Haight," broke in Shirley, turning her flushed, troubled face toward the older woman. "It would be lovely here, and I know I shouldn't have a dull minute. I'm aw-



fully grateful to you, too, for thinking of taking me in this way. But I'm used to roughing it, and I'm sure I could be of help to father and—er—Mr. Moran by cooking and—well, lots of ways. Dad's all I've got, and we haven't been separated for—”

“But my dear,” interrupted Colonel Rives, “don't you see how much better an arrangement this would be. All along we've worried a good deal at the thought of the hardships you'd have to go through. I'd miss you, of course—miss you a great deal. But my mind would be much easier, knowing that you were safe and comfortable here with Mrs. Haight.”

“Jest what I been sayin',” declared the older woman with satisfaction. “I'm glad to see yuh got that much sense, colonel. Well, that's settled, praise be! Now we can set down comfortable an' enjoy the evenin'. There ain't been anybody drop in for weeks, an' I'm sorta parched for news. What's been goin' on in Hatchett, Nell? How's Mis' Stebbins, an' what come o' that sister o' her's who was on from Clayton for a visit?”

Shirley's lips parted impulsively, but, as she took in the solid, competent, determined air of her hostess, her protest remained unuttered. With a helpless little movement of her shoulders she glanced swiftly toward Moran, only to find his gaze fixed sullenly on the floor.

For an instant she stood hesitating, a faint flush creeping up into her face. Then abruptly heedless of Mrs. Haight's open disapproval and of Nell Driscoll's scantily veiled curiosity, she swiftly crossed the room and paused before him. Unerringly she seemed to sense the cause of his discontent.

“I'm sorry,” she said in a low tone. “I told her that you—you had left Saddle Butte for good, but she—she—”

“She's certain shore I'm out to skin yuh an' yore dad, I'll bet,” put in Dan, a touch of hardness in his voice. “I

expect she's told you I was jest lyin' so as to get the best of you two. Ain't that right?”

Shirley's lids dropped under the direct gaze of those cool, slightly accusing gray eyes, but lifted swiftly again.

“But why do you care?” she countered swiftly. “You know, and I know, and dad, too, that it isn't true. What difference does it make what she thinks? Besides, she's bound to find out the truth soon.”

Moran's gaze softened, and a faint smile momentarily quirked the corners of his lips. “Mebbe yuh're right,” he admitted. “I expect I'm a fool to let it bother me. I s'pose I oughta be thankful, her havin' it in for me made her want yuh to stop here.”

“Oh!” reproachfully. “Why, you're as bad as dad, wanting to get rid of me.”

There was a tiny pause in which he stood looking at her in a way that brought the color into the girl's face.

“No,” he returned slowly, “it ain't that. I reckon yuh know it ain't. I'd like a heap to have yuh with us, but, yuh see, I know that country. The old lady's right when she says it ain't any place for a woman.”

“But you'll be gone ever so long,” she said dismally.

“Not likely. If things are like I think, we oughta make a quick clean-up. If they ain't, well, that'll bring us back all the sooner. Say, how much did yuh tell Mrs. Haight? Yuh didn't let on—”

“Oh, no.” Instinctively they both pitched their voices low, so that only an indistinct murmur reached the three people on the other side of the room. “I only repeated what you told Nell. Neither of them have the least idea we've a special, definite clew to follow. That's why Mrs. Haight thinks it'll be nothing but a wild-goose chase.”

“Good! Let her think so, though I reckon she's safe enough. Well, I better say good night, I think. I want to



go out an' look over the outfit so there won't be any time wasted in the mornin'. We oughta start as soon as we can see to ride."

"You mean you still think some one might be following?"

"I don't know, but there's no sense takin' chances. We'll be off by daybreak, an' if there ain't anybody to fool, so much the better. So it'll be good-by, too, for a while, I reckon. No use yore gettin' up that early."

"But I will! How could you think I'd not be up to see you off."

And so she was. Though Nell Driscoll still slept the sleep of worn-out nerves relaxed at last, Shirley rose long before daybreak, helped Mrs. Haight prepare breakfast, and sat down with the two men, while they ate it. Afterward she walked with them as far as the beginning of the trail leading back into the mountains. And long after the hard gray shadows had swallowed up her slim, graceful figure, there lingered in Moran's mind a vivid memory of her brown eyes raised to his; he still thrilled at the recollection of the decided grip of her firm, cool fingers.

## CHAPTER VII.

SPIKE MOGRIDGE.

LEANING back in his special chair, Ormsby Asher favored his lieutenant with a chilling glance.

"Eleven days—twelve, including today—it's taken you to find out *this!*" he rapped out contemptuously. "It's a wonder to me you didn't finish up the two weeks and call it a vacation."

Foss McCoy squirmed uneasily under his employer's scornful regard. "Yuh might think I'd been loafin'," he retorted sullenly. "Ain't I told yuh my hoss was wore down to a whisper, navigatin' them dog-gone mountains, an' as for me, I lost ten good pounds an' like to starved to death before I met up with that fellah,

Mosby. I ain't never claimed to be no wonder, but——"

"You said a mouthful!" put in Asher cuttingly. "Blondy's plumb solid from the neck up, but I'll gamble even he'd have dug up something."

"Huh! He would, would he?" flung back the exasperated McCoy. "I'd shore admire to see him. What would yuh have me do, anyhow? Here I trace the hull blasted bunch to the Bar S, for all they tried to throw me off'n the track by startin' out on the Thunder Creek Trail. They gets there at dusk, an' next mornin' at sunup Moran an' the old codger is both flitted, an' I ain't seen hide or hair of 'em since."

"Did you try the Fanning Trail?" inquired Asher curtly.

"Shore I did. That's what I done first off, but the tracks there was all old. Looks like they musta struck back into the mountains, so I circled around the lower end o' Bar S valley, an' I been combin' the hills ever since. I dunno what more I could of done, short o' payin' a call on Ma Haight an' askin' her perlite which way her friends went."

"You might have done worse," averred Asher, feeling in his pocket for a cigar. "It ain't hard to fake up an excuse that'll fool a woman."

"Oh, ain't it? Yuh talk like Ma Haight was some kind of a greenhorn. An' how about Cass Burton an' Jerry White. After that business last spring they'd either of 'em pull down on me on sight. I shore would like to know what yuh expect of me anyhow, Orms."

"Results," stated Asher with cold succinctness.

Scratching a match on the underside of the chair, he held it to his cigar. When this was drawing well, he rose and moving over to the window, stood staring out, hands linked loosely beneath his long coat tails.

"Results!" he repeated harshly. "That's what I want, and that's what I aim to get from any one I hire. Yuh

don't find me kickin' about costs, or time spent, or anything else, do you, so long as you produce results." His shaggy eyebrows contracted and he shot a hard glance at McCoy. "Looks like we'd have to have another deal all around," he went on significantly. "Here's you fallin' down hard, an' Jessup makin' even more of a boggy ford with that business of Rafe Driscoll's girl."

McCoy moistened his lips. His blustering air had subsided with the abrupt completeness of a pricked balloon.

"She's stayin' there at the Bar S, along with the other one," he muttered in a hurried effort to distract Asher's attention from his own failings. "I dunno how the devil they come together. Moran never paid no attention to Nell when he was here before."

For a space Asher made no comment. Still staring absently out of the window, his coldly brilliant eyes narrowed the least trifle, and the slight movement of his hands beneath the coat tails ceased.

"You saw 'em together?" he asked at length, without turning his head.

"Shore. On my way back I stopped to give the ranch the once-over again. They was ridin' along the upper end o' the valley. I had my glasses with me an' got a good look at 'em."

"H'm! Was Mrs. Haight with 'em, or any of the Bar S men?"

"Nope. They was alone, not far from where the trail goes down from the rim. While I was lookin' at 'em, the other gal got off'n her hoss to tighten up the cinch, or somethin'. I thinks to myself at the time that——"

He paused, suddenly aware that Asher was no longer attending. Asher's narrowed eyes were fixed intently on something in the street outside, and across his hawklike face there rippled momentarily an expression of intense irritation. Through the open window came the thud of hoofs, the creak of saddle leather, the clear jingle of a spur.

"It's Spike Mogridge," said Asher,

turning sharply on McCoy. "Not a peep out of you about this to him or any of the boys he's got with him. Remember that."

"I get yuh," replied Foss hastily. "Yuh needn't fret none about my babblin', Orms. I know how to keep a still tongue."

His palpable relief at this opportune interruption drew a sour smile from Asher.

"You better," he stated meaningly, as he moved toward the door. "Slip out the back way an' keep outa sight' till I send for you. We'll go over this again—later."

The barroom, hazy with tobacco smoke and resounding with rough talk and laughter, was well filled with patrons a goodly proportion of whom crowded about the bar at one end. It was characteristic of Ormsby Asher's movements that no one seemed to see him enter. At one moment he was absent; at the next he might be seen leaning carelessly against the bar, listening indifferently to the garrulous remarks of Jed Zeek, who appeared to have been drinking too much. Even Blondy Jessup, who, in spite of a rather insipid regularity of feature, missed very little that went on within range of his long-lashed violet eyes, was not immediately aware of his employer's presence.

When he did spy him, it was curious that Jessup, after a single, searching glance at his apparently absorbed patron, should glance swiftly toward the outer door. When there entered presently a tall, broad-shouldered man of thirty-odd, handsome in a bold, full-blooded fashion, despite divers freshly healed abrasions and faint, greenish-yellow shadows beneath his slightly puffed eyes, Blondy's somewhat ingenuous countenance was immediately wiped of all expression. Hastily sliding bottle and glass toward a clamorous patron, he reached for a towel and began to mop the bar top with meticulous precision.

But all the while, from under those curling lashes, he closely followed the movements of the newcomer and the two men who had entered at his heels.

For a moment or two the former stood just inside the door, staring around the crowded, smoke-filled room. Then, catching sight of Asher, his eyes brightened, and he made his way directly toward the proprietor.

"Hello, ol'-timer!" he said, bringing one hand down on the sloping, broad-cloth-covered shoulder nearest him. "How's tricks?"

Asher's surprise was not overdone. He turned negligently, and, as his glance rested on the tall man's face, one eyebrow quirked characteristically.

"Well, Spike," he drawled, quite as if he had not been fully aware of the other's movement. "When'd you hit town?"

"About two minutes ago," responded Mogridge. "I got a mouth like a wad o' cottonwool," he added pointedly.

Asher summoned Blondy with a movement of his eyebrows. "Name your pison," he suggested, including Mogridge's two companions in the invitation.

The three men lost no time in lining up against the bar. When a couple of drinks had been swallowed, Mogridge set down his glass and glanced at Asher.

"I'm after that polecat, Dan Moran," he stated belligerently. "The cow-faced lump went on the prod over to Saddle Butte ten days or so ago an' shot up the joint. Plugged Bill Scully in the arm an' raised a row before he left. Me an' 'Munk' an' 'Squint' tracked him part way to Clayton an' then lost his trail. I'm wonderin' if he might have doubled back an' cut down through the Gap."

Asher raised his eyebrows. "Moran!" he commented in surprise—an emotion not entirely assumed, for he was learning things. "What got his dander up? I thought you were all nice an' friendly together."

"Friendly!" Mogridge flushed darkly. "He's yaller, he is, the pup! I've sus-pi-cion-ed it some while, an' I was jest about ready to tie the can to him, when he lit out. Yuh mean to say he ain't been here?"

For an instant Asher hesitated, wondering how far he could play this big, blustering individual, whom, though he found useful and at times, perhaps, a little dangerous, he held in secret contempt. But before he had time to utter his swiftly formed reply, his hand was forced.

"Shore he was—a week ago Friday." It was the voice of Jed Zeek, a trifle thick, but distinct enough for all that. In his eagerness he swayed forward from where he had been standing, hugging the bar directly back of Asher. "Him an' a gal an' an old geezer with a black mustache—they pulled up in front o' Timmons' store at twenty past eight, an' all three of 'em went in, an'—an'—"

Under a swift, sidelong, scorching glance from Asher, Zeek's voice faltered, quavered, and died away. Save for the stimulation of a glass or two beyond the ordinary, it is quite unlikely that even his love of gossip would have tempted him to break in so rashly upon a conversation in which Ormsby Asher—as he now realized only too poignantly—had such evident concern. As the older man's venomous glare stabbed him, Zeek's jaw sagged, and he stumbled back against the supporting bulk of the bar.

"Well?" snapped Mogridge, his eyes glowing with sudden triumph and excitement. "What'd they do? Where'd they go. What's the matter with yuh, Zeek? Ain't yuh got no tongue?"

Suddenly he turned and stared suspiciously at Asher. "Why'n't yuh tell me first off he was here?" he demanded harshly.

"You didn't give me time," rejoined Asher smoothly. "I saw him and talked



to him, but how was I to know he'd busted things up the way you say. He told me you and he had split, but——"

He paused, his keen glance sweeping the faces of the men near him, several of whom were showing a distinct interest in the conversation.

"Suppose we step into my room," he suggested significantly. "We'll be more comfortable there."

Still scowling, Mogridge hesitated an instant and then shrugged his shoulders. "Aw right," he acquiesced shortly. "Yuh fellahs stick around," he added to Greer and Henger. "I'll be out before long."

He evidently knew the way, for he strode past Asher toward the door in the corner, thus missing a brief, but potent, glance the proprietor cast at Jed Zeek. It was merely a passing stare, but so full of venom and displeasing promise that the stout hotel keeper turned a mottled gray, and, when he was able to pull himself together, he staggered through the crowd and vanished into the gathering dusk.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SPIDER SPINS A WEB.

HAVING closed the door of his private room, Asher lit the lamp on the center table, closed the window, produced bottle and glasses, and motioned Mogridge to a comfortable chair. It was worthy of remark that, while his guest faced the uncompromising glare of the powerful oil burner, Asher's own features were more or less shadowed. He had managed the position of the chairs so casually, however, that Spike seemed quite unsuspecting of any intention in the matter.

"Waal, spit it out," he growled, when he had poured himself a drink, his coarsely handsome face still sullen and suspicious. "Zeek says there was a gal an' an old man with him. Is that so?"

Asher nodded. "They stopped in

front of Timmons' store about half past eight, and all three of 'em went in. The girl wasn't bad looking. The old man——"

"Bad lookin'!" interjected Mogridge. "I'll say she ain't! Great Godfrey! An' I thought yuh was a judge of wimmin. She's——" Abruptly his lips clamped shut. "Waal, what next?" he went on more quietly. "They went into Timmons', yuh say. What was you doin' all the time?"

"Watching them from this window," returned Asher composedly. "When Moran and the old fellah came out with a lot of stuff, I strolled around through the bar and later out into the street. I was just in time to be introduced. The lady's name is——er——Rives; the old man seems to be her father."

Spike drew a long breath. "I guessed that much," he said curtly. "So the skunk's wormed in there, has he?" His eyes glowed with anger, and he emptied his tumbler at a gulp. "What kind of a story did he tell? Or didn't yuh ask him?" he added with a sneer.

Under the lash of his contemptuous tongue, Asher's expression did not alter. Perhaps there was the faintest tightening of the thin lips, a touch of added hardness in the cold eyes, though the shadow lying across his face made it difficult to be certain. But, if Mogridge could have guessed what was passing behind that hawklike immobile mask, even he would have given pause.

"Naturally," purred Asher smoothly. "I took him to one side, and we had quite a talk. He told me you an' he had split, and he was headin' west." Resting one elbow on the table, he shaded his eyes with a long, thin hand. "In some way he fell in with this man Rives," he went on with slow deliberation, "who, it seems, is interested in hunting gold."

He paused, acutely aware of Mogridge's slight start and the sudden avaricious light which gleamed momentarily in the man's black eyes.



"Gold? Huh!" grunted Spike, controlling himself with an evident effort. "Waal, go on. What's Moran got to do with it?"

"He said he'd hired himself out to Rives—who don't know much about prospecting—to show him some likely places," rejoined Asher smoothly. "Told me they were going to take a look through the Thunder Creek country."

Mogridge's jaw sagged, and an expression of utter blankness overspread his face. "Thunder Creek!" he ejaculated. "What the devil— Why, that ain't— It's a blind o' course. He wasn't goin' that way a-tall. An' yuh let him ride off without liftin' a finger, I s'pose. Lord, but some folks are thick!"

A faint touch of color crept slowly into Asher's pallid, wrinkled face. "Not quite as bad as that, Spike," he retorted quietly. "His story was all right in some ways, and at the time I hadn't any reason for suspicions. Still I was a little curious to see if he really was heading for Thunder Creek, and if so, what he might find there. So I—er—sent McCoy after them."

"Ah! Well?"

"Unfortunately he boggled it to some extent. He got back only this afternoon. I'd just finished giving him a piece of my mind when you showed up."

As he slowly narrated the steps McCoy had taken, his keen, cold eyes, almost invisible under indolently drooping lids, noted the slightest, most delicate shade of expression rippling across Spike's face. Deliberately, with not a little inward scorn, he played upon the man's emotions, finding some slight retaliatory satisfaction in lifting Mogridge's hopes, only to dash them callously again. And then, having eased his mind of some small portion of its venom, he set himself to finding out just what it was Spike was holding back.

Not his infatuation for Shirley Rives: that became only too swiftly and plainly

evident. No; it was something else—something having to do apparently with the objective of the three wanderers. Though Spike proved uncommonly stubborn when it came to giving out definite information, Asher presently reached the conclusion that the movements of Moran and Colonel Rives were not in the least aimless, but directed toward a very definite end. Instead of starting forth on a general prospecting trip, they were—or Spike thoroughly believed them to be—heading for a location that had already panned out. A rich one, too, if Asher could judge Mogridge's almost feverish eagerness to locate the vanished men.

"We gotta down that skunk, if it takes six months," Spike finally declared emphatically. "He knows too much, Orms. Why, if he wanted to, he could raise enough trouble to run us outa the county."

"You, perhaps," corrected Asher dryly. "Personally I'm not worryin' a whole lot about myself."

"Alla same, he could make things mighty unpleasant," persisted Spike, with a fine show of energy. "I reckon it's up to me an' Munk an' Squint to start off to-morrow an' comb them mountains till we find him."

He reached forward and poured himself another drink. The diamond on Asher's finger sparkled, as his hand dropped gently to the table top.

"I can tell you a better way than that," he remarked quietly.

"What?"

"Get him through the girl."

"The girl? What d'yuh mean?"

Asher leaned forward slightly. "Suppose she—a—disappeared," he said in a lowered voice. "The minute word was brought to 'em, wouldn't Moran an' old Rives come hot-footin' back to find out what's happened to her?"

Mogridge hesitated an instant. "Likely they would," he admitted slowly. "But who's gonna send word to 'em?"

"Mrs. Haight. She must know where they've gone. There's nothing hard about the thing. Foss says the two girls ride around alone together. All we'd have to do would be to keep a close watch on the valley and nab 'em when we get a chance. There's an old abandoned line camp on my ranch——"

"*We!*" cut in Spike sharply. "What's the idea o' yore hornin' in, Orms? I thought yuh wasn't worryin' none about Moran."

"I'm not. You can have him and welcome—likewise this—er—Rives girl. I'm interested"—Asher smiled a slow, feline smile—"in Nell Driscoll. I had her about where I wanted her when she up an' cut away."

"O-h!" An expression of understanding and relief overspread Mogridge's heavy countenance. "So that's how it is, is it? Hanged if there ain't somethin' in that bean o' yores, after all!" He laughed boisterously and took a long drink. "We'll start in the mornin', huh? What's yore idea? Yuh comin' with us?"

"I wasn't planning to," returned Asher. "I've got some things to see to here. I'll send McCoy and a couple of other men who'll be under your orders. When you've turned the trick you can send me word. That line camp o' mine will make a fine place to keep the women—retired, you know, an' yet not too far out of the way."

Again that expression of relief rippled across Mogridge's flushed face. Asher, accurately reading the other's mind, smiled inwardly.

Ten minutes later, as he stood alone facing the closed door, the smile materialized into a vivid, wicked sneer that curled the corners of his lips and glinted evilly in his hard eyes. Reviewing swiftly the details of the interview, his satisfaction grew. Brainless clod that he was, Mogridge would undoubtedly pluck the chestnuts out of the fire for Asher to enjoy. To be sure there was

bound to be a bitter awakening later for Spike, but Asher had already coldly planned for that.

"Now for a little talk with Foss to give him his instructions," he reflected. "I can see Callahan at the ranch to-morrow. A bunch of men strung along the hills at likely points south of Bar S, can't help but spot those two, when they come out and trace back to where they started from."

His face grew keen and thoughtful, and he drummed absently on the bare table with long, thin fingers.

"I wonder what sort of a strike they've made back there in the hills?" he pondered. "Spike wonders, too." He laughed softly; it was not a pleasant sound. "I must take care to remember that."

## CHAPTER IX.

### LOST SQUAW MINE.

TUCKED snugly away in a wilderness of rugged cliffs, of forest-covered slopes, slit bewilderingly by endless cañons and deep gorges, a narrow, treeless gulch blazed in the stifling heat of early afternoon. Insignificant it was in every way, and so hemmed in by natural bulwarks that the desert wanderer might easily pass within a hundred yards and still have no suspicion of its existence.

At one time a stream had evidently flowed along the bottom of the gulch—a stream which, in the thawing spring especially, must have boiled and bubbled over its course with unusual force and volume. There were holes and pockets at intervals and beds of fine, pounded sand, and throughout the entire length of that scanty two-mile stretch the rocks and pebbles were worn smooth by ages of persistent friction.

That, however, was long ago—how long, only a skilled geologist could tell. At some remote period nature had stirred, flinging up solid barriers of rock at both ends of the little gulch, turning the stream to other courses, raising, at

the same time, no doubt, that curiously regular, cone-shaped peak which towered like a sentinel above the northern extremity.

It was that peak alone which had preserved this insignificant scratch on nature's bosom. Doubled by the delirium of the lost Sioux squaw, who, twenty-odd years ago had plucked from the sands of that dead river a scant handful of golden nuggets, it had become a by-word throughout the country. Weeks later, starved, thirst-tortured, literally dying on her feet, the squaw tottered into a remote settler's cabin, babbling of twin peaks and a dried-up water course paved with gold. The smooth, yellow pebbles were found hidden in her garments, and for years afterward men searched the mountains with feverish unavailing thoroughness for those two towering guardians of rich treasure.

It was left to John Blake to solve the mystery of their failure—to find at length that there was only one peak instead of two. But he, too, with riches in his grasp, had followed those earlier seekers into the realm of shadows. Wounded to the death by Spike Morigridge's treachery, he had yet outwitted the outlaw and lived long enough to pass on to Shirley Rives the secret of the famous Lost Squaw Mine.

Mine, it was not in any ordinary meaning of the word. The gold, washed down from some distant, unknown source, had lodged in holes and pockets along the two-mile course, exposed for the most part to the light of day. Nor was there here a tithe of the fabulous wealth with which rumor had clothed the legend. Moran and Colonel Rives had already discovered this to their sorrow.

For over three weeks the two had toiled and sweated in this stifling, shut-in place, with pick and shovel and pan and primitive rocker, and already its possibilities were beginning to be exhausted. To be sure during the first

week the taking had been enormous. By simply following the bed of the old stream and poking about in holes and pockets, they had gathered in nuggets of varying sizes that weighed upward of fifteen hundred ounces. Laborious panning of the sand, with water carried from a distance, added nearly another five hundred to the horde. But each day the findings had been less—very much less indeed after the likely places had been exhausted.

"Looks like in a couple days more we'd jest about be pannin' out our keep," remarked Moran, sitting back on his heels and drawing a shirt sleeve across his dripping forehead.

The colonel nodded wearily. "I'm afraid so. Very little seems to have lodged in the sand. I suppose the force of the stream carried off the dust and small gold flakes, and only the heavier pieces stuck in rocky pockets. Is the water all used up?"

"Yeah. I s'pose I better pack another load." With a grunt, Moran heaved to his feet, but could not seem to bring himself to start at once on that toilsome trip back to the spring. "Unless," he added hopefully, "yuh want to call it a day."

Colonel Rives' sunken eyes brightened for an instant. Then his long, thin, almost haggard-looking face took on a conscience-stricken expression.

"I—I suppose we ought to keep at it," he said dubiously. "I must confess I should enjoy a rest, but—"

"Why not take it then? We've earned a whole flock of 'em. An' when yuh get down to cases, I ain't so shore but what we're wastin' our time stickin' here any longer. We ain't panned out three ounces since sunup. That shore ain't worth wearin' ourselves down to a whisper for."

The colonel stood up slowly, with a wince or two that told of stiffened muscles and general bodily weariness. He was thinner, gaunter than ever, and



there were hollows in his wrinkled cheeks that brought a look of swift, veiled solicitude into Moran's eyes.

He himself had, as he expressed it, thinned down considerably during these three weeks of drudgery under the intolerably blazing sun, and he knew how much less fitted the older man was to cope with such hard labor. To be sure he had done his best to spare the colonel in every way possible, but the latter was a difficult person to coddle. Watching him now, Dan had an uneasy suspicion that he was very nearly at the end of his rope.

"Perhaps not," returned the colonel, wiping his forehead. "But how do we know that at any moment we may dig into something rich?"

"We haven't so far," Dan pointed out. "Like I said this mornin', ever since we skimmed the cream that first coupla weeks, the dust's been steadily peterin' out. It would take us a year or more to pan all the sand like we're doin', an' in the end we might be a coupla hundred ounces to the good. In my opinion it ain't worth it. However we don't have to make up our minds right off. Let's go back to camp, an' when we're rested up we can chin over this some more."

Without waiting for the colonel's acquiescence, Moran picked up the two buckets and climbed the slope to where a tethered buckskin stood under the scanty shade of a twisted scrub cedar.

"Hot, boy?" he asked, slinging the buckets, which were tied together by a length of rope, across the horse's back. "An' thirsty? I'll tell a man! Well, mebber we'll soon get back to where there's plenty grass an' water an'—people. You'll like that, eh? So'll I."

Leading the horse he rejoined the colonel, and together they walked slowly along the bottom of the gulch toward its single outlet, a narrow opening masked on the farther side by a thick clump of mesquite. Both of the men were too hot to talk, but more than once Dan

glanced solicitously at his exhausted companion and cursed himself for not having forced the situation sooner. Three weeks of close relationship had brought about a much better understanding of this courtly, intrepid, slightly erratic product of the South. Even had he not possessed the distinction of being Shirley's father, Moran felt that he would have liked him. He foresaw difficulties in bending the colonel to his will, but he meant to do it somehow.

Pushing through the mesquite they emerged into a narrow cañon hedged in by high, sheer cliffs. It lay approximately northeast, and about a quarter of a mile to the eastward was a small tent pitched in the shade of some jack pines. A small spring bubbled up in the rocks, not far to one side, the twisting course of its overflow outlined with a thin penciling of green. Farther along the cañon two hobbled horses, a big, rangy bay and a shapely cream, grazed on the scanty herbage.

Both men made straight for the spring and drank long and deep. The buckskin also lost no time plunging his nozzle into the clear water. When he had finished, Dan hobbled him and joined the colonel, who was sitting in the shade of the jack pines, fanning himself with a disreputable hat. For a time neither of them spoke. Then the older man drew from his pocket a limp buckskin bag, grimy with much handling, which contained the day's meager takings.

"I reckon we'd better put it with the rest," he remarked.

Dan nodded and, taking it from him, made his way over to the foot of the cliffs, where fallen stones and rubble were piled in chaotic heaps. Pausing at a certain spot he lifted a heavy slab and disclosed a hidden hollow underneath, containing two bulging canvas bags stoutly made of double thickness. Setting aside the slabs, he squatted on his heels and, opening the nearest sack, emptied into it the contents of the little



bag. A shadow falling across the hole made him glance up swiftly to find the colonel standing beside him.

"After all, it's a very tidy bit," mused the older man.

"I'll say so!" agreed Moran. "There's over two thousand ounces in them two bags."

"Thirty thousand dollars and more," commented the colonel thoughtfully. "I'm afraid I must seem very greedy," he went on in an apologetic tone. "It isn't altogether that, though. There's a sort of fascination about it that rather gets into the blood. One never knows when—"

"I get yuh," nodded Moran, as he paused. "I've felt that way myself—of'en, 'specially the first coupla weeks. When a turn o' the shovel may open up three-four' hundred dollars at a clip, a fellah jest can't leave off. But I'm afraid that sorta thing's over for us now."

Colonel Rives nodded. "I expect you're right, Dan. I've been thinking it over, and it seems to me we ought to put what we've got into a safe place without any more delay. I don't suppose there's much chance of any one stumbling in here, but one never knows. Afterward we could come back, of course, if it seemed worth while. Another thing—there's Shirley. Likely enough she'll begin to fret and worry, if we stay away too long."

Moran's eyes brightened. "Yore willin' for us to drag it then?" he questioned eagerly. "Great stuff!" He tied the mouth of the canvas sack with a jerk and replaced the flat stone. "We can get ready to-night an' start first thing in the mornin'. Oughta hit the Bar S by noon, anyhow."

Fatigue and heat forgotten, he at once set about briskly preparing for their departure. He, too, had been thinking about Shirley. As a matter of fact, her image was rarely absent from his mind. At night, particularly, when the day's

grubbing was over, and he had spread his long length on the sloping bed of pine needles, he could almost see her face looking at him through the starlit shadows, or across the glow of the blazing camp fire.

Always that mental picture was lovely in contour and expression. The sweet, sensitive mouth was always half smiling; the warm, vivid eyes regarded him with the level, straightforward gaze of perfect friendliness. Now and then his longing read wistfully into that glance a touch of something deeper, but, as the fire died, and he came back to stern reality, the conviction usually stole over him that it was his imagination alone that had placed it there.

To-night, as he lay wide-eyed and restless, his mind keenly active in spite of bodily weariness, the old, troubled questioning reiterated through his brain with more than usual persistency. Did she really care a little? Was it possible that she could? To-morrow he would see her, face to face. What if he took his courage in both hands and put the question? Sometimes anything seemed preferable to this harassing doubt. And yet again, as long as he remained uncertain, he could at least hope. Still undecided, he fell asleep at last to dream that he was holding her hand in his. So vivid was the vision that he could see the wealth of her beautiful hair, the glaring color of her lovely face. When he awoke to find the stars paling before the creeping gray of dawn his hesitation had vanished.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE AMBUSH.

**R**ISING above the jagged eastern sky line, the sun saw Moran and his companion crossing a wide mesa, close to the base of frowning granite cliffs. Back of them the cone-shaped peak, bathed in the rosy glow of dawn, stood out against the darker background, like

a mass of pale pink onyx. It did not look ten miles away, but they had made such an excellent start that it was all of that and more. Indeed, only a few hundred yards ahead loomed the mouth of the narrow, winding gorge through which they had descended from the southern side of the Rattlesnake Range.

A night's rest, coupled with the knowledge that the toilsome labor of the past three weeks was over, had done wonders for Colonel Rives. No doubt, also, the thought of their success contributed not a little to his excellent spirits. After years of grubbing a bare living from the earth, the pleasing weight of a thousand precious ounces distributed about one's clothes and saddle would be enough to bring sunshine to the heart of a most confirmed pessimist; and the colonel, though somewhat seriously inclined, was far from that.

He was riding "Bob," Moran's shapely cream, who was the steadiest and most dependable of the three horses. Dan bestrode the rangy bay and led the buckskin, on whose unwilling back their belongings were packed. Apparently he had made up his mind that he had been a pack horse quite long enough, and his behavior from the very beginning had been the one flaw in an otherwise auspicious start. But even that could not greatly affect Dan's exuberant spirits.

"Yuh ranger hawss!" he admonished, after a sharp and heated struggle to force the animal to enter the gorge. "One more o' them brain storms, an' I'm likely to get real peevish with yuh. At that, I dunno's yuh can blame him a whole lot," he added. "All his young life he's carried nothin' but a saddle."

"I suppose I should have ridden him instead of Bob," remarked the colonel. "If he has these tantrums often he's going to hold us up considerably."

"He won't," declared Moran firmly. "Bob's done more'n his share o' the dirty work, an' it's time he laid off it.

Come on, yuh wall-eyed old horntoad, an' quit yuhr foolishness."

Ranger "came on," though grudgingly, with much laying back of the ears and a display of general cussedness. Reluctant to enter the gorge, he seemed equally against quitting it, and when he was finally dragged out onto the wide ledge that thrust forth from the side of the mountain, Moran halted to mop his face and addressed the stubborn animal in forceful terms of withering contempt.

The ledge curved around the broad base of an outthrust spur, and from one point, through a gap in the lower hills, was presented a sweeping view over low flats and rough, rock-strewn plains, in the middle of which a glint of twisting silver showed the winding course of Moon River. Somewhere in that wide, chaotic wilderness—bounded on the farther side by the hazy blue of distant mountains—lay Saddle Butte, the headquarters of Spike Mogridge and his band of cattle thieves and outlaws. Moran gave it no more than a casual glance. That part of his life, he told himself with a feeling of extreme satisfaction, was as dead as last year's tumbleweeds—so dead, indeed, that he could look upon the scene of more than one questionable exploit without even a touch of heightening color.

A period of deceptive docility on the part of the buckskin enabled them to push on along the ledge with fair rapidity. They had even made a fair progress along the twisting intricacies of the mountain way before the horse began to act up again. From that time on, however, his outbursts of stubborn protest were so frequent and so prolonged that Moran completely lost his temper, and at intervals he considered dropping the lead rope and letting the beast work out its own salvation.

That move, however, could scarcely be seriously entertained. The loss of their belongings, though annoying, would be a matter of no great moment,

but considering the rough, often hazardous nature of their route, the presence of a spare mount was of vital importance. The gold had been equally divided between the two men, and, if either the bay or the cream should be disabled, they would be in an exceedingly difficult plight.

So Moran was obliged to make the best of the situation, and by dint of alternating persuasion and force he managed to keep the obstreperous animal moving. But the effect on his temper was not improving, and when at length—very much delayed—they reached the level floor of a shallow cañon not more than two miles from the head of the slope leading down into Bar S valley, he gave a deep sigh of fervent relief.

The sides of the cañon, which was no more than a scant half mile in length, were grown up in spruce. With the colonel in the lead they had made about half that distance when, without the slightest provocation, the buckskin planted his fore feet stubbornly and dragged back on the lead rope.

"Yuh big hunk o' misery!" flamed Moran angrily, twisting in the saddle. "If I don't——"

Crack! Cra-ack! Two sharp reports shattered the placid noonday stillness of the cañon. A bullet whined past Moran's head, so close that it seemed actually to stir the hair that crisped above his ear. He saw the colonel reel in his saddle and at the same instant noted the curling wisps of smoke eddy out of the spruce on the slope to his left.

Like a flash he dropped the lead rope, dug spurs into the bay, and, jerking out his gun, began pumping lead into the trees that masked the ambush.

"Keep a-boilin'!" he yelled to the colonel, bending low over the bay's neck. "Get around that rock ahead an' under cover."

Two more bits of lead pinged across

his bent back. He answered them with the last shot in his Colt and, jabbing this back into the holster, whirled around a massive buttress and swept alongside Colonel Rives.

"Keep goin' if yuh can!" he urged. "Where yuh hit?"

The colonel's left arm hung limply; already a spreading blot of crimson stained his shirt. His face was ashen, but his lips pressed firmly together.

"Shoulder," he answered briefly.

"Can yuh stick it out a while longer?"

The older man nodded. "It's not much farther, is it?" he asked. "I seem to remember——"

"Not more'n two miles at most," encouraged Dan. "We'll make it all right an' beat the scoundrels."

For perhaps ten minutes they clattered on in silence, Moran keeping an anxious eye on the tall, lean figure at his side, while he slipped fresh shells into his six-shooter. Presently the cañon twisted into a wide gulch that sloped down at a considerable angle. If only they could reach the end of this in safety, decided Dan, they would be reasonably secure.

The thought had scarcely passed through his brain, when, from behind, came the sound he had been waiting for—the thud of hoofs. His lips tightened, and he glanced swiftly at the man beside him.

"Could——" he began, but wasted no further words.

The colonel had let fall his reins and was gripping the saddle horn with a force that brought out a row of white dots across his bony knuckles. Beads of perspiration stood out on his white forehead; his thin body swayed perilously with every movement of his mount. Swiftly Dan forced the bay closer and was just in time to catch his friend, as he slid sidewise.

For a scant second he held the other upright with a firm grip about the body. Then, with a heave of powerful shoul-



ders, he dragged the helpless man across the saddle in front of him, supporting him with his left arm.

"I—I'm—sorry," muttered the colonel faintly. "I—my head—"

"Don't yuh worry none," cut in Moran reassuringly. "We'll make it all right."

But, as he urged the bay forward, he wondered. Already the clatter of hoofs behind them sounded perilously close. At any moment the riders were likely to swing into the gulch, and, hampered as he was, Dan fully realized how helpless he would be against them. As his glance swept ahead, gauging the length of that level, open slope, his eyes darkened, and the muscles of his jaw and chin hardened.

Suddenly the remembrance of the gold packed into the colonel's saddle pockets brought his head around swiftly. The sight of the riderless cream trotting close at his heels, brought a momentary grim smile to Moran's set lips.

"Good old Bob!" he muttered. "Lucky I didn't trust to that longhorn buckskin." He roveled the bay gently. "Go to it, boy—yuh gotta. We'll beat 'em yet, ol' hawss."

## CHAPTER XI.

### TRAPPED.

WITH a low, rippling laugh, Shirley Rives tucked back a flying strand of crisp brown hair.

"Oh, but he is!" she stated positively. "If you could see him look at you! It's a case, if ever there was one."

Nell Driscoll, flushed becomingly and, striving in vain to hide her embarrassment under a casual manner, shrugged her slender shoulders.

"I don't see how you can say that," she protested. "I never saw him before we came here, and that was only three weeks ago Monday."

"All the more credit to your charms, dear," smiled Shirley. "It isn't every

girl that can have a man— How is it the boys say it? Oh, yes, feeding out of your hand in three weeks."

"You're talking nonsense," retorted Nell, her flush deepening. "He hangs around, of course, but that's because— What about 'Windy' Bogert?" she countered in sudden triumph. "I never saw anybody quite so far gone in all my life."

"Oh—Windy! Goodness!" Shirley giggled. "Isn't he funny the way he sits on the edge of his chair and makes sheep's eyes and hardly ever says a word. Did you hear Mrs. Haight go for him on the porch yesterday. 'Yuh, Windy! Do yuh think I'm runnin' one o' these here rest cures for invalids? My land o' love! About forty things hollerin' to be done, an' yuh set there like yuh'd took root. Have I gotta take yuh by the ear an' lead yuh to a job o' work?'"

Her imitation of their hostess' deep, throaty voice and forceful manner was excellent, and both girls went off into peals of laughter. Then Shirley was smitten with compunction.

"I expect I'm rather horrid," she said contritely. "After all he's awfully decent, even if he isn't very thrilling. I only wish he'd live up to his name and have a little more to say. I get worn out trying to carry on a conversation. Last night— What are you stopping for?"

Nell, who had reined in her horse beside a clump of pines, gave a slight shrug.

"It's so rough and rocky farther on," she returned, with a jerk of her head toward the narrowing end of Bar S valley. "I suppose we might as well turn back."

Shirley straightened her hat slightly. "I wish there was some other place to ride," she commented. "I believe we've worn a regular rut up and down the valley, and it's getting monotonous." Her glance swept past the pines toward the



foot of the little-used trail leading out of the valley and thence toward Hatchett, and her eyes brightened. "Why shouldn't we explore a little up there?" she suggested.

Her companion looked dubious. "Do you think it would be—safe? Mrs. Haight told us not to leave the valley."

"I know, and of course we shouldn't go far. But we've been here for nearly a month. Surely if any one had followed us from Hatchett, we'd have known of it by this time, don't you think?"

"I suppose so," returned Nell slowly, her expression still doubtful. "Still, of course, we can't really be sure, and I—"

She paused and, bending sidewise in her saddle, stared back in the direction of the ranch house. Shirley, whose horse faced the other way, caught the expression of sudden interest in her friend's eyes.

"Who is it?" she asked, turning in her saddle. "Oh, one of the boys! I wonder which?"

Nell did not answer at once, and the two girls, withdrawing still farther into the shelter of the pines, peered through the interlacing branches at the solitary rider, still a long way off, who loped toward them. Suddenly Nell gave a subdued little scream of mirth.

"It's Windy!" she giggled. "I know him from that yellow horse he rides."

"Goodness!" ejaculated Shirley, glancing hastily around. "He'll ride back with us, and we'll have to talk the entire way. There isn't a place to hide, unless—" Her lips straightened firmly. "I'm going up the trail," she went on hurriedly, touching her horse with one heel. "Only a little way," she added over one shoulder. "The woods are thick up there, and he'll never guess we've left the valley."

Nell hesitated an instant and then pushed after her. As they mounted the rough, sloping track, the pine grove hid

them from the approaching rider, and the moment they had surmounted the rim a heavy growth of timber on both sides of the trail continued the concealment. Shirley rode on a few hundred yards and then glanced back at her companion.

"You don't suppose he'd come this far?" she asked.

"Not unless he saw us," returned Nell. "Oh, unless—gracious! I never thought of that. Perhaps he's going to Hatchett."

The possibility threw both girls into a mild, partly amused sort of panic, and, finding a spot where the woods were open enough, they turned the horses off the trail and rode in among the trees.

"It's too ridiculous!" whispered Shirley, when at last they came to a halt in a tiny clearing behind which a mass of boulders rose among the pines. "I do hope he passes on. We'd feel so silly to have him find us running away from him and hiding like two kids."

Nell nodded, and in silence the two girls sat there, listening intently. Presently, and much sooner than either had expected, they heard the beat of hoofs out on the trail and exchanged swift glances. When the sharp clatter changed abruptly to a deadened thud, Shirley realized that they were caught and made a wry face.

"Darn!" she breathed vexatiously. "Well, we can't help it. I'm not going to run any farther. We'll have to make believe we came up here just for a lark."

Nell acquiesced, and both prepared to meet with bland innocence and surprise the appearance of the pertinacious Windy. Already through the trees they could make out a slight sense of movement, but, owing to the heavy, drooping branches of the pines that clustered round their retreat, it was impossible to see more than a few yards with any degree of definiteness.

Swiftly the thud of hoofs drew nearer. To Shirley they seemed curi-

ously multiplied, and she wondered a little at Bogert's recklessness in dashing through the woods at such a speed. Nevertheless her tranquillity was undisturbed, as she sat composedly waiting, lips parted in a little preparatory smile of surprise, brows realistically arched.

Abruptly the pine boughs were thrust aside, and a mounted horse plunged into the little glade, to halt with a jerk and a slithering of hoofs on the slippery pine needles.

The smile frozen on her lips, Shirley stared at the newcomer in dumb horror. For the horse was not a yellow buckskin at all. The rider was not Bogert, but Spike Mogridge! And, peering over his shoulder, she recognized the face of Munk Henger.

## CHAPTER XII.

### CARRIED AWAY.

SHIRLEY never knew how long she sat there, petrified—just staring in frozen horror at the creature she feared and hated more than any one on earth, and whom she had hoped and believed never to see again. For a brief space, indeed, it seemed as if this thing simply couldn't be true, as if she were in the grip of some ghastly nightmare and *must* presently awake. Then Mogridge smiled, a slow hateful, triumphant smile, and in a flash the girl came to herself, dug spurs into her horse's flanks, and lashed him with her quirt.

The sudden unexpectedness of the move took Mogridge by surprise, and for an instant it almost seemed as if the girl's mad effort to escape would be successful. But, as the startled roan leaped forward, his hoofs slipped on the treacherous pine needles, and, in spite of Shirley's frantic sawing on the bit, he swerved close enough for the outlaw to reach out and grasp the reins. Wild with terror, the girl flung herself out of the saddle and ran.

Blindly she plunged through the sweeping pine branches, pursued by

oaths and sharp, furious commands which only spurred her on. Wildly, she flew down the gentle slope toward the trail, the thought of the derided Windy Bogert looming large in her distraught mind. By this time he must have climbed to the rim of the valley. If only she could reach the open.

Back of her the thud of hoofs told of swift pursuit, but still she sped on determinedly. Slipping, sliding, her face tingling from the sharp buffets of the pine boughs, she ran, as she had never run before—save only once! The memory of that other mad dash sent a rush of deep crimson into her pale face and made her, perhaps, a little heedless of what lay ahead. She saw only that the trees were thinning, and, though she was well to one side of the opening by which they had entered the wood, she felt that the trail must be close at hand. A moment or two later she ducked under a sweeping branch and plunged breathlessly out onto the trail—almost into the arms of one of three strangers who, with their horses, completely blocked the narrow way.

Instantly the nearest fellow laid hold of her. "Why the rush, kiddo?" he drawled. "Yuh'll wear yuhrself all out, chasin' around like this. Better wait a coupla minutes an' get yuhr breath."

His face was lean and narrow and shadowed by a thatch of brick-red hair. A long scar, slanting downward from one corner of his mouth, lent it a sinister expression which turned Shirley's heart to lead. Nevertheless she strove desperately to tear herself from his grasp.

"Let me go!" she panted. "How—how dare you!"

Abruptly she broke off, as her glance, sweeping over the man's horse, fell upon the head of a yellow horse just coming into sight around a sharp bend in the trail, a hundred yards or so away.

"Windy!" she screamed instantly. "Oh, Winly! Help——"

A hand roughly clapped against her mouth smothered the frantic appeal. But over the edge of the man's palm, calloused and none too clean, her eyes grew round with helpless horror. As if roweled with a spur, the yellow horse leaped forward, bringing Bogert abruptly into view, his hastily drawn six-gun rising swiftly from its holster. But he was not quite quick enough. One of the trio had already drawn, and an instant before the cowman's gun spit fire, a spurt of flame burst from the outlaw's Colt.

Shirley heard the whine of a bullet overhead, saw Windy reel, fling up one arm, and topple forward across the horse's neck. What she missed was the sorrel's swift, clattering turn and galloping retreat. For at this final, culminating horror something seemed to snap inside her brain, and with a smothered little moan she sagged limply back against the man who held her.

She came to herself to find her head resting in Nell's lap, with the reassuring touch of Nell's hands chafing her limp fingers. Mogridge and Henger had joined the group. Shirley could hear the former speaking to some one in a harsh, angry voice, but she did not try to understand what he was saying. With a shiver her glance sought her friend's pale face, and her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Oh, Nell!" she whispered brokenly. "Windy—they shot him! He—"

She broke off, biting her lips. Nell's own mouth quivered, and her fingers closed tightly over Shirley's for an instant, but she did not speak. A moment later Mogridge moved forward and stood looking down on them.

"Comin' around, eh?" he commented. "About time, I'll say. We gotta get outa here pronto. Gimme yuhr hand."

But Shirley did nothing of the sort. Ignoring his outstretched hand, she managed with Nell's help to scramble to her feet. Save for a slight buzzing in

her ears and a vast, encompassing lassitude, she felt little the worse for her fainting spell. For an instant she stood motionless, hat gone, hair waving in disorder about her pale, accusing face. The glance she bent on Mogridge was full of utter loathing.

"You—*beast!*" she said, in a low penetrating voice that quivered a little with the emotion that was rending her. "I don't know why such men as you are allowed to live! If I had only let him—kill you!"

For an instant she thought that she had penetrated his supreme and callous self-conceit. His brow darkened, and into the bold black eyes there flashed the momentary shadow of a look which in another man she might have thought was pain! But it vanished before she could make quite sure, and his full lips curled in an irritating grin.

"Yeah?" he drawled. "Feelin' kinda mad, ain't yuh? I allus did like a gal with pep. Waal, get aboard yuhr hawss, unless yuh'd rather I'd carry yuh in front o' me."

Without a word Shirley snatched her hat from Nell and put it on with hands that shook a little. Her roan stood near, the bridle held by one of the other outlaws. Lips tightly compressed, Shirley walked quickly over to him, turned the stirrup, and swung herself into the saddle.

"Nice an' doc-ile, all of a sudden, ain't she?" remarked Mogridge with a wink at the red-haired man. "Hurry up," he said to Nell. "We ain't got all day."

Nell took a step or two toward her mount and then turned a strained, white face on Mogridge.

"Where are you taking us?" she demanded unsteadily. "What—what are you going to do—"

"Yuh'll know soon enough. Climb onto that hawss pronto, unless yuh want to be thrown on."

With a shiver Nell obeyed; the men



mounted and set off at once down the trail. Spurring up beside the roan, Mogridge took Shirley's bridle from the dour-faced outlaw and proceeded to enliven the way with rough jokes and repeated attempts to draw the girl into conversation.

His efforts were quite unsuccessful. Shirley kept her eyes set straight ahead and stubbornly refused to open her lips. She was governed partly by her intense loathing of the man, but chiefly because her mind was such a wild turmoil of conflicting emotions that she couldn't trust herself to speak.

The thought of Windy Bogert brought hot tears into her eyes and bitter self-reproach to her heart. She had called him to his death—she, who that little while before had been making fun of him! What a beast she was! And there was Nell, whose protests against leaving the valley she had so calmly overridden. She was responsible for the whole business she told herself bitterly, and there were moments when she wished she could have died before this horror came upon them.

Such moments grew more frequent, as she rode on, heedless of the passing way, shutting her ears against that hateful voice beside her—drowned in misery. For hope, though proverbially hard to kill, was dying swiftly in her breast.

The thought of her father and of Dan made her eyelids sting and turned her fairly sick with longing. Once Moran had come to her rescue in such a pass as this, but she knew only too well how utterly futile it was to hope for such help now. Far back in the mountains, beyond the reach of any call, he was doubtless at this very moment hard at work in blissful ignorance of her plight. He might not return to the Bar S for weeks, and by the time he came—

Shirley's long lashes dropped to hide the swift, hot tears. When at length she had winked them away she was sud-

denly aware that they were passing the deserted Driscoll house.

The discovery made her tingle. It couldn't be possible that they were going into Hatchett. Reckless as he was, Mogridge would scarcely dare that much! She only hoped he would, for surely, even in a place like that, there must be some people decent enough to rise up against the perpetration of such a brazen, barefaced outrage.

Her crushed spirits insensibly reviving, Shirley began to think and plan. She would wait until they were well within the limits of the town. She remembered Dan's saying that it was often crowded in the afternoon. Well and good. At the first sight of a group of men or women—even two or three would do—she would cry out to them for help. They might not at once escape from Mogridge's clutches, but any situation would, she felt, be better than the present.

Unfortunately her disillusionment was swift. Less than two miles beyond the Driscoll house Mogridge came to a sudden halt. Across the trail, which curved sharply a little way below and disappeared among the willows that grew thick along the stream, lay a broad seam of rock. It was very like the one they had made use of in quitting the Thunder Creek Trail, save that off to the right it spread out and took substance, becoming in no great distance a noticeable ridge. This ridge curved southward toward the mountains, forming the western boundary of a broad expanse of rolling country, dotted here and there with outcroppings of rock and clumps of scraggly trees, but for the most part fairly fertile. Shirley's inquiring glance, sweeping over this more or less open land, had just detected moving objects which seemed to her like cattle, when she became aware that Mogridge was addressing the man with the scar.

"Yuh know what to tell him, Foss.



We'll be at the shack in less'n an hour. He may want to come out to-night."

The fellow nodded and gathered up his reins. "Likely he will," he grunted, as he spurred off along the trail.

Mogridge watched him disappear around the bend and then, with Shirley's reins still twisted around his hand, turned his horse to the right and rode slowly along the rocky spur, the others following in single file.

For a moment or two Shirley's disappointment was so acute that she could think of nothing else. Then suddenly her mind flew back to Mrs. Haight and the Bar S cowmen. It was odd she hadn't considered them before. Certainly they were not the sort to sit still and do nothing at such a pass. Quite the contrary. When she and Nell failed to appear for dinner, there would be a search. They would come upon Windy. Shirley gulped, her heart torn, her remorse reviving at the thought of his supreme sacrifice. His horse, returning riderless, was more than likely to start the men out sooner. To their practiced eyes the outlaws' track would be easy to follow—up to now.

She noted the extreme care with which Mogridge was picking his way and, glancing down, observed, as she had expected, that the horses' hoofs left no mark on the hard granite. How to leave a sign that they had left the trail? She thought for an instant of dragging the roan suddenly to one side, causing him to leave a scratch on the rock. But that, besides being certain to be noticed by the outlaws, might not be clear enough. Then suddenly she remembered the quirt dangling from her wrist. If only she could let it drop without their seeing her.

From under drooping lashes she shot a swift side glance at Mogridge. At the moment his face was turned away from her, his attention apparently absorbed in the careful guiding of his horse. Heart fluttering, Shirley gently

loosed her grasp on the saddle horn and let her hand hang straight at her side. She felt the loop of the quirt slide down over her cuff, and, compressing her hand a trifle, she gave it a scarcely perceptible shake. An instant later the dangling length of braided leather thongs slipped over her hand and was gone.

For a second or two Shirley enjoyed her triumph. Then abruptly a rough voice in the rear dashed her hopes utterly and completely.

"Hey! Wait a minute, Spike. The lady's dropped her quirt."

Mogridge turned sharply. "Huh? Her quirt?" he said, and the girl, though she kept her gaze set straight ahead, was aware of his steady, penetrating scrutiny. "All right, Munk; bring it along."

Presently Henger rode forward and handed the quirt to Spike, who passed it over to Shirley, riding on his left. In taking it from him she was forced to lift her eyes. She knew that her face was crimson, and she was not surprised at the mocking glance with which the man regarded her.

"Yuh don't wanta be so careless," he told her meaningly. "Next time there mightn't be anybody to pick it up."

Shirley made no answer. But, as she slipped the leather loop over her wrist with shaking fingers, she bit her lips, and over her lovely face there swept again that dull, hopeless, tragic expression which made it almost haggard.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE FANGS OF THE SPIDER.

IT was toward the middle of the afternoon, when the two girls dismounted wearily before a small log building showing unmistakable signs of desertion and decay. A small window, covered by a crazy shutter, pierced one of the end walls. The entrance, protected by a sagging door of rough planks, was the only opening in the longer eastern side. Back of the cabin were the remains of a shed

or two and a disreputable corral. The outfit was set down in a sort of hollow grown up in spruce, about half a mile below the ridge, and to Shirley it seemed as desolate a spot as she had ever seen.

A man with a straggly brown beard greeted Mogridge heartily, and at Spike's direction opened the door for the girls to enter. Shirley obeyed without protest. She felt limp and dragged out, and even the discovery that the interior had been freshly swept and was moderately clean, failed to arouse her interest. She was only thankful when the door closed behind them, and they were left alone.

Silently the girls clutched each other. Both wept a little, but somehow the situation seemed beyond the solace of even tears.

"There's only one thing to be thankful for," said Shirley at length, wiping her eyes. "They've made you come along just because you were with me. There's no other reason."

She paused. Nell hesitated an instant, her face white and strained. "I don't know," she said slowly. "Foss McCoy—the man who left us— You heard what Mogridge said—that he might want to come out to-night. McCoy is Asher's man!"

Shirley's eyes widened. "Oh!" she cried despairingly. "It—it can't be that! He must have meant something else. Surely——"

She broke off at the sound of horses' hoofs, and with one accord both girls darted over to the window. Munk Henger was loping away from the cabin toward the ridge. In silence they watched him mount the gentle slope and disappear among the straggling spruce. Then their glances met and dwelt together. It seemed such a little way to the edge of those dense thickets. Impulsively Shirley took another step forward and thrust her head cautiously out of the open window. She met the

amused glance of the bearded man who leaned against the corner of the building, his fingers busy fashioning a cigarette.

"Fine day, ma'am," he drawled, "though mebbe a mite warm."

Shirley swiftly drew back her head and flashed a tragic glance at Nell. Save the door and a rude stone fireplace at the farther end, there was no other break in the monotonous log walls.

"We might have known they'd watch the window," she said despairingly. "There's nothing left to do but——"

She broke off, and both turned swiftly toward the door which opened to reveal Mogridge standing on the threshold. For a moment he hesitated. Then he stepped into the room and closed the door behind him. As he approached them, Shirley shrank closer to her friend.

"I'd like a word with yuh," the outlaw said briefly, as he stood in front of them.

For a moment Shirley returned his glance shrinkingly. Then something of the old spirit flamed into her troubled eyes.

"I can't prevent your saying it," she told him calmly. "I've got to listen— unless I stop my ears."

Mogridge looked meaningly at Nell. "I want to talk to her alone," he said curtly.

Shirley clutched her friend's wrist. "No!" she cried. "Oh, no!"

But Nell, sensible of a subtle change in the man, aware that nothing could be gained by angering him, gently disengaged her fingers.

"I'd better, dear," she urged in a low tone. "I'll just go over by the fireplace."

Heart fluttering, Shirley watched her cross the room. Then, purposely avoiding Mogridge's gaze, she turned her head and stared miserably at the stretch of sun-drenched green, topped by a sweep of brilliant sky that was visible

through the small window. Suddenly a hand caught her chin and twisted her face around.

"Yore scart—plumb sick," said Mogridge, his rough voice curiously softened. "Can't say I blame yuh much at that, with all yuh musta been thinkin'." His hand fell to his side, and he hesitated, a dull flush creeping into his tanned face. "I jest wanted to ease yore mind a bit," he finished awkwardly.

Shirley looked at him in bewildered amaze. This was a side of his nature which she had not only never seen, but which a moment ago she would have believed impossible.

"I—I don't understand," she faltered.

His flush deepened and one of his big hands clenched over the butt of his Colt. "I—I can't get on without yuh," he said, with an odd mingling of harshness and simplicity. "Ever since I first seen yuh that mornin', when yuh slammed the door in my face, I've thought of yuh—'most all the time. I made a mistake once. I'd oughta have known yuh weren't that kind. This time I'm gonna marry yuh."

Shirley took a step backward, her outstretched hands pressed against the rough bark of the logs behind her. She could not speak. She could only look at him, her whole tortured soul staring from her frightened eyes.

"Yuh ain't wild about the idea, I reckon," pursued Mogridge. "Waal, mebbe not right now. But lemme tell yuh, yuh might do a whole lot worse. I got a pretty decent bunch o' kale soaked away. I'm willin' to cut Saddle Butte an' all that an' go off some'rs an' start fresh. It wouldn't take long to get used to me as——"

"Oh, no, no!" wailed Shirley, her self-control vanishing before the ghastly mental picture that flashed through her mind. To marry this brute—this murderer! To turn those sweet, shy, secret girlish visions into a lifelong nightmare of pure horror! I'd rather die."

Mogridge's mood changed swiftly. "Yuh couldn't, eh?" he snapped, his face darkening. "That shows all yuh know. Yore gonna do it—y'understand? Munk's gone to fetch the justice o' the peace, so yuh got jest about three hours to get used to the notion."

"But you can't! No justice—nobody—can force a person to—to——"

"Yuh don't know Judge Cawley," cut in Mogridge. "He'll do anythin' I or Orms Asher tell him, an' that's whatever." He turned abruptly on his heel. "Think it over," he flung back over one shoulder. As the door clattered shut behind him, Shirley slowly turned and stared hopelessly across the room at Nell.

Something more than two hours later the two stood close together at the little window, watching the shadows creep across the shallow basin. As these lengthened swiftly, blotting out alike the jutting rocks and little hollows, turning the scraggly spruce trees into queer, distorted shapes, Shirley had a horrible feeling that just as swiftly the coils were tightening inexorably about them. Less than another hour would bring Judge Cawley, whom Nell had told her was one of Asher's closest intimates, an utterly unscrupulous man. Asher himself might appear at any moment. And then——

She gave a little shiver, and her hand clenched over the window ledge. Throughout the dragging hours of waiting not a few heart-breaking thoughts and longings had swept through her mind, but always she had thrust *that* consideration from her. Yet ever it loomed just at the edge of consciousness, like some grisly specter which must ultimately be faced.

The sound of footfalls outside made both girls start and turn nervously toward the door. It was Mogridge who entered, and, as he crossed in silence to the table and lit the lamp standing there,



their glances followed him in tense speculation. Still without speaking he came over to the window, drew in the shutter, and made fast the catch.

At his approach Shirley shrank back a little. It was an instinctive movement, but now, when he was close to her, she noticed with a sudden sinking of the heart that his face was flushed and his eyes inflamed, as if he had been drinking.

"Waal," he said roughly, after a long, appraising stare that made her shiver, "time's passin'. Gettin' any more used to the idea of matrimony?"

She did not answer. Only her eyes, great, liquid pools in the haggard whiteness of her face, were eloquent. Too eloquent, perhaps. With a sudden snarl Mogriddle reached out and, grasping her wrist, dragged her closer.

"Ain't yuh got no tongue?" he demanded harshly. "Mebbe yuh think I didn't mean what I told yuh? Or is it I ain't good enough for yore high-an'-mightiness? I'll show yuh."

Like a flash his arms went out, and with a smothered cry she tried to thrust him back. Failing that, she managed to free one hand and, half mad with terror and disgust, struck him in the face with her clenched fist, again and again.

For a second or two he only gripped her closer. Then suddenly, as if one of her blows had found a tender spot, he gave an oath and flung her from him with such roughness that she stumbled across the uneven flooring, tripped, and fell against the log wall, with a force that wrenched a cry of pain from her set lips.

"Yuh—vixen!" he snarled furiously. "Try that on me, will yuh? I'll learn yuh a thing or two. I'll—"

Abruptly he broke off and whirled to face the door. Huddled against the wall, Shirley got a fleeting glimpse of Ormsby Asher standing on the threshold, tall, gaunt, an expression in his hawklike face that turned her cold. She saw him

close the door and take a single step forward into the room. Then, without the faintest preliminary movement, his right arm flashed up, and from his cuff there seemed to spurt a penciling of yellow flame.

As the sound of the shot reverberated through the room, Mogriddle reeled back with a guttural cry, spun half around, and, sagging at the knees, sprawled, face downward, on the floor. Frozen with horror, unable to move a muscle, Shirley saw Asher leap forward, jerk the outlaw's gun from his holster, and drop it close beside Mogriddle's outflung hand. When the door was flung open an instant later, he was standing just inside it, cold, erect, emotionless, the faintly smoking derringer in his hand.

"He pulled down on me," he said in a cool, passionless tone. "Lucky I carry a derringer up my sleeve. What's the matter with him, anyhow? He must have gone loco, drinkin' redeye, or something."

For a brief space none of the men crowding the doorway spoke. Most of their faces were strange to Shirley, who found herself, even in that tense moment, wondering if Asher had brought them with him. Squint Greer, one of the Saddle Butte gang, did, indeed, glance suspiciously at the tall, somber, dominating figure, but swiftly dropped his eyes. The man with the black beard gave a grunt.

"Mebbe that's it," he commented. "He was lushin' it—sort of."

"I thought so," shrugged Asher. "Well, better carry him out and see if you can do anything to bring him 'round. I had to shoot quick, but I didn't aim to kill."

But Spike Mogriddle was far beyond the reach of human ministrations. Shirley sensed it from the manner of the men, as they lifted up the sprawling body and carried it out into the darkness. What was worse, she *knew* that Asher had slain him purposely, with a

calm, cold, callous deliberation, so infinitely more appalling than a deed of hot anger. As she stumbled to her feet, Nell flew over to her, and, clinging together, the two girls met the glance of those coldly brilliant eyes, with the shrinking, fascinated terror the charmed bird has for the snake.

"Sorry to have given you ladies a shock, but it was unavoidable," purred Asher, a touch of irony in his tone. "From what I saw, however, I gather that I spared Miss Rives some further slight unpleasantness."

As he stroked his mustache meditatively, the diamond on his little finger flashed and sparkled in the lamplight, like some evil thing.

"I only just arrived," Asher went on presently. "But one of my men tells me that—er—our friend sent for Judge Cawley to perform a—marriage ceremony."

He paused invitingly, but neither of the girls spoke. Nell seemed on the point of collapse. Shirley, sick with horror and foreboding, suddenly began to shake. For Asher's glance, heavy-lidded, appraising, with a subtle, half-hidden expression brought the color flaming into her face. Even before he spoke, she knew somehow that it was not Nell he wanted, but herself!

"It would be a pity to bring the judge all this way for nothing," Asher mused softly. "My friends often tell me that the life of a bachelor is a poor thing. Sometimes I wonder if they're right."

He ceased, and for a brief space a tense silence lay over the room. It was broken presently by the thud of hoofs passing the window. The sound seemed to beat upon Shirley's brain like the dread inexorable march of fate. She straightened, her slim body stiffening, and one clenched hand flew to her lips. Over it her eyes stared—great wells of purplish black sunk in the dead pallor of her face.

Asher had turned with catlike swift-

ness and faced the door, alert and listening. Presently the horse stopped; there was a jingle of the bit, the creak of saddle leather. Then a rough voice spoke:

"That yuh, judge? Oh—Spike! Waal—yuh see—Orms Asher's inside. He'll tell yuh all about it."

Asher's tall, gaunt frame relaxed, and, glancing over his shoulder, his lips parted in a slow, feline smile. An instant later the latch clicked.

## CHAPTER XIV.

DAN RIDES.

**S**NORTING, sweat-lathered, sides heaving, the gallant bay carrying his double burden, swept around the corner of the ranch house and narrowly missed colliding with a bunch of five hard-eyed, determined cowmen just ready to mount. Moran reined him to an abrupt halt and then met the hard, chilly gaze of Mrs. Haight, who stood a few feet away. Hat gone, iron gray hair ruffled by the breeze, her tanned face was set in hard bitter lines, lips clamped, chin thrust forward, eyes glinting with a dangerous light.

"Well?" she snapped harshly, as Cass Barton and another man ran forward to support the limp body of Colonel Rives. "What's the matter? Is he dead?"

Dan wiped away a trickle of crimson from a cut in his cheek, where one of the later bullets had clipped him.

"No," he returned laconically. "Only fainted. He's plugged in the shoulder an' lost a lot o' blood."

Mrs. Haight's expression did not soften. "Lift him easy, Cass," she directed. "Take him into my room an' fix a bandage. I'll be there in a minute." Her glance shifted to Moran. "Who done it?" she demanded.

Dan swung down from his saddle, shaking the stiffness out of his legs. He was a little puzzled at her manner, but accounted for it by the evident dislike

she had taken to him from the first. Without wasting words he told her about the attack in the cañon and their subsequent flight and escape.

As Mrs. Haight listened, her glance fixed sharply on the man's face, a faintly puzzled expression crept into her hard black eyes. When he had finished, she glanced swiftly at his horse, standing near by with torn, tattered bridle reins trailing, and then back to Dan.

"Yuh mean to say yuh got enough dust in that time for somebody to hold yuh up for it?" she demanded.

Moran nodded. "Though how anybody got wise to it, beats me. There's over a thousand ounces on each one o' these hawses," he added in a lower tone. "Only for the cream, we'd have lost half of it." His eyes swept the front of the ranch house. "Ain't the—the girls around?" he asked with apparent inconsequence.

Her eyes glittered. "Around?" she snapped. "I'll tell yuh where they are. They're gone! Stole by yuhr friend—Spike Mogridge!"

A flood of crimson surged into Moran's clean-cut face, which suddenly seemed to freeze.

"What was that yuh said?" he asked her quietly.

"They been carried off by that beast, Mogridge, an' his gang," repeated the lady harshly.

Moran took a swift step toward her. His gray eyes had dilated to a deep purple; there was a dead-white streak around his mouth.

"Tell me!" he urged in that same low, compelling tone. "Quick! When did it happen? Where?"

There was something in his face which awed even Mrs. Haight's sturdy nature and loosed her tongue in spite of herself. Had she been wrong after all, she wondered. As she poured forth her narrative, she watched Moran closely.

"An hour before dinner. They went

off for a ride up the valley this mornin'. When they didn't show up by one, Cass an' 'Slim' Wickert started out to hunt 'em up. At the foot o' the trail they found Windy Bogert—shot! I'd sent him to Hatchett for some wagon bolts. He'd fell off'n his horse, an' the reins twisted around his wrist held the sorrel there. They brung him back, an' when he come to, he told us he'd rif into Squint Greer an' two o' Asher's men, who had hold o' Shirley. She yelled at him, an' he fired, but they got him first. His sorrel ran, an' he managed to hold on 'till he was jolted off at the bottom o' the trail. That's all he knew. Of course it might have been Orms Asher, but Greer bein' there, an' from what Shirley told me about Mogridge, I suspicioned— Where yuh goin'?"

Dan had turned swiftly and swung into the saddle. "Another hawses," he flung back, as he spurred toward the corral.

Mrs. Haight watched him disappear and then turned a thoughtful face toward the three punchers.

"I wonder if I could have got him wrong?" she pondered aloud. "Some way he don't act like he was playin' a part."

"If yuh ask me," commented Buck Stover, the straw boss, "I'd say he was plumb in earnest. There's some things a man can't fake good."

"Yeah," nodded Slim Wickert. "Yuh gotta remember, too, he never was quite as rotten as most o' that bunch o' pole-cats over to Saddle Butte. I wouldn't wonder if he did quit 'em cold, jest like Shirley's been tellin' us all along."

"H'm!" grunted Mrs. Haight. There was no doubt in her mind that Shirley did trust this man completely, and a month's close intercourse with the girl had given the older woman a favorable opinion of her judgment. "Yuh fellahs may's well wait up for him," she went on, as Cass and "Pink" Darrell came out of the house. "He'll shore be a mighty



helpful addition, if it comes to a showdown. There's something about them eyes o' his, an' the set of his chin that——"

She broke off at the sound of thudding hoofs and turned to see Moran, mounted on a splendid black thoroughbred—her own special, jealously guarded mount, whirl around the corner of the house.

"Might have known he'd pick the best in the place," she thought grimly. "Waal, after all——"

Dan pulled up with a jerk and, dismounting swiftly, dragged out of his saddle pockets two heavy canvas bags, which he dropped at Mrs. Haight's feet.

"Take care of 'em, will yuh?" he asked, with a meaning look. "They belong to Rives, yuh know. There's as much more on the cream. Yuh ain't gonna be here alone, are yuh? Where's the rest of the boys?"

"They took some three-year-olds to Fanning yesterday, an' they oughta show up any time now. Yuh needn't fret none," she added, reading his thoughts accurately. "Besides m' six guns I got a sawed-off shotgun in the house that I'll load pronto an' keep handy for any callers!"

Moran nodded and swung back into the saddle. The others had already mounted, and, without further delay, they set off down the valley at a lope. Immediately Dan ranged alongside Cass Barton, and in a few minutes he was acquainted with all the Bar S foreman knew about the affair.

This was not much. Apparently Mrs. Haight had gleaned all the important facts. It was possible, of course, to speculate as to how the thing had come about, where the outlaws were heading for, and a dozen other details. But nothing could be definitely decided until they reached the spot where the outrage had taken place.

Fortunately at this point the surface of the trail was not too hard to seize and

hold illuminating impressions. Two nights before there had been a heavy shower which blotted out the old tracks and held the impress of later ones with quite sufficient distinctness. In less than ten minutes the pursuers had gathered all there was to see and were spurring their mounts along the trail toward Hatchett.

By this time it was after four. Little over an hour later they pulled up in front of the deserted Driscoll house, where only a glance was needed at the smooth, untrodden sweep of bare ground leading in from the road, to send them on again.

Two miles farther on they clattered across a ridge of rock and were speeding on toward a sharp bend that followed the river, when Moran jerked the black to a halt.

"Hold up, fellahs," he said quickly. "That bunch never passed here."

He slipped to the ground, and one or two of the others followed his example. Though a number of hoof-prints pointed the other way, only two sets—and these were very fresh indeed, headed toward Hatchett.

"They've turned off some'ers between here an' Driscoll's," decided Cass.

He glanced questioningly toward Moran, who was staring back along the trail.

"That seam we just passed would be a likely place," Dan remarked thoughtfully. "Let's go back an' look it over."

At first they found no encouragement. Toward the river the granite soon gave place to sand, and that in turn to soft ooze, both innocent of any tracks. In the other direction, even for a considerable distance from the trail, the bare rock showed not the slightest mark or scratch. Then all at once Moran noticed the broken stem of a sturdy little plant growing in a crevice, and his eyes brightened. Presently Cass pointed out a bruised bit of juniper, and later on another.

"Looks like we're on the right track," he declared jubilantly. "They're followin' the curve o' the ridge an' keepin' out o' sight on the north side."

Moran nodded. He had ridden up to the crest of the ridge and was staring thoughtfully at the rolling, dappled open country to the south.

"Asher's outfit, ain't it?" he asked, glancing down at the others.

"Shore," nodded Stover. "The buildings are back o' that round hill, about eight miles to the south."

For a space they rode on in silence, following the trail with increasing ease, as the men ahead grew more careless. When the straggling clumps of spruce began to thicken into a continuous growth, sweeping over both sides of the ridge, the thing became child's play.

"Ain't there an old line camp up this end o' the ranch some'ers?" asked Dan suddenly. "Seems to me I remember—"

"Why, shore there is," cut in Slim Wickert. "A log shack set down in a kind of basin, with a bunch o' spruce around it. Don't guess they use it much."

Moran and Barton exchanged glances and urged their horses to a greater speed. With only an occasional brief comment they pushed on through the spruce growth. About half an hour later the trail they were following turned abruptly to the eastward, cutting almost directly across the summit of the ridge.

At Dan's suggestion they all dismounted and, leading their horses, went in cautiously. His vague recollection of the line camp—in which he was confirmed by Wickert—was that it lay rather close to the foot of the ridge, so that he was not surprised, after some ten minutes of walking, to glimpse through the thinning branches the low, squat building set down in a shallow hollow, not more than half a mile below them.

The distance, the gathering dusk and interfering foliage, made it impossible from where they stood to study the place with any satisfaction. A little distance to the right, however, a bare rocky shelf jutted out from the ridge. Making their way thither, four of the men remained under cover, while Barton and Moran crawled out through the undergrowth. Stretched flat on the ledge, Moran took the field glasses Cass handed him and hurriedly focused them on the hollow.

The details, though much clearer, were still considerably obscured by the rapidly falling dusk. Dan saw enough, however, to make him clench his teeth. The corral seemed full of horses; he did not even try to count them. Outside the bars a fire was just being kindled, and, standing or lounging around it, were a dozen or fifteen men. Who they were, or where they had come from, he had no idea. Nor could he locate Mogridge himself. With a feeling of baffled, impotent fury he passed the glasses to his companion.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE SLIM EDGE OF HAZARD.

SOME o' Asher's punchers from the Three Circles," Cass whispered after a brief scrutiny. "I can make out Cliff Trexler, the foreman, an' two, three others. The girls must be in the cabin, huh?" He lowered the glass and stared at Moran. "We'll shore have one dandy time gettin' 'em away from that bunch."

"It's gotta be done, though," declared Dan. "An' there ain't a thing to be gained by puttin' it off. Let's drag it."

He slid back through the bushes, Barton close behind him. It took but a few words to explain the situation to the waiting punchers, none of whom made any comment. Their faces were mostly invisible in the shadow, but Dan noted with pleasure a general hitching up of

cartridge belts and shifting of holsters. Evidently there was no thought of backing down.

"We better lead the cayuses down through the scrub, as far as we can, an' tether 'em there," he said in a low tone. "They won't be seen in the dark, an' we'll want to have 'em as close to the cabin as we can. Mebbe we can sneak right up to—— What's that?"

In the silence that followed there was wafted to them on the still night air the thud of hoofs, the swishing of branches, even the indistinct mumble of voices. The sounds came from the farther side of the ridge. Evidently two persons at least were approaching along the same general course they themselves had taken. Almost as one man Moran and the Bar S punchers left their horses standing and sped swiftly and noiselessly back through the trees.

Guided by the sounds and particularly by one exceedingly strident voice, which was presently discovered to be uttering one continuous stream of orders, they spread out along what seemed likely to be the course the unknown pair would take.

Moran's heart leaped savagely, as he recognized the familiar accents of Munk Henger, and he gripped Cass Barton's arm. "I'll take the first one, an' yuh grab the other," he breathed. "Tell Slim an' Pink to get the horses. No noise, o' course."

A moment later the bulking forms of two riders, advancing in single file, loomed through the shadows. Crouching beside a tree trunk, Moran waited, muscles tensed, fingers spread out like clutching claws, until the first horse was nearly abreast of him. Out of the corner of his eye he noted Barton's position a little to the right. An instant longer he held himself in, and then he leaped.

Hands accurately circling Henger's throat, he dragged the man swiftly from the saddle and flung him to the ground. There was a momentary furious strug-

gle, but Henger was no match for this man in whom the frenzied passion to kill was held in leash by the most tenuous thread. Some one grabbed the bridles of the startled horses. Their stamping and a stifled, frightened squawk from the second man was all that ruffled the still serenity of the night. With Stover's assistance Dan bound and gagged the half-choked Henger and then stepped back to where Cass squatted beside a prone and bulky figure.

"Who is it?" he asked in a low tone.

"Crawley, justice of the peace in Hatchett. Him an' Asher are thick as thieves—an' jest as crooked."

"Huh! What do yuh s'pose he's doin' here?"

"Got me," shrugged Barton: "We might ask him. Take yore hand off'n his mouth, Bill."

The puncher obeyed, and Moran, bethinking himself of a small pocket flash he carried, produced it and turned the thin beam on the prisoner. He was a tall man, with broad shoulders and what had once been an excellent figure. But sloth and good living had long since clothed his frame in a too, too solid mass of fat. A prominent paunch mounded the odd brown linen dust coat he wore—a paunch which quivered like jelly, with every fearsome tremor that shook his ample person. Barton perceptibly increased these tremors by drawing his gun and rudely poked the barrel into the judge's stomach.

"No tricks, yuh'ol' terrapin," he admonished. "Yuh let one holler outa yuh, an'——"

His thrusting emphasis brought a little moan from the fat man's pendulous lips. "I ain't goin' to holler. I wouldn't think of it. Take away that gun, won't you? You got it cocked."

"Shore I have, an' my finger's draggin' on the trigger. Shet up!"

With a heave and a quiver the judge struggled to a sitting posture, his bulging eyes shifting from side to side, his



weak mouth agape. His hair, grown long on one side and habitually combed carefully across a prominent bald spot, had become disarranged and hung down like a curtain over one ear. Barton's lips twitched in a momentary grim smile.

"Now spit it out!" he commanded. "What are yuh up to, yuh slimy ol' buzzard? What's brought yuh here?"

"I was—s-s-sent for," palpitated Cawley hurriedly. "Mogridge—sent for me to come out—right away to—to Orms old line camp an'—an' marry him."

A dead silence, broken only by a noticeable stir among the men standing around, followed this announcement. Barton's eyes, shifting sidewise, noted the hard, bitter, frozen look on Moran's face, curiously contradicted by the blazing passion in his gray eyes, and looked hastily away again. The stillness was so prolonged, however, that Cass finally glanced back again to find with some surprise that Dan's rage had been succeeded by an expression of keen, alert speculation.

"Get up!" Moran ordered abruptly, his eyes on Cawley.

Pallid and shaking, the judge staggered to his feet and stood there, swaying. "Wa—what you goin' to do?" he gurgled. "I——"

Moran silenced him with a fierce gesture.

"About my height, ain't he?" he said, glancing at Barton. "About the same size around the shoulders, too, I'd say."

"Jest about," nodded the puzzled Barton.

"O' course," pursued Dan meditatively; "he weighs a good thirty pounds more, but on a hawss in the dark the paunch wouldn't be missed under that long coat o' his. With his black hat pulled down——"

"Yuh ain't thinkin' o' dressin' up in his clothes an' goin' down there alone?" asked Cass.

Moran's lips tightened. "Somethin' like that's gotta be done. Lissen: Them two girls are in the cabin. Likely enough Mogridge, or somebody else he can trust, is watchin' 'em close. If we bust down there, what would yuh give for their chances o' gettin' out alive? Man, I know that devil. If he saw the girl was gonna slip through his fingers, he'd shoot her cold. If I can pull this trick, at least I can get inside an' down him first. It's full dark by now, an' the fire's some ways off from the door. Yuh fellahs can sneak up pretty close an' be ready to pile in, the minute I settle Mogridge. How about it? If yuh can think of a better way, I'm willin' to try anything—only we gotta act quick."

"Not me," returned Barton promptly. "I ain't got no brains when it comes to thinkin' out this sorta thing. At that, it might work, an', if yore willin' to try it, we'll back yuh up. Slide outa that coat, Cawley," he added sharply. "Where's his hat? An' don't forget that handkerchief he allus wears 'round his fat neck to keep the dust out."

While Moran hastily donned the borrowed garments, the judge was firmly bound and gagged, in spite of his quavering promises not to stir until they gave him leave. Henger's fastenings were also examined and tightened, and then, taking the two extra horses with them, all six started off down the slope.

Before reaching the edge of the hollow they paused at the sound of hoofs rapidly approaching from the east. These came on and passed, going in the direction of the cabin. Barton suggested that the unseen riders must be more of the Three Circle men—perhaps Asher himself—coming direct from the ranch house. After all, with the odds against them already so great, two or three more made little or no difference.

Much more disturbing was the muffled pistol shot that halted them at the edge of the clearing. It seemed to come from inside the cabin, and it was

followed by a stir and bustle and considerable running to and fro by the men gathered about the fire over by the corral. But it was not repeated, and presently, when the excitement had quieted down, Moran, who had held himself in by sheer will power, abruptly announced that he was going on.

"Yuh fellahs sneak up as close as yuh dare, but don't take any chances. When yuh hear another shot, that'll be time enough to get on the jump."

Without further speech, he touched the judge's horse with his spur and trotted off into the darkness. He had already taken his weapon from the holster and dropped it into the side pocket of Cawley's duster. Presently, as the dark bulk of the cabin loomed ahead, he slid his right hand down and gripped the butt.

Walking his horse around the corner of the cabin, he thought for an instant that he might reach the door unnoticed by the men who seemed to be all gathered around the fire. But, as he slid out of the saddle, hat brim pulled over his eyes and shoulders slightly hunched, a man stepped suddenly out of the shadows.

"That yuh, judge?" he asked, peering at Moran uncertainly.

"Yes," returned Dan promptly, in an excellent imitation of Cawley's throaty tones. "Where's Mogridge?"

"Oh—Spike?" queried the other hesitatingly. "Waal, yuh see, Orms Asher's inside. He'll tell yuh all about it."

Puzzled, wary, conscious alike of the need for haste and the danger of betraying himself to the Three Circle man—who had fortunately come up on the other side of his horse—Moran stepped over to the door and felt for the latch. Drawing his gun, he concealed it in the folds of the duster. Then with a swift, agile movement he pushed the door open, stepped through, and closed it behind him.

Asher faced the door about ten feet

distant, his tall, lean figure outlined prominently in the mellow lamplight. He presented an almost perfect target, but, to Dan's dismay, Shirley and Nell Driscoll were standing close behind him, directly in the line of fire.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE BLACK CARRIES DOUBLE.

AS the latch clicked, a desperate determination swept over Shirley Rives to resist this horror by every effort in her power. Surely this judge, no matter how corrupt, would not dare to perform that mockery of a ceremony in the face of her pleading protest. Slim figure straightening determinedly, she took a step to one side, so that she could see the doorway around Asher's intervening shoulder.

The man who entered was tall, with sagging shoulders and a big frame covered rather grotesquely by a long, wrinkled dust coat. A red handkerchief was knotted about his throat, and the wide-brimmed black felt hat was dragged so low that his face was quite invisible. His appearance was neither inviting nor reassuring, and, though Shirley had not expected much, she gave a disappointed sigh.

And then—a miracle! For a fleeting instant, between the lowered hat brim and the knotted handkerchief, her eyes—sharpened by love and terror—perceived the outline of a square, cleft chin. It was the merest flash of an impression, but it was enough. She *knew!* Against all probability and even reason, he had come to her, and her heart leaped chokingly.

All in the same instant—her wits were sharpened, too, by love and fear for him—she realized his peril. She saw that he could not fire at Asher because of her position; only too well was she aware of their captor's deadly swiftness. And so, without an instant's hesitation, she leaped forward and

catching Asher's right wrist with both her hands, clung to it desperately.

She was just in time. Under her gripping fingers she felt the hard, compact bulk of the derringer, operated by some contrivance of strong elastic bands. Even as Moran leaped forward, Asher's furious upward jerk of the arm swung the girl fairly off her feet, but still failed to loose her hold.

It was all over in a second. With a dull sickening thud Moran's heavy Colt crushed through the high-crowned black felt hat. Asher reeled, staggered, and crumpled to the floor, his fall eased by the swift hold of the man who had laid him low, making no noticeable noise. Hat gone, eyes blazing, crisp blond hair rising in a crest above his clean-cut face, Moran caught Shirley, as she swayed toward him.

"Oh, Dan—Dan!" she sobbed hysterically. "You came! It's been so horrible!"

For a second he crushed her to him, eloquent gray eyes devouring her haggard face. "I know," he whispered soothingly. "But it's over now—or almost. We've got to get outa here quick. I saw a window——"

"Of course." Swiftly she pulled herself together and, with flushed face and brilliant eyes, glanced toward the closed opening. "There's been a man watching it all afternoon."

"He ain't there now," reassured Dan. With a jerk he shed the encumbering dust coat, ripped the handkerchief from his neck, and softly unhooked the shutter. "Cass an' some o' the Bar S boys are waitin' for us—straight back o' the cabin. Yuh an' Nell beat it to them as quick as yuh can, an' I'll follow. Sabe?"

She nodded. "You—you won't delay?" she whispered.

His eyes caressed her gently. "Not me," he drawled. "Ready, Nell? All right, le's go."

Without a sound the shutter swung open, and, lifting Shirley bodily in his

arms, Moran swung her through the opening. Nell was helped through as quickly, and then, just as Dan had flung one long leg across the sill, the sound of steps came from outside the door.

Swinging through the opening, he closed the shutter and ran, the echoes of a brisk rap at the door bringing a grim smile to his lips.

"Knock away," he muttered, racing over the uneven ground. "Yore jest about sixty seconds too late, old dear."

As he caught up with the girls, a muffled, surprised yell issued from the cabin. Several voices answered it, and from the direction of the camp fire came the thud of scurrying feet. But, before the throng of Three Circle men could have much more than reached the cabin, Moran, a girl clinging to each arm, plunged into the little bunch of waiting Bar S punchers.

Eager hands hoisted Nell to the back of Munk Henger's horse. Moran hastily mounted the black and lifted Shirley to a place in front of him. Barton and the others flung themselves into their saddles, and, with a swerving turn, a swift drumming of hoofs, they swept around and sped away into the darkness.

"Straight along this side o' the ridge," shouted Barton. "It's longer, but we won't get messed up in those trees."

Back of them the darkness was riven by a little tongue of flame, and the crack of the shot echoed through the still night air. Another followed and another still, and then a regular fusillade of snapping shots. But Asher's men were firing blindly, and their bullets all went wild. Before saddles could be flung onto hastily roped horses, the rescue party had secured an almost hopeless lead.

Aided by the brilliant starlight, which was bright enough for their purpose, but of no help to their pursuers, they swept on across the rolling, open country, the horses responding gallantly to every urge. Far behind the thud of pursuing hoofs was barely audible. But, by the



time they reached the trail and were headed westward toward the Bar S, these had died away. Evidently, lacking Asher's guiding hand, his men had given up the pursuit as hopeless.

Until this moment there had been little or no opportunity for speech. Indeed, Shirley, in the blissful reaction from those interminable hours of strain and mental suffering, was perfectly content to lie there silent. Wedged in between the saddle horn and Moran's body, jolted every now and then by the inevitable stumbling of the doubly laden black, her position might have seemed one of acute discomfort.

But it was not—at least to her. Dan's left arm was around her shoulders. Her right hand slipped down along his side and, found a steadying hold on his broad leather belt. Under the rough flannel of his shirt, against which her face was pressed, she could hear the strong, rhythmic beating of his heart. It all meant safety, security—and something even more. When at length he began to talk in low tones, telling her of the happenings of the past few hours, she listened dreamily, her mind not more than half on what he was saying.

Only the knowledge that Windy Bogert had not been slain, but was in a good way to recovery, stirred her to fervent gratitude. She was troubled, of course, to learn about her father, but, as his wound—this Moran had from Barton—was far from dangerous, her worry

over him was not long enduring. Of the treasure they had found she scarcely gave a thought.

At length, when all was told, Moran fell silent for a space. Strung out in single file the horses were slowly mounting a steep part of the narrow trail, the black bringing up the rear.

"What made yuh grab Asher's arm?" asked Dan suddenly in a low tone. "Yuh know—that saved my life. He always carries a derringer up his sleeve, an' he's quick as lightnin' with it."

"I know," said Shirley with a momentary shudder. "I saw him—use it!"

"But my face was covered by the hat brim—at least it must have been, or he'd have plugged me."

"I—I saw—your chin," she told him slowly.

"My chin!" puzzled. "Why, what's there about my chin that's different from anybody else?"

She did not answer at once. Instead, her head dropped back a little against his shoulder, and she raised her eyes to his.

"It's just *yours*," she murmured softly.

For an instant Moran sat rigid, gray eyes searching her shy, flushed, lovely face. Loosened by the cool night breeze, a wavy strand of brown hair gently caressed his cheek. It was a moment in which they seemed suddenly alone—shut out entirely from the whole wide world. Abruptly his arm tightened about her; his head bent swiftly.

### WILL LASSO PLESIOSAURUS

WHEN Professor Elmer S. Riggs, a Chicago paleontologist who sailed a short time ago for Patagonia, South America, was informed that a live plesiosaurus was still being reported from the Territory of Chubut, he said that if he met the plesiosaurus he would put a lariat around its neck and lead it to the Buenos Aires Zoo. The report made us wonder just what kind of lariat would be best suited to the professor's task, and we wished he could have had a talk, before he left for the wilds of South America, with some of our Western boys who know all about these all-important lariats. Professor Riggs' expedition into South America is for the purpose of hunting fossils for the Field Museum.

# A "Micky" to a Man

BY  
*Herbert S.  
Farris*



Author of "'Done' at Drydust," "'Brindle' Burke Drops In," etc.



REPARATORY to making his usual weekly trip to Pine Bluff, "Prohibition Jim" Haines bent his stalwart young back and energetically shook hands with Tin Lizzie. For more than a year it had been his exclusive privilege to make the drive to the county seat, for a most excellent reason. The reason was his employer's—Prohibition Jim could be trusted absolutely and implicitly to make the round trip, a distance of a hundred miles, without touching liquor in any form.

Even in the heyday of Montana's saloon days, before the great drought that brought "mountain dew" to almost every hill and dale in the great State, Prohibition Jim had held a prejudice against intoxicants. And this moonshine whisky—according to Jim Haines, it was deadly stuff and had only one use that was legitimate—it might with safety be used in the radiator of a Tin Lizzie in lieu of water when winter made a nonfreeze mixture necessary.

As he bent over to crank his tiny car his fellow cow-punchers stood in a semicircle, prepared to speed him on his way with the best mixture of playful

sarcasm and humor of which they were capable. But it was all quite good natured; no one who knew Jim Haines as they did could help liking him.

"Prohib," suggested "Blondy" Jones, "don't you-all go and get pie-eyed this trip. Remember 'at likker's a curse an'—"

"Yeah," interrupted "Shorty" Purcell, "likker's a curse. Down with likker!" and Shorty crooked his elbow while holding an imaginary glass to his lips.

Even "Dummy" Tate unlimbered and went into action. "Prohib," he warned soberly, "think of the trouble you are to us when you-all get liquored up. Ever' time it happens the boss has to send us boys into Pine Bluff jest to round you up. Don't do it this time," he concluded and solemnly wiped his eyes with a long forefinger.

From behind the steering wheel Jim Haines was now grinning cheerfully at his friends. "If you've all had your say I reckon I'll be goin'," he said good naturedly, "but if I was a hooch houn' like you-all I'd go over in the timber yonder an' build me a nice little still instead of standin' around with your tongues hangin' out like a bunch of bird

dogs in the huntin' season. Get up, Lizzie," and without giving his friends a chance for the last word Jim gave the little car gas, threw in the clutch, and took a precarious turn into the county road through the big open ranch gate.

For almost two miles Jim Haines swayed along the narrow mountain road, pleased with the vista of rolling hills to his left, pleased with the towering crags to his right, and, most of all, pleased with the trip that was taking him from the daily routine of the ranch. It was glorious! He tossed his hat into the tonneau of the little machine and burst into a song of the round-up.

"With a foot in the stirrup, an' I'll soon be a-straddle;

An' here goes now for the dog-gone cattle.  
An' it's ki-yi-yippy, yippy-i—WOW!  
An' it's ki-yi-yippy, yippy-i."

When Jim had sung the tenth "spasm" of the old song he had reached Zeb Taylor's tumble-down shack, and here he stopped his car and sounded his horn lustily. For almost a year it had been his custom to deliver the old man's supplies from the county seat, and he was waiting now for the list which Zeb gave him each week. Zeb Taylor was gasping for breath as he hobbled to the highway; his eyes, protruding from their age-shriveled sockets, had the appearance of being freshly lubricated as he looked up pitifully at his young friend. His brown, bony fingers trembled violently as he held out a penciled list of provisions.

"Zeb," said Jim Haines, "you're hittin' up the booze pretty hard. You ain't runnin' a still up the river, are you?"

"If you'd punished as much red likker as I have in the last forty years, son," old Zeb told him plaintively, "I reckon you'd lap up a little booze, too. As for runnin' a still—well, if I knowed anything about makin' whisky I reckon the sheriff'd have one more moonshiner in his county to try an' look after."

"Zeb, you ought to cut it out. Booze

never did do a man any good, an' this 'moon' they're makin' these days would put out the best man in the State in a year's time—so they tell me. I wouldn't drink the stuff on a bet!"

"Jimmie, you ain't never had the gnawin' I got. I hope you never do have it. If you had you'd understand my need for the stuff." Old Zeb's cracked, blackened lips quivered pathetically. "You see, Jimmie, I jest can't get along without—"

"Well, never mind; I reckon you're one case that would be pretty hard to cure. Anyhow, it's none of my business. Better get in an' ride to Pine Bluff with me; it'd be quite a change for you, an' maybe do you some good."

"No thanks, Jimmie; my rheumatism's worse'n usual. Reckon I couldn't stand the jolt o' the car. Some other time, though."

Jim Haines glanced at the list the old man had handed him, saw that the order was pitifully small, then folded and thrust it into his pocket.

"Look here, Zeb," he began uncertainly, "if you need more grub than you got on this list—if you're short of money—I'll be glad to—"

"No, no, son," the old man interrupted, "it don't take much to keep me goin'. Thanks jest the same."

At Pine Bluff Jim Haines went methodically about his errands. When it was possible he liked to attend to his business before noon. Somehow it made him enjoy his dinner more; it gave him a feeling of satisfaction to know that he had nothing more to do, nothing on his mind other than to "hitch up" his Lizzie and leave town when it pleased him to do so. However, on this day he left one errand until the very last thing before he should leave for the ranch.

So it was that after he had attended to his errands, even to filling Zeb Taylor's order with Zeb's favorite grocer, he had lunch at Blake's Café, then took



his way to Pine Bluff's First National Bank. Here he entered the bank's private office and laid before the First National's president a letter and a check, both in the sprawling, irregular handwriting of his employer.

"I'd like to have the money brought in here if you don't mind," he said. "Not that there's any particular danger, but it's not my money, an' for safety's sake I'd just as leave nobody saw me tuck that amount away in my jeans."

The banker smiled. "Same old cautious Jim," he said. "But what's got into the old man? What does he want with ten thousand in cash?"

"Cattle's down an' times is hard an' we're goin' out on a two-week buyin' trip. Lots of people'll take less money for their stuff these days when you shake the dinero under their nose. It's lots better than writin' checks."

When the banker returned with the money Jim Haines divided it into two packets, and these he carefully placed in the huge inside pockets of his heavy coat. Then after buttoning his coat he nodded his farewell and left the bank.

Forty miles from Pine Bluff, at a point where a rough mountain road leaves the main highway to meander circuitously through the dips and rises of a stunted pine forest to the Byrne Ranch, two men, bearded and rough-clad, halted their weary, sweat-stained ponies for a survey of their surroundings.

"How about the top o' that hill there?" asked the taller of the two, indicating a point almost a half mile distant.

"Jake with me," the other answered carelessly. "Reckon we can see the forks of the road here easy enough from up there."

"All right then. Let's beat it before somebody comes along."

With one accord they urged their tired ponies up the steep hill. They

held no further conversation until they reached the summit and tethered their horses in a clump of pines some distance from the road.

A few minutes later they threw themselves to the ground in an open space at the side of the road and gazed silently down the slope of the hill. For a distance of more than a mile the main highway, like a drowsing, twisted serpent basking in the afternoon sun, could be distinctly seen.

Finally the taller of the two men flicked a half-smoked cigarette into the dust of the road, then came to his feet and lazily stretched his long arms to their greatest length. For a moment he stood thus, his wide, thin-lipped mouth open, the contour of his sunken cheeks half hidden by a ten-day growth of stubbly red beard, and his overlarge nose and hard eyes cast in deep shadow by the broad brim of a shapeless black hat. Abruptly he lowered his arms and looked at his watch.

"Time to get busy, Joe," he said, his thin lips snapping to a straight line.

The other continued to stare out at the length of road. "He ain't in sight yet," he demurred. He looked up and met his companion's eyes, scowling angrily into his own. He leaped to his feet. "All right, 'Red,'" he mumbled, "if you think it's time."

They walked unhurriedly. Together they walked into the pines and returned with a heavy length of log, which they dropped by the roadside.

"We won't stretch it across the road yet," said Red. "Somebody might come along before he does, though it ain't likely. Lots o' time after we see his dust."

Joe dropped to the ground, panting lustily after his exertion with the log. He removed his hat and allowed the sun to shine upon his unkempt, black hair; then as he looked up it shone upon his hoarse, bloated face, unwashed and bestial.

"Think we'll have to kill him?" he asked casually.

"No!" Red snapped angrily. "What's the matter with you? Do you want to kill somebody?"

"We never killed nobody yet, have we?" asked the other with veiled truculence.

"No, an' we won't—till it's plum' necessary. What is it makes you think this job might be different from any of the others we pulled off?"

"Well, you know what Mike told us down at Drydust—said this guy was a plum' bad un' didn't he?"

"Sure, an' we had Mike drunk, didn't we?"

"All the same, Red, he wasn't so drunk but we believed him when he told us this feller'd be bringin' the money from town; that old man Byrne trusts him more'n himself; that he heard old Byrne tellin' Black, his boss, that he'd be back to the ranch Thursday or Friday to pay him two thousand for them cattle. We believed all that strong enough to be here, that's a cinch; but when Mike goes on to say that this Pro'hibition Jim's a bad man 'ith a gun, you think it maybe ain't so because Mike's drunk. So far as I can——"

"Aw, shut up! What difference does it make? If he's bad—bad enough an' crazy enough to show fight—he won't be bad very long, I reckon. How much you think he's got on him?"

"Dunno. Mike says old Byrne buys a pretty good bunch of cattle ev'ry fall. Anyway, we know of two thousand' he's goin' to pay Black alone. Wouldn't surprize me if we get five or six thousand' off this guy."

"If we do," said Red thoughtfully, "we'd best beat it into Idyho. It's gettin' pretty hot for us in this neck o' the woods."

Joe displayed a row of blackened teeth. "Gettin' a little bit leery of that new stock inspector at Pine Bluff, ain't you, Red?" he said. "Him with his

loud talk of rewards for us, an' makin' the big powwow that he'll chase us out of Montana in less'n sixty days! I'll reward the big—— Look! There he comes!"

It was a puff of dust on the main highway that had caused Joe to shorten his diatribe of the stock inspector at Pine Bluff. There it was, a cloud of dust that billowed up in the distance and dissipated itself almost as soon as formed, in the slight breeze that carried it to the pines on the mountainside.

"Come on!" said Red. "He'll be in sight of us before very long. Give us a lift!"

Quickly they laid the log across the road; then unhurriedly, but in a thoroughly businesslike manner, they produced dirty, discolored handkerchiefs, which they tied over their faces. When they had finished, only two pairs of eyes were visible between handkerchiefs and hatbrims.

Red indicated a boulder across the road. "Git behind that!" he ordered sharply. "An' keep still. I'll do the talkin'!"

Himself ensconced behind the spread base of a pine uprooted in the shallow soil at the top of the hill, Red watched his companion as he obediently took his position behind the boulder. From their hiding places both men peered out at the little car rapidly approaching. There was a chance, of course, that the man driving the car might not be the person they thought. That question, however, was solved a minute later when the automobile left the main highway and began the ascent of the hill. Now it was near enough to hear the engine's exhaust.

At the middle of the hill the driver skillfully shifted to low gear, and the little car approached them more slowly; at last it surmounted the brow of the hill and came to an abrupt stop. Jim Haines had suddenly applied his brakes and now sat upright in his seat as he

looked with a puzzled expression at the log which blocked the road.

"Well, how in——"

"Stick 'em up!"

The sharp command that broke in upon his thoughts and the beginning of his bewildered soliloquy, came from the spread base of an uprooted pine, and without the slightest consideration Jim Haines reached like a flash for the holster beneath his arm.

"Cut it! They's two of us, an' we both got you dead—see? Reach high, an' do it immediate, or you're a gone cat! Up with 'em!"

The speaker's voice was even more cold and incisive than when he had first spoken, and slowly, as his good sense came to his rescue, Jim Haines allowed his hand to slip from beneath his arm.

"Up with them hands—quick!"

Slowly, reluctantly, Jim Haines raised his hands, stretched them high above his head.

"Crawl out. Don't move so slow, neither!"

Jim Haines obeyed, and a moment later he stood with upraised hands in the dusty road; but he was eagerly alert and watchful, and his keen gray eyes were constantly on the lookout for any opportunity that might present itself as the two bandits approached him from either side of the road. Evidently Red intended to take every precaution with this man who had been described to him as "a plum' bad un with a gun."

"Joe," he said, "jest you stand at this guy's side an' tickle his ribs 'ith the point of that gun of yours. If he bats an eye while I'm goin' through 'im, smoke 'im up!"

Cautiously Red advanced and took the revolver from the holster beneath Jim Haines' arm. Then, after tucking the weapon in his pocket, he swiftly and methodically continued his search. As he found and abstracted the two packets of currency from the pockets of his victim, his hard eyes took on a

light of pleased surprise. He had not expected to find so large an amount. He thumbed through the bills hurriedly, making a rough estimate.

"How much, Red?" Joe asked eagerly.

"Shut up, you fool! Ain't you got no more sense than to go bawlin' my name out that way!"

"Aw, what's eatin' you?" Joe retorted. "Ain't they a thousan' fellers called Red in Montana, an——"

"Shut up!"

"I'm shut, but you ain't goin' to be wanted a bit more when we finish this job than you are right now."

"Never mind. Jest you keep your gun at this feller's ribs while I tie him up!"

Red had now stuffed the money into his pockets. From a cavernous coat pocket he produced a piece of rope, with which he proceeded to render his prisoner helpless. At last Jim Haines lay in the grass at the side of the road, hands and feet stoutly trussed to the satisfaction of both outlaws.

"Should I gag him?" asked Joe. "He's liable to raise a holler after we pull out."

Red shrugged his contempt. "Are you crazy?" he demanded. "They ain't a house in seven or eight miles. Let him holler if he thinks he's got a holler comin'! Come on, let's beat it!"

"All right," said Joe meekly, "but we got a mighty long ride ahead of us, an' blame little grub. Let's take a look at what's in that flivver."

"First time you've showed any sense for a week," was Red's manner of showing his enthusiasm for Joe's suggestion. "We'll jest load up an' save takin' the chance of stoppin' for grub at Drydust."

Together they went to the little car where they proceeded to make up two small packs, which they intended to tie behind their saddles. The provisions they could not use they scattered ruth-



lessly in the road. Red completed his pack first and became impatient at the other's delay.

"Come on," he called, leading off, "we got a long ride to make before dark."

"Jest a minute," said Joe, who was busily overhauling the tiny box of provisions containing Zeb Taylor's supplies. "You didn't take a look in this little box, an' I'm hungry for bacon. Maybe there's some in here."

Joe found no bacon, but he did find a carefully wrapped package, from which, after he had tediously unrolled several layers of heavy wrapping paper, he produced two soda-pop bottles, each containing almost a pint of liquid, colorless except for a greenish tinge given it by the glass containers.

Joe uncorked one of the bottles, smelled of its contents, and, after tasting it gingerly, emitted a joyous yell. Red, who was walking in the direction of the tethered ponies, turned and looked at his partner with a puzzled frown.

"What's all the big noise about?" he demanded impatiently.

Joe's coarse, bestial face was contorted into a horrible grimace of triumph. He had removed the handkerchief which had served him as a mask, and now he approached his partner, a bottle in each hand.

"One for you an' one for me!" he chortled as he held the bottles aloft. "A 'Micky' apiece!" He thrust one of the bottles at Red, whose frown melted away as he received it. Red removed the cork, took a sip thoughtfully with the air of a connoisseur; then, all doubt removed, he tilted his head and drank deeply.

"That's mighty good 'moon,' Joe," he said with a sigh of intense satisfaction.

By way of reply Joe reduced his visible supply to the level of that in his partner's bottle. "Yes," he said with

an attempt at a grave, judicial expression, "the guy that cooked this stuff sure knowed his business." He walked to where Jim Haines lay sprawled helplessly in the grass, and waved the bottle triumphantly before him. "Say, feller," he demanded, "do you make this stuff?"

Jim Haines looked up in astonishment. "Make what?" he asked.

Red, who had approached, took another pull at his bottle and winked solemnly at Joe. "Don't make the man admit nothin'," he counseled sagely, "unless, of course, you go ahead an' tell 'im that anything he says is likely to be used against 'im."

Joe was highly appreciative of his partner's wit. He laughed heartily, consumed almost half the contents of his bottle, and shivered perceptibly from the effects of the fiery stuff.

"If I could make whisky like this," he said, "I'd tell the whole world about it! I'd be real proud of myself. Why, she's got a kick like a two-year-old Missouri mule!"

Under the influence of the potent contents of his bottle Joe was rapidly beginning to look with friendly eyes upon all humankind; even this poor "rumdum" of a cow-puncher lying there on the grass wasn't such a bad sort. Of course, nothing but sheer ignorance could prompt a man to work for forty dollars a month when by using a little judgment he might pull off a job such as he and his partner, Red, had just accomplished.

"Say, pardner," Joe continued, addressing Jim Haines, "if you didn't make this stuff, who the devil did you buy it from? I've drank my share of moonshine, but this is jest a little the best I ever struck. Man, I tell you she's powerful!"

Red, sucking at his bottle and dreamily viewing the landscape, was shocked into consciousness by this last remark. "Powerful!" he said emphatically. "I'll say it's powerful! Course, though," he

went on reflectively, "it might be it's a feller's condition. Any likker's got more power when a man's stummick's empty. Empty stummick—that's me. Say, Joe, let's cook us up a feed. Empty stummick—stummick thinks my throat's cut."

Joe was highly delighted at the suggestion. Just at that moment he would have been delighted at anything whatever. "Red," he said as he seated himself in the grass, "y'ain't the man to talk 'bout cookin' 'less time's come t' cook." He weaved about unsteadily, took another drink, and vainly attempted to place the cork in his bottle. He was much amused that this feat was impossible. "Red," he continued in maudlin fashion, "le's have 'nother drink."

Jim Haines, who had at first been watching the men in bewilderment, began vaguely to formulate a plan of escape. There was but little chance, he reasoned, that his captors could be induced to liberate him; but the chance, however slight, was well worth taking. Patiently he waited until the two had almost drained their bottles.

"Boys," he said carelessly, "you said something about eatin' a few minutes ago, an' me—I'm hungrier'n a she-wolf. Suppose you let me up from here, an' I'll show you that I am the best little camp cook in Montana."

Joe blinked at the speaker. "Cowboy," he said thickly, "you got 'nawful crust. You jes'—"

"Shu-tup!" This from Red. Drunk as he now was, he resented Joe's apparent attempt to assume leadership. He drained the last of his moonshine and threw the empty bottle to the dust of the road. "Joe," he said solemnly, "le'm cook—tie 'im loose an' le'm cook. Ol' Red'll see 'e don' do nothin' but cook." He drew his six-shooter, held it limply before him. "Shay, tie 'im loose!"

Joe, accustomed to do Red's will,

produced a wicked-looking pocket knife and steered an uncertain course to the prisoner. First he cut the rope about Jim Haines' feet; then, placing his knife blade beneath the bonds at the cowboy's wrists, he cut them with a quick slash and rolled to one side, out of range of his partner's six-shooter. It was all done with the extreme cautiousness frequently shown by a drunken man. Joe seated himself beside his partner.

"Gi-tup, cowboy!" commanded Red. "Up on yer hin' laigs, an' do yer cookin' ack! Take look at the Micky there, first!" He indicated the bottle he had thrown in the road, and instantly there came a sharp report from his six-shooter.

Although Jim Haines gave no indication by word or sign that he was affected in the least by the outlaw's marksmanship, he had not failed to observe that Red's shot had shattered the bottle into a thousand fragments. Briskly he went to work, and in a few minutes he had collected pine boughs with which to build a fire.

"You can sure shoot," he said admiringly as he paused on his way from the road, where he had salvaged some of the provisions which the outlaws had thrown away when they were rifling the contents of the car. "I've seen a good many like you—fellers that can shoot as good drunk as sober."

"Think I can't," said Red boastfully. "Jes' make a funny move! I'm bes' shot 'n Montana!"

Jim Haines busied himself about the fire he had kindled. At the same time he was intently watching every move made by Red and Joe, who were seated side by side at a distance of about fifteen feet. Joe, he noted with great satisfaction, was nodding drowsily, showing not the least interest in his partner's boasts.

"Bes' shot 'n Montana," Red went on. "Show me shot—hit anythin', me."

"That can in the road," suggested Jim Haines, "the little one."

"'Seasy," said Red and promptly proved the truth of his statement.

"Fine! Try this," and Jim tossed a can into the air. "Can you hit 'em on the fly?"

Three shots Red fired. Jim retrieved the can, and at a distance he pointed out the fact that but one shot had taken effect.

"I think that's blame good shootin'," he said heartily, "though I knew a fellow once that could hit a can at that distance two times straight—sometimes three. But then he was the best I ever saw. Why, once I saw him——"

"Throw 'em 'gain!" Red commanded.

Jim Haines' hand trembled as he once more prepared to toss the can. He shot a hasty glance at Joe and was relieved to see that individual's chin sunk forward to his chest and almost buried in his blue flannel shirt. With an effort he steadied his voice.

"Ready? Get 'er twice this time. Here she goes!"

Came the sharp crack of Red's six-shooter, immediately followed by a dull, metallic click, for which Jim's ear was straining. Not another shot left!

Even as Red, with a wild oath, attempted to come to his feet, Jim was upon him with the leap of a cougar. The cowboy made two lightninglike moves; the first brought Red back to earth in a sitting posture, and the second brought the heads of the two bandits together with a sound that was dull, sickening.

That was all; Jim Haines knew his strength. Without a backward glance he went to his car for a rope, and five minutes later he wiped his perspiring forehead as he grinned down with great satisfaction at his captives, quite as neatly trussed as he had been a few minutes before. Next he transferred all weapons, and the money Red had taken, from the pockets of the bound

man to his own; then like two heavy sacks of wheat he carried the men to the car and, one after another, dumped them carelessly and somewhat roughly into the tonneau.

Seven miles down the road Jim Haines stopped his little car at Zeb Taylor's and with a grin watched the old man as he hobbled forth for his provisions.

"Zeb," said Jim, pretending anger, "what've you been havin' me bring you for nearly a year?"

"Grub," said old Zeb innocently. "Why, what's the idee, Jimmie?"

"Nothin' else?"

"Well now, Jimmie——" The old man's watery blue eyes lowered before the cowboy's direct gaze, and he shuffled his feet awkwardly in the dust of the road. "Jimmie," he went on in embarrassment, "you know you said yerself, only this mornin', that you reckoned my case was one where it'd be hard for a man to quit, an—you've got it for me, ain't you, Jimmie?"

"It's in back there," said Jim with a jerk of his thumb to the tonneau, "inside two of the worst thugs in Montana."

"Hey? How's that? What'd you say you brung it in, Jimmie?"

"Listen, Zeb. I'm in a hurry. You got no more booze'n a rabbit this trip. Those two crooks killed both your bottles. Let's see, how much do they set you back for them—Mickies, ain't it?"

"Jest a dollar apiece. Nobody charges more'n a dollar for a Micky in Pine Bluff."

"Well, I know of at least four thousand dollars' reward money that's offered for these two thugs, an' I'm goin' to cut it in two with you. Reckon that's not so bad for two one-dollar Mickies, is it, Zeb? Get up, Lizzie!"

At the Byrne Ranch the punchers were washing up for the evening meal when Prohibition Jim Haines drove up



with his prisoners. The astonishment of the boys rendered them speechless as they gathered about the little car and stared down at the bleary-eyed bandits.

"Prohib," questioned Blondy Jones, "I thought you-all was goin' to bring grub back when you come. This here don't look good to eat—not to me, it don't!"

"An' you got 'em all tied up nice an' pretty," Shorty Purcell chimed in. "Who are they, an' what you collectin' 'em for?"

"Prohib," contributed Dummy Tate accusingly, "I b'lieve these friends o' yours've been drinkin'!"

"Boys," said Jim, "I want you to meet a pair of the toughest an' worst

all-round cattle rustlers, hold-ups, an'—an' common drunks that ever give the slip to a sheriff! Boys, meet Red Burns an' his pardner, Joe Devlin. Maybe you saw their pictures in the sawciety column of the Pine Bluff *Clarion* about two weeks ago."

Red Burns, who had been jolted back to consciousness and partial sobriety, emitted a long string of particularly lurid oaths.

"An'," he concluded, "it's a fine brand o' booze you handle, you rotten bootlegger!"

"It's some powerful," Jim agreed heartily, "when it only takes a Micky to the man to catch a pair of coyotes like you!"



#### NEW DISCOVERIES ABOUT CLIFF DWELLERS

SINCE the discoveries made a short time ago by Mr. William P. F. Ferguson, of Franklin, Pennsylvania, in uncovering the ruins of an ancient city on Isle Royale off the north shore of Lake Superior, archaeologists have been engaged in discussing the various theories which the ruins suggest. What manner of people were they who in prehistoric times inhabited the country now embraced by the United States? Who were the superior races who faded into oblivion and extinction before the coming of the red man? And the mound builders—where did they come from and whither have they departed? What of the cliff dwellers who have left us evidence in the ruins of their civilization that they were far in advance of the Indians and the first white men who came to these shores? These are some of the questions which have been asked over and over again, and which each new discovery brings to the fore once more.

In the ruins uncovered by Mr. Ferguson, archaeologists believe that they have found evidences of a people who were engaged in copper mining, and who lived on the Isle Royale from one thousand to two thousand years ago. Not much is left of these supposed dwellings of the copper miners—merely the foundations of a series of semiunderground buildings. Ashes of camp fires long dead have been found with the débris, as well as broken pieces of stones and some tools and hammers, the latter supplied with thongs. The workings of the aborigines may be found all about the island, for it is still virtually untouched by man, and scientists have a rich field in which to conduct their researches.

Indications found so far show that the copper on Isle Royale is not embedded in veins, but is mixed indiscriminately with rocks and earth. It is thought that the prehistoric miners merely dug a trench or furrow and ran it on for great distances, removing the deposits of pure copper as they found them. Remains of the ditches, still evident, would indicate that the miners rarely dug deeper than 30 feet, and that the average trench was about a half, a third, or possibly a fifth of that depth. The fact that the trenches criss-cross one another would tend to show that the miners were unwilling to let a square foot of earth hide its treasures from their eyes. As the work of excavating these ruins progresses, other interesting developments will no doubt shed new light on the prehistoric people who inhabited the island long years ago.



# Gray Wolves of Sea Foam Mountain

By *Reginald C. Barker*

Author of "Orange and Black," "A Rattler's Luck," etc.



WITH his left arm gloved to the elbow in one of the boots he had been greasing, old Bill Carson, the trapper, pointed at the two piles of furs which lay upon the bunk in the little cabin on Thorne Creek Peak.

"Well, Tommy," he remarked to a small, ferret-eyed man seated at the opposite side of the stove, "I guess this is where we take different trails."

Rising from his seat Tommy Giles picked up one of the skins and thoughtfully smoothed its silky, brown fur.

"How much do you reck'n we've made, Bill?" he asked.

"Most of the marten will bring thirty bucks," replied his partner. "Altogether our winter's catch should net us about one thousand dollars apiece."

"A thousand bucks for each of us," mused the little man. "That's a lot of money to throw away, Bill."

"Throw away!" repeated his partner. "Who's goin' to throw it away?"

"Yuh are, dog-gone yuh," said Tommy accusingly. "Oh, I know what yuh're goin' to say. Yuh are figurin' on buyin' an apple orchard down in Oregon. Now ain't that right, Bill?"

"I been thinkin' about it—all right,"

admitted the big man from his height of six feet and two inches.

"Yeh," jeered Tommy. "An' that's all yuh will do, is to think about it. Yuh'll get to Boise, an', the first thing yuh know, yuh'll go down to some sales stable an' buy a couple of spavined cayuses an' some pack outfits what have been tinkered up with hay wire. Then yuh'll mosey over an' buy a gold pan, an' a lot of worn-out prospectin' tools from a secondhand store, an' pay more for 'em than yuh would for new ones. Later yuh'll play a dozen hands of poker down at 'Pug' Kelley's place. By that time yuhr apple orchard will have gone down the flume, an' yuh'll have to come back to the big hills an' prospect around until it's time to trap again. Now ain't that about the size of it, Bill?"

"This time, when I get my check for my share of the winter's catch, I'm sure goin' to put it right in the bank," protested Bill virtuously. "Then I know it will be safe."

Tommy Giles laughed raucously, as he tossed the marten pelt back upon the pile. Then he picked up his share of the skins and threw them on top of those belonging to his partner.

"No, yuh won't, Bill," he said.

"Why not?" asked his partner in amazement. "Who's goin' to stop me?"

"I am," announced Tommy. "Listen: how much have yuh got to show, Bill, for yuhr thirty years in the hills? One thousand dollars, that's all for thirty years of hardships!"

"Jest the same, Tommy," said the big man, "I've had lots of adventures yuh'd give yuhr back teeth to have had; an' I've seen the raw gold rollin' down the riffles of many a sluice box."

The little man sniffed.

"Adventure!" he scoffed. "Gold! The day of adventure and the day of findin' gold is pretty near past, Bill. Do yuh know that this is the year nineteen twenty-three?"

"What's that got to do with me not putting my money in the bank?" asked the big man.

"Just this," answered his partner. "This Thorne Creek Peak country is gettin' pretty well trapped out, ain't it?"

"Uh-uh."

"Well," said Tommy, "about a hundred an' thirty miles north of here, I now of a stretch of virgin trapping country that ain't been trapped for twenty years or more. They say, too, that the gray wolves have become so thick in there of late years that a man ain't safe travelin' alone at night."

A flicker of interest showed in old Bill Carson's eyes at the mention of wolves.

"Where is it" he asked.

"It lays northwest of Sea Foam Mountain," replied the little man. "It is the country layin' between the middle fork of the Salmon River an' the Thunder Mountain country. And," he added, "they say that there's still gold in there."

Old Bill puffed reflectively at his pipe.

"It would cost a pile o' money to 'stablish a string of trappin' camps in there," he said. "I've heard tell of that country, an' they say she's a bad one."

"We've got the money righth now," said Tommy persuasively, "but, if we take different trails an go to the bright lights, we'll spend it all. If we was to ship in this winter's catch of furs an' have our checks mailed to Salmon City, we could outfit there, spend the summer building our string of cabins, an' be all set by October to make a big clean-up of furs next winter. If that wouldn't beat all this here adventure yuh're talkin' about all the time, I'd like to know what would. Trappin' has got to be run as a business, Bill; there ain't no denyin' it."

Old Bill shook his head, still unconvinced.

"There ain't nothin' will beat adventure, Tommy," he said. "There ain't nothin' beats seein' the raw gold in the sluice boxes."

"An' where will yuh find adventure or raw gold in the riffles, nowadays?" demanded Tommy. "The new highway has even gone through our old diggin's in Tackawanna Cañon. An' yuh can't go nowhere without hearin' the honk of an automobile. No, Bill, we may just as well look the thing in the face; we've got to quit it an' go into business, sooner or later. So why not make a business of trappin'?"

Before answering, the big man strode to the door of the cabin and gazed across the vast stretch of country that lies between Thorne Creek Peak and the Moore's Creek Summit. Here and there patches of snow still remained upon the upper reaches of the hills, but for the most part the range was bare of the white carpet that had covered it for nearly seven months. Along the side of Tackawanna Cañon a white ribbon showed, part of the new highway, of which Tommy Giles had been speaking.

As he gazed, old Bill felt a queer sensation. A hand seemed to clutch at his heart and threaten to squeeze it until it had succeeded in bringing tears to his eyes. It was the march of mod-



ern progress fighting the old-time sourdough.

"Come here a moment, Tommy," he called to the little, acid-faced man who had started to bale the furs of their winter's catch.

As Tommy reached the door, old Bill made a circular sweep with his arm. "See that, Tommy" he asked. "D'yuh see them clouds hangin' low above them timbered hills? What do yuh reck'n them clouds are hidin', Tommy?"

The little man snorted, for he could not understand.

"How should I know, Bill?" he asked. "Prob'ly rain."

From his great height old Bill looked pityingly at his little partner. "Mebbe they are hidin' adventure, Tommy," he said, "an' mebbe they're hidin' gold."

Tommy Giles turned away jeeringly. "An' mebbe," he sneered, "that new highway was built for broken-down old sourdoughs like yuh, so that yuhr pore old spavined pack animals won't hurt their hoofs climbin' up an' down the humps an' hollows of the big hills."

"All right," said old Bill, "I'll jest go yuh on that trappin' proposition out in the Sea Foam country, but, lemme tell yuh somethin': that little strip of man work, called the new highway, ain't goin' to have any more effect on the tarppin' in this section of the big hills than a drownin' mosquito would have on the waters of Big Payette Lake."

## II.

"It's an ideal place for a cabin," remarked Tommy Giles about three weeks later, as he and old Bill Carson stood upon a boulder-covered flat, a little distance from the mouth of Soldier Creek, on the middle Salmon River.

"It's all right in the summer," admitted old Bill, "but it ain't no place for a cabin in the winter."

"What's the matter with it in the winter?" asked Tommy.

The old trapper pointed to the side of Sea Foam Mountain, towering above the site of the proposed cabin, to the height of nearly three thousand feet.

"Suppose the snow was to slip off that mountain one night while we was sleepin', Tommy, where do yuh reck'n we'd wake up?"

Tommy Giles grinned boyishly. "I know where yuh'd wake up," he stated.

"If the snow ever broke loose up there," explained old Bill, "she'd come down the side of old Sea Foam Mountain like a howlin' thunderbolt of destruction, an' sweep this flat clean to bed rock."

Tommy Giles turned his little hatchet face to one side, like a bantam rooster, and squinted with a pale-blue eye at the precipitous slope that backed the flat.

"Heck, Bill!" he exclaimed. "Look at all those little firs growing upon the side of the mountain. Where do yuh suppose those little firs would be, if the snow was always slippin'?"

"Those firs are not more than fifty years old," stated his partner; "an' look at the down timber piled on the flat here. Between fifty and fifty-five years ago, Tommy, there must have been a big slide here, and what has happened once can happen again."

But Tommy Giles was ignorant and stubborn in his ways.

"Heck, Bill!" he exclaimed. "Lightnin' never does strike in the same place twice."

"Mebbe it don't," admitted his partner. "I ain't never noticed. But I *have* noticed that snowslides occur twice in the same place, an' oftentimes twice in the same year. All that flat is good for, Tommy, is for a placer claim in the summer time; looks as though there might be payin' gravel beneath all them loose boulders."

"Of course," said Tommy Giles nastily, "if yuh're scared, Bill, there ain't no more to be said. Yuh that are

always talkin' about adventure and gold in the riffles. Yuh ain't huntin' adventure, Bill. What yuh are huntin' is an old ladies' home an' a pair of knittin' needles."

"I ain't huntin' sudden death, Tommy," replied his more experienced partner imperturbably. "An' that is what it will amount to, if a slide should hit the cabin while we are asleep."

"Maybe 'twould have been better if we had split up," said Tommy Giles. "Then I could have built a cabin wherever I chose. Yuh make me tired, Bill, with yuhr talk of adventure and gold and snowslides. The trouble with yuh, Bill, is that yuh're gettin' too dog-goned old an' childish. Half of the danger the big hills get credit for possessing ain't there. As for adventure, there ain't no such an animal."

"Red gravel," said old Bill Carson irrelevantly, as he bent and turned over a boulder. "I wouldn't wonder if there was payin' ground under this bar, if a fellow could get rid of these surface boulders."

He straightened up and with an experienced eye glanced at the boulder-covered flat. "It would be taking an awful chance," he muttered; "still, if there's gold in this bar—" Suddenly he turned to Tommy. "I'll jest go yuh on buildin' a cabin here, Tommy. I got a notion to work this bar in the spring; I think it might pay."

"There yuh go again," said Tommy, "huntin' things that ain't. We came out here to make a business of trappin' furs, not to prospect for gold, nor to hunt for adventure."

Old Bill cast a speculative eye at Sea Foam Mountain.

"If them gray wolves yuh were talkin' about are around this winter, Tommy," he said, "yuh'll likely see plenty of adventure before spring, whether yuh are huntin' it or not; as for the gold"—he paused and with the toe of his hunting boot dug a hole in

the red gravel—"we'll get some o' that, too, or I don't know nothin' about signs. Guess we might as well begin clearin' a place for the cabin. Which way shall it face?"

"Hear him!" exclaimed Tommy to a blue jay that swung to and fro upon the top of an Alpine fir. "Which way do yuh suppose it'll face, Bill. Why, the river of course."

With a swing of his huge arms old Bill drove the blade of his ax deep into the side of a tree.

"It might just as well face the river and get acquainted," he said; "for if a slide should ever start—" Here he paused, then added ominously, as he shook his grizzled head: "I'm a darned fool to let yuh have yuhr way, Tommy; this ain't no place for a cabin."

In the exuberance of his youth Tommy Giles laughed.

"The trouble with yuh, Bill," he said, "is that yuh're old, too old."

### III.

Winter had settled down upon the Salmon River Mountains. Inside the cabin the number of skins of marten, fox, fisher, and lynx, hanging from the rafters, grew greater, as, day after day, upon web snowshoes the partners followed the trap lines. Up the river and down the river, for otter and mink; along bald, timberless ridges for foxes; down into deep ravines timbered with dark-green Alpine firs, where marten and fisher ran when the moon was full, and where the great, gray Canada lynx left frescoes of her pads upon the whitened forest floor.

One night, seated between the little hewn table and the red-hot stove, Tommy Giles raised his head and spoke:

"I told yuh there wasn't any more adventure left, Bill," he said. "We've been trappin' now for nearly three months, and nothing uncommon has happened."

Old Bill Carson paused in tightening a rawhide thong upon one of his snowshoes.

"There's lot of time yet, Tommy," he said; "lots of time yet." Then suddenly old Bill laid his pipe upon the table and arose to his feet. "Listen!" he commanded.

From somewhere out in the snow-covered forest came a long, low howl.

"What is that?" asked Tommy somewhat nervously.

Leaning the snowshoe he had been mending against the edge of the table, old Bill swung open the door, and the cold air, rushing in, met the warmth of the stove and turned to a white vapor that hovered in wreaths above the little lamp.

High above the summit of Sea Foam Mountain the full moon rode in a cloudless sky, flooding the forest with its silvery light. Upon the top of a dead snag facing the cabin, a great horned owl stood turning his head from side to side, as he watched for the deer mice that sometimes ran from shadow to shadow of the boulders which dotted the flat.

It was very cold, and Tommy, who had followed his big partner to the door, shivered.

"Shut the door, Bill," he said. "It's terribly cold."

Old Bill did not answer, but continued looking down the ice-covered surface of the Middle Fork of Salmon to where, a mile away, he could see under the white light of the moon a number of moving forms.

As the old trapper stood there, the silence of the night was again broken by a long, savage howl that rose and rose in volume, until, old sourdough though he was, old Bill felt the blood chill in his veins. One more look he gave, then he closed the door and resumed his seat by the stove.

"Guess we'd better travel together from now on," he said to Tommy.

Tommy bristled angrily, for he was very young.

"Who'll travel together?" he demanded. "Not me—I won't. I'll run my end of the dog-goned trap line, just the same as I've been doin'."

Old Bill looked at his partner thoughtfully.

"Sometimes I think yuh're quite a good little man," he said, "an' at other times I think yuhr just a plain fool."

"An' sometimes I wish yuh weren't a foot an' a half taller than I," retorted Tommy belligerently.

For thus does the loneliness of the big hills work upon the nerves.

"Yuh can thank yuhr stars I am," said old Bill ominously.

Closer and more savage in tone came the howl from the forest. Again Tommy shivered, and again with a tremor in his voice he asked: "What was it?"

Rising to his feet Bill looked down at his little partner, and slowly a pitying look superseded the anger in his eyes. But just to tantalize Tommy, he did not for a moment answer.

"You don't have to tell me what it is, if you don't feel like it," remarked Tommy angrily. "I guess I can go an' find out for myself." And he arose and laid his hand upon his rifle.

But a big hand reached out and took him by the slack of his pants, and another hand that seemed to Tommy even larger, closed around his neck, and, like a bad-tempered, squirming child, he felt himself lifted from his feet and tossed upon his bunk.

"Wolves," said Bill quietly. "Gray timber wolves."

And, disregarding Tommy, who whined threats from his bunk, the old trapper took from a shelf a tiny vial and for an hour or more sat by the stove pouring grains of strychnine into slits that he cut in tiny wedges of fat.

The night wore on. The light in the cabin was extinguished and all became still. Just before the dawn came the



wail of the spirit of loneliness, a howl from the woods.

#### IV.

Tommy's trap line was the one which led down the river, and it was from that direction that the partners had heard the howl of the wolves. Perhaps that was why Tommy was the first to leave the cabin the following morning. But if Bill noticed that his little partner was unusually hurried in his preparations for departure, he did not mention it.

With his rifle upon his shoulder and his pack upon his back, Tommy left immediately after breakfast without a word of farewell or a backward glance. He was still brooding over the treatment he had received at the hands of his gigantic partner. Had he troubled himself to glance over his shoulder, he might have been surprised to notice that instead of starting in the opposite direction, as was his custom, old Bill had not left the cabin.

In the thin, wind-blown snow that covered the ice of the Middle Fork, Tommy found the tracks of the wolves. As Tommy disappeared out of sight around the first bend in the trail, the door of the cabin opened, and Bill followed in the tracks of the little man. When he reached the wolf tracks he stopped.

Finding a track that was larger and more plainly defined than the rest, old Bill stooped and spanned it with his thumb and forefinger. Then he gave a low whistle of surprise.

"Four and one half inches from toe to heel," he muttered. "It is the biggest I ever seen." Then he straightened up and slowly walked in a circle around the tracks. "Eighteen of 'em," he muttered, "besides the leader; an' I didn't believe there was a gray wolf left in the Salmon River Range!"

For several hours the old trapper followed the tracks of the gray marauders.

As he snowshoed, from a bag at his side he threw to the right and to the left tiny pieces of poisoned fat.

"No use tryin' to trap 'em in this much snow," he muttered, "but mebber they'll fall for a bite of that."

In the red cold of a winter sunset he returned to camp and found that Tommy had preceded him. Apparently the little man had recovered his temper, for he had kindled a fire, and from a kettle upon the stove there came forth an appetizing odor.

"Put out some traps?" asked old Bill.

"What's the matter with yuh, Bill?" asked the little man. "Sure, I did. D'yuh think I'm gettin' soft-hearted?"

"Gray wolves are almighty hard to catch in snow," said old Bill.

"Yuh watch my smoke, Bill," retorted his partner. "I'll catch 'em all right."

But the old year came to an end, and neither old Bill nor his partner had caught a single wolf. They seemed to have left the country in the immediate vicinity of the trap lines.

"Bunch of deer winterin' down at the warm springs," was old Bill's explanation. "Them gray devils are cleanin' 'em out."

January brought with it cold that the little thermometer outside the cabin registered at being forty-five below zero.

"Coldest I ever seen outside of Alaska," was old Bill's verdict one morning, as they left the cabin. Tommy did not answer, but shivered miserably.

Little did old Bill dream that Tommy did not travel a mile down the river, but only watched him out of sight, then sneaked back to the cabin, where he built a fire in the stove and threw himself upon the bunk.

"Bill can freeze himself to death if he wants to," muttered Tommy. "I'm goin' to take a lay-off upon as cold a day as this."

Ten minutes later loud snores from the bunk proclaimed that Tommy had kept his word. Weeks of snowshoeing had worn out the strength of Tommy Giles, and all through the short winter day he snored steadily. When he at last opened his eyes and rolled from his bunk, he knew by the sad, gray light in the cabin that night was at hand. Feeling somewhat guilty, he started a fire in the stove.

"I'll have to get a move on me," he muttered, as he sliced the venison for supper. "Old Bill will be about frozen."

An hour passed, and the increasing darkness had made it necessary to light the lamp, and Tommy began to feel uneasy. The more uneasy he felt the madder he became. Again and again he opened the cabin door and looked up the Middle Fork, lying icebound and still beneath the pale moonlight.

"It would serve Bill right," muttered Tommy, "if I was to let him eat a cold supper." Just the same he replenished the fire and set the beans in the warming oven above the stove.

"He doesn't need to think I'm going to wait for him before I eat," grumbled Tommy.

But the evening wore on until the hands of the little alarm clock above the bunk pointed to eight o'clock, and still Tommy had not eaten. Instead, he kept up a continual trotting to and from the cabin door. All at once he thought of that morning when old Bill had pointed at the low clouds hanging over the mountains, and his partner's words came back to Tommy's mind.

"'Mebbe they're hidin' adventure, Tommy; an' mebbe they're hidin' gold.'"

"Huh!" exclaimed Tommy to reassure himself. "There ain't no more adventure now and darn little gold. Old Bill is all right."

Like an answer to his challenge there came from the forest a long, low, wailing howl.

Tommy pricked up his ears, shivered nervously, looked undecided; then put on his Mackinaw and his mittens. Then he reached for his fur cap. As he took it from its nail, it slipped from his fingers and dropped into an open can of kerosene standing behind the door.

"Thunderation!" exclaimed Tommy. "I've told old Bill a dozen times not to cut the top out of a coal-oil can. Durn these old-timers anyhow! Now I've gone and spoiled my cap."

Then he took his rifle from the wall and put on his snowshoes. "Just my luck," he muttered, "to have to go an' hunt for the poor old fool." And he stepped out into the night.

With head down and his chin tucked into the collar of his Mackinaw, Tommy breasted the bitter wind that swept up the river. For five miles the trail led along the bank of the river, then suddenly it made a sharp turn and entered the timber. As Tommy disappeared between the flanking firs, upon the ice of the river, a mile behind him there appeared a number of doglike animals that trotted with noses down upon his trail.

"Here's where old Bill left the trail," muttered Tommy, as by the light of the moon he saw where the snowshoe tracks of his partner left the main trail and disappeared up a heavily timbered ridge.

"I wonder what made old Bill climb the dog-goned mountain?"

Up the "dog-goned mountain" Tommy followed; over the ridges and down into a shadow-frescoed hollow; and there, by the side of a hole in the snow, old Bill's snowshoe tracks came to a sudden stop. Bending over the hole in the snow, Tommy called:

"Are yuh down there, Bill?"

"That yuh?" came his partner's voice.

"Sure it's me. Who did you think it was? Are yuh hurt?"

"Only my feelin's, Tommy," answered his partner. "Yuh'll find my belt

ax lyin' around in the snow somewhere. It pitched out of my belt when I slipped into this old prospect hole. Cut a couple of poles an' lower 'em down in here, an' maybe I can climb out."

Ten minutes later Tommy eased a couple of poles into the hole, a distance of some twelve feet. Then, before Bill could stop him, he slid down into the hole. As he reached the bottom, he gave a gasp of surprise. Old Bill, alive and unharmed, was seated upon the body of a gray wolf!

"What in Halifax do yuh call that?" asked Tommy, as soon as he had recovered from his surprise.

Old Billy grinned twistedly through his ice-clad whiskers.

"This," he said, "is adventure."

Tommy stared at the body of the wolf. "Yuh're crazy with the heat, Bill," he said. "How long have yuh been in this hole?"

"Guess it must have been about three o'clock this afternoon when I fell in," said old Bill. "Yuh see, Tommy," he explained. "I've had a line of poisoned baits out ever since the first night we heard 'em howl. Guess this one swallowed a bait an' went locoed, the way a poisoned wolf does, an' fell in the hole like I did."

"Then yuh didn't see the hole?" asked Tommy obtusely.

"I did after I fell into it," answered his partner dryly. "An' now don't ask me any more fool questions until we get back to the cabin."

As Bill's head and shoulders emerged from the hole, he gave a low whistle. Slinking away among the surrounding timber he had seen a number of gray wolves.

"Guess my rifle is down there, Tommy," he said. "Hand it up, will yuh?"

As Bill's hand closed upon the rifle stock, he gave a grunt of relief. Then, as he tried to work the lever, his relief changed to consternation. The fall into

the old prospect hole had so jammed the mechanism of the rifle that the lever refused to work. Bill had not a shot in his locker!

As Tommy Giles climbed out of the prospect hole, Bill put out a huge hand.

"Boy," he said, "in a few minutes we're goin' to face one of the biggest adventures of our lives, and mebbe the last. I jest want yuh to know that if we should pull through it, I won't forget that yuh came a-lookin' for me to-night."

Tommy snorted.

"What's the matter with yuh, Bill?" he asked. "I came huntin' for them wolves."

"Yuh're goin' to find more of 'em than yuh expected," said Bill. "Look there!"

And, as Tommy looked, he shuddered, for here and there among the shadows of the timber, green eyes glowed, disappeared; glowed in another place; glowed and disappeared. The gray wolves were closing in.

"How many of 'em are there?" asked Tommy in a shaking voice.

Bill shook his head. "Enough to put up an awful scrap," he said; "an' my rifle's jammed, too."

"What'll we do?"

"There's only one thing we can do," said the old trapper; "that's to build a fire. That'll hold 'em off until mornin'."

Tommy fumbled in the pockets of his Mackinaw. "My Lord," he exclaimed, "I came away without any matches!"

Out of the shadowed timber facing them trotted a great, doglike beast. Ten yards to their left another slinking form strove to gain their rear, but between them and the wolf lay the big prospect hole.

"Gimme yuhr rifle," said Bill. "I kin skin yuh a mile at shootin'."

Fifteen yards to the right there appeared another wolf, half seen among the shadows.



Bang! The light was bad, and it was only a wasted cartridge. Into the timber the gray wolves melted. Again green eyes glowed.

"How many cartridges yuh got, Tommy?"

"Only what are in the magazine, Bill," answered his partner. "I never figured on runnin' into anything like this."

"I told yuh there was still plenty of adventure to be had," Bill reminded him.

Tommy did not answer, for there was nothing he could say.

In the shadowed timber a gray wolf howled; five doglike forms took their places in a semicircle in front of Tommy and Bill. Bill felt in his pockets.

"Guess I must have dropped my match box down in the hole," he said thoughtfully, and he fired at the leader of the pack.

The rifle clicked. It was empty!

Reversing the useless weapon, Bill grabbed it by the muzzle.

"It's poor business, Tommy," he said quietly, "to leave camp without either matches or cartridges."

There was nothing Tommy could say that would fit the occasion, so he stooped and, picking up Bill's useless rifle, clubbed it, and by his giant partner's side stood and awaited the rush.

But the wolves were in no hurry; they knew; they knew. Back in the timber more green eyes glowed. Their reinforcements had arrived. In silence the newcomers took their places in the green-eyed, gray semicircle that faced the two men. Then, led by a huge, dark leader, snarling threats, the gray wolves rushed.

As though he knew which was the weaker of the two men, the huge leader lunged straight at Tommy's throat and knocked the rifle from his hands. At the same instant the clubbed rifle in the hands of old Bill rose and swung, and, with all the big man's weight behind

the blow, it landed with a thud upon the great wolf's spine.

There was a snap, as of a breaking stick, then with a howl of pain and wildly snapping jaws, the great leader rolled backward in the snow. Dragging his hind quarters he reached the pack, and they fell upon him with ravenous fangs.

"Better get down in the prospect hole an' see if yuh can find my match box," suggested old Bill. "It won't take them more than two shakes to eat that fellow, and then, once they've tasted blood, look out."

"Yuh go an' get yuhr matches, yuhrself," replied Tommy. "I ain't cold."

"One of us will have to stay an' hold them devils off," said Bill, "an' that one is me."

"I ain't goin' to leave yuh, Bill," stated Tommy obstinately.

The next instant he found himself lifted from his feet and unceremoniously dropped into the prospect hole, where he landed upon the body of the poisoned wolf.

How it happened that in the darkness of the prospect hole Tommy found the lost match box, can only be attributed to Providence. Having found it, like a wild cat he scrambled back up the leaning poles and arrived on top of the ground just as the gray wolves rushed a second time. As Tommy picked up and clubbed his rifle, the stock of Bill's rifle broke upon a shaggy back, and a second wolf caught the Mackinaw of the big man in its gleaming fangs.

Then was it given to Tommy Giles to see Bill exert his immense strength. Snapping off his mittens, he gripped the throat of the wolf in his bare hands. As the slaving jaws lolled open beneath that awful grip, the big man planted one foot upon the gray wolf's spine and slowly bent the head backward. There was a muffled snap, then old Bill Carson raised the huge body high above his head and flung it into

the heart of the pack. As the body of the great wolf left the hands of his giant partner, a thought came to Tommy Giles.

Snapping open Bill's match box, Tommy applied a lighted match to his oil-soaked cap.

As the thing blazed, the wolves shrank back, and Tommy hurled the flaming cap into their midst. Like shadows of the night, they melted into the darkness before the menace of the flying fire, and for a few moments the partners were alone.

"Do you still think there ain't any adventure to be found in the year nineteen twenty-three?" asked Bill quizzically, when later they sat by a blazing fire and awaited the dawn.

Tommy sniffed. "I've got to allow that there is a darn sight more than I care to see again," he admitted. "But yuh said adventure and gold. I ain't seen the gold yet, partner."

Bill puffed at his pipe.

"When yuh do find gold, Tommy," he said, "will be just when yuh think that all is lost."

"An' when I do find it," said the little man, "do yuh know what will be the first thing I'll buy?"

"Naw. An automatic pistol?"

"Automatic blazes!" scoffed Tommy. "An asbestos hat!"

## V.

March had come again to the Salmon River Mountains. A heavy, gray-black bank of clouds hung over the crest of Sea Foam Mountain, and a steadily pouring rain percolated through the snow and soaked down into the thawing ground beneath. Splash, splash, splash, it fell from the eaves of the trappers' cabin and bored little holes in the spongy snow.

In the darkness that precedes the dawn, Bill awakened and lay for a few moments listening to the drip from the

eaves of the cabin and the moan of the wind among the firs. Then he arose and called Tommy.

"We'd best be packin' our furs and get to the next station with 'em," he told Tommy. "I ain't aimin' to get caught by a slide, here on this flat."

Half asleep, Tommy rubbed his eyes. "Bound to have her slip, ain't yuh?" he grumbled.

"She's apt to slip at any time, boy," proclaimed the old trapper. "Better get a move on yuh; there is no sense in takin' too many chances."

"Yuh said she ain't slipped for fifty years," Tommy reminded his partner. "Why would she slip now?"

"An' if she does slip," went on the old trapper, "we can kiss the cabin good-by."

"Yuh got to show me," averred the little man. "It'll take more than a bunch of wet snow to move this cabin."

Bill did not argue the matter, but began baling the winter's catch of furs and getting together enough grub to last them to their next cabin, which had been built upon a flat some seven miles distant.

Every now and then the old trapper would step to the door of the cabin and try to pierce the darkness that blanketed the side of Sea Foam Mountain.

After a hasty breakfast of flapjacks and bacon with coffee, the partners adjusted their packs to their backs and, putting on their snowshoes, slopped out into the mushy snow, just as the east was beginning to pale. At the ford of the Middle Salmon, just below the falls, they removed their snowshoes and waded the river in a driving rain. An hour later they stood upon the high bluffs that lie on the west bank of the river between Big Sulphur and Pistol Creek. Facing them across the Middle Fork, they could see the slopes of Sea Foam Mountain, towering above the cabin they had just left.

Suddenly Bill stopped, for a whisper-

ing moan had come to his ears, a moan that was not the wind.

"She's goin' to break away, Tommy," he said quietly, "jest as I thought. It's lucky for us that the drip of the rain awakened me."

"Lucky blazes!" grumbled the little man. "I'm soaked to the bone."

Then he stared across the Middle Fork, for the moan in the air had grown to a roar, and, far up on the side of Sea Foam Mountain, a huge tree suddenly vanished. Just vanished, that was all, before a wave of rain-soaked snow. The roar in the air increased in volume. Ahead of the big slide they could see huge balls of snow racing frenziedly down the mountain, only to fall to pieces, owing to lack of cohesion. The terrific momentum of the moving mass caused a spindrift to arise ahead of the slide, only to fall behind, out-distanced.

Louder and louder became the roar until it merged into a stupendous thunder of sound. Like a gigantic scythe, a hundred feet in width, sweeping everything ahead of it, the great slide bit down to the solid rock.

"Watch the cabin!" said Bill. "She's gone." But Tommy did not hear him, though he stood but a few feet distant.

With mouth open and the most ludicrous expression of astonishment upon his face, Tommy Giles stood there in the rain and watched the work of the mountain gods.

Though in reality but a few moments, it seemed an age to the partners before the big slide reached the base of Sea Foam Mountain. But at last it struck the flat, and they saw the tens of thousands of tons of moving snow pause for a split second, then surge up and

over the cabin which they had just left. There was a muffled sound, as of timbers being torn fiber from fiber. The broken end of a log was projected for a moment from beneath the chaos. That was all. Hidden from sight in the bosom of the great Sea Foam slide, the little cabin in which Bill and Tommy had spent so many months, went to rest in the Middle Salmon.

"What do yuh think of that for a slide?" asked old Bill.

Tommy was for the moment too awed to speak.

Old Bill removed his pack.

"Let's go back to the flat," he suggested. "I'd like to have a look at the bed rock since the slide came down."

Cleaned to bed rock for a width of a hundred feet, the flat lay brown and gray in patches, where granite merged into porphyry. Here and there a great boulder, which had been flung from the path of the slide, lay in monolithic loneliness. As the partners walked over the path of the slide, Bill stooped and picked up a fragment of quartz from an exposed ledge.

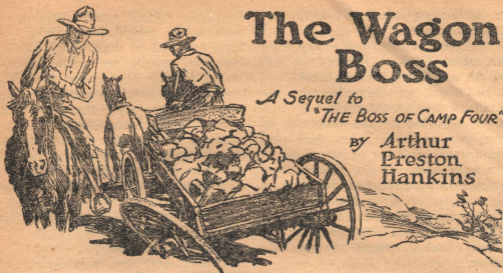
"Look, Tommy!" he said. "I always told yuh there ought to be gold somewhere in this red gravel. Can yuh beat that for the year nineteen twenty-three?"

Taking the piece of quartz from the hand of Bill, Tommy gave a gasp of astonishment. It was streaked and splashed with gold.

"If I ever meet another guy that says there ain't any adventure and gold left in the West of nineteen twenty-three," Tommy exclaimed, "I'll send him to the Salmon River Mountains. Gray wolves and gold is a hard combination to beat!"







# The Wagon Boss

A Sequel to  
"THE BOSS OF CAMP FOUR"

BY Arthur  
Preston  
Hankins

## Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

THE boss of the Paxton Construction Co., Chester Fanning, finds that his employer, "Spookmule" Paxton, is being made the victim of the greed of the Watkins Land & Cattle Co. To prevent the Paxton people from carrying out their contract to build a bridge, the Watkins people bring in "Karlo the Naught" and "Shortwing" Duffy, two crooks, who thwart the work by wrecking the wagons which haul the stones.

Fanning is an ex-confidence man, but Paxton is not deterred by the man's past and sanctions Fanning's engagement to Iris, Paxton's daughter. Fanning knows Karlo and Duffy, and they use their knowledge of his past to try to get him to sell out Paxton.

A mysterious young man, known as "Big Indian" Majette, becomes Fanning's wagon boss, and he soon learns what is afoot. At Majette's suggestion Fanning engages six Mexicans who undertake to capture Karlo and Duffy. These Mexicans are really loaned by John J. O'Fallen, a scientist, who is engaged in some secret work drilling a well on land that belongs to the Paxton Ranch. The Mexicans capture Duffy, and, just as Fanning is particularly pleased over the event, six shots in quick succession warn him that Karlo's men have blown up the French Road.

## CHAPTER XV.

"OH, YES, SIR!"



IGNORING Big Indian's order for him to stand guard at the door of Shortwing Duffy's prison, Chet Fanning ran as fast as he could to camp and

ordered his horse saddled by the stable boss.

While this was being done, he hurried to the blacksmith shop, where Blackie was busy at his anvil punching holes in the red-hot ends of the bars that were to cover the vent in the prisoner's door.

"Blackie," said Chet, "something's wrong down Smoky Cañon, and I've got to ride down there and see what it is. I've left our prisoner unguarded.

I guess he'll be safe enough until you can get your bars ready and get over there. And when you've got him all fixed, stick there and guard him until I get back, will you? Tell the cooks I said to give you some grub to take to him."

"Surest thing you know," readily consented the blacksmith. "And say, Chet, what I wanted to tell you is, that it was that fellow Skyles that mocked you when you said, 'Oh, yes, sir,' this evening. I wasn't standin' very far away from him, and I heard him say it."

"Skyles, the foreman in the upper cut?"

"That's the fellow. They call 'im 'Rocky' Skyles."

"Thanks, Blackie. I'll remember that. I guess Skyles is out of a job."

"Might hang onto 'im and watch 'im," suggested Blackie.

"I'll think it over on my way down the cañon," Chet told him and ran back to the stable tent for his horse.

He swung into the saddle and galloped off through the night. He followed the road on the same side of the cañon as Camp Four, which road ran parallel with the French Road on the other side. If the French Road had been rendered useless, there was no opportunity for the quarry skimmers to use the one over which Chet was now riding, as it was impossible for the heavily loaded wagons to cross the cañon.

In less than an hour Chet's horse had worked his way down and crossed the stream. Chet had not ridden far on the French Road when he heard voices ahead. He forged on through the darkness until a gruff voice challenged him in Spanish:

*"Pare V. alli!"*

Chet did not know the literal meaning of the Spanish words, but he realized that it was best to come to a halt and identify himself.

"It's Fanning," he called.

"Come on, Chet!" invited Big Indian's voice. "But don't ride up on Lope de Vega again that way without announcing yourself in advance. He's devilish quick on the trigger. Here's an awful mess for you to see. Five great gaps in the road, about a hundred yards apart. No more hauling until we've thrown bridges across 'em."

Chet had ridden up while the wagon boss was speaking. He found only him and one of the Mexicans at the brink of a huge hole in the French Road, the former training a flash light on the bottom of it. Big Indian explained that the other four Mexicans were trying to ride down the dynamiters, but had slight hope of overtaking them.

"They've been tunneling under the road in five places of nights," Big In-

dian said. "They shoveled their muck down in the creek and were careful to leave no traces of their work. Doubtless they covered the mouths of the tunnels during daytime, so that they would not be seen by anybody traveling along the road on the other side of the cañon. Pretty thorough work, Chester. It comes as a complete surprise to me. If only we had got the boys on the job earlier in the game! But there'll be no more tunnels run after this, I'll guarantee."

"Are all of the other gaps about like this one?" Chet asked.

"Just about the same."

"Then I don't need to see the rest of 'em to-night," Chet decided. "There's no use in pulling hair over this thing. I'll go back to camp and make arrangements to hustle out freighters early tomorrow morning for lumber to bridge these gaps. And I'll throw a big gang on this road with carpenter tools. We ought to finish the bridges in a week, at the outside."

"Lord! Will it take that long?" asked the wagon boss.

"I'm afraid so," Chet replied. "Only so many men can work at a time, or they'll be getting in one another's way and accomplish nothing."

Chet had just thrown his horse's reins over his head, as a preliminary to riding back to camp, when Lope de Vega wheeled suddenly, spoke a quick word in Spanish to the wagon boss, and whipped his short-barreled rifle to his shoulder.

*"Pare V. alli!"* his sharp command rang out, as he aimed his rifle up the bank above the road.

At the first guttural word uttered by the Mexican, Big Indian had whisked the shaft of brilliancy from the depth of the gap to the top of the bluff. And, as the disc of light traveled about, a horseman rode into it.

*"Pare V. alli!"* the Mexican challenged once more.

"I don't know what you're talking about, you grinning ape!" came the cross voice of John J. O'Fallen. "Quit pointing that thing at me, De Vega. Confound you!"

Lope de Vega lowered his rifle and grinned. The light was flashed away from the newcomer's face instantly. Chet called up to the scientist.

"Hello, there, Mr. O'Fallen! What brought you out in the night on horse-back?"

"Those explosions, confound 'em!" growled O'Fallen. "They awoke my daughter and me, and I had my horse saddled and rode over to see what was going on. Nice rip you've got in your road there, Mr. Fanning. Lytle Washash's work?"

"Yes," Chet replied. "And this is only one of five just like it. It'll take us a week to bridge these gaps and get the stones moving to the river again. And, believe me, we can't spare a week just now!"

"Tut, tut, tut, tut, tut!" fired O'Fallen.

Then he fell silent and looked down into the hole.

"I'm not by any means a practical construction man," he said, "but, in my work as a scientist, I have been on several expeditions that were fitted out to excavate on a large scale in search of prehistoric fossils and the like. And, besides, I've a scientific mind and grasp certain details pretty quickly. So if you'll pardon me, I'll offer a suggestion."

"Suggestions certainly are in order," Chet told him. "Eh, Big Indian?"

There came no response to Chet's last speech, and he turned quickly to see that the place the wagon boss had occupied on the brink of the cavity was vacant.

"Those wagon boss," said Lope de Vega in a low tone, "he ees vamos. Speak no more of him."

"What's that you said about an Indian?" come O'Fallen's voice.

Chester's quick brain was at work. "I said that I'm so shot to pieces over this thing a cigar-store Indian could give me advice," he fibbed.

"Oh! Well, I'm not exactly a cigar-store Indian, but I've a suggestion to make."

"Shoot! I'll appreciate it."

"It'll take a week or more, as you say, to bridge these gaps," said the scientist. "Now have you got a good powder man? One who can place a shot so that it will shoot in the direction and about the distance he wants it to?"

"I have that," Chet replied. "Nels Nielsen bane de best powder man dat ever come from Sveden."

"Then here's the idea: Instead of building bridges, throw heavy retaining walls, built of two-inch planks, across the cañon side of your gaps. Then let your powder man lay shots up here on the bank, where I am, and shoot muck down into the gaps till they are filled. Then level off the top and start your teams. The retaining walls will keep the dirt and rocks from rolling on down into the cañon. But success depends on the ability of your powder man to throw a shot the way he wants it to go, and not to overshoot."

"By George!" cried Chet. "That's a whale of an idea, Mr. O'Fallen! You ought to be in the construction game. I can throw up all five retaining walls while I'd be building one bridge strong enough to hold our heavy loads. And all the time that we are building the walls, Nels and his gang can be laying the shots to fill the gaps. Two days, at the most, will see our wagons moving to the river again. You're a wonder!"

"Humph!" snorted O'Fallen. "Nothing but a little common sense. You're probably too rattled to think clearly. I'm more or less disinterested, so my reasoning is dispassionate. Well, hope you make it all right. Now I'll be riding back to bed. 'Amapola' is worried over the shots."



"Amapoia—who's that?" asked Chet.

"That's the name the Mexican boys have given to my daughter Ingeborg," O'Fallen explained. "It's because of her yellow hair, she tells me. It is Spanish for poppy. Funny how those boys seems to worship my daughter, Mr. Fanning. If she merely sighs, three or four of 'em will be falling over one another to see if she is in need of anything. But I can't see why she was so cut up over those shots. I wouldn't have come, I guess, if she hadn't insisted. And she wanted to come along, but I set my foot down on that. Well, so long. Bet a dollar I don't get to sleep again before dawn!"

All enthusiasm over the idea that the man of science had given him, Chet rode hurriedly back to camp and routed out the boss powder man. His eyes filled with sleep, Nielsen listened to the manager, as he detailed the particulars of the French Road catastrophe.

"Sure," he said, as Chet concluded. "Ay can t'row das muck anyvere Ay want to. Das ben one good idea, Shet. Das ole man you tell about he bane purty slick, Ay guess. Now Ay get some sleep, and ve go at her in de mornin'."

"All right, Nels. There's enough old planks on hand at French's Camp to build at least two retaining walls, and by noon the freighters will be back from Blister with more. We can lower it into the cañon from this side and snake it across and up to the road. Or, maybe, we could rig up a cable and shoot it across in the air. I'll see Landen about that first thing in the morning. He ought to have enough cable kicking about to reach across Smoky Cañon."

"Yas, Ay tank so," replied Nielsen sleepily and turned his back on the boss of Camp Four. He was snoring before Chet had parted the tent flaps.

It was now quite late, and Chet was tired after his hard ride, with the attendant excitement, coming on top of a busy day at his desk. But his work was

not yet finished. He hurried through the silent camp and out upon the dark desert toward the magazine, thinking of the strange behavior of Big Indian when O'Fallen came.

He called to Blackie, as he neared the prison, but there came no answer. He began to run then, fearing that something had happened, and in fifteen steps he stumbled over something soft and pitched headlong to the earth.

He struggled to his feet, felt about in the darkness. Almost at once his hand came in contact with the face of a prostrate man. He lighted a match.

The blacksmith lay stretched out on his back, and the food designed for Shortwing Duffy and his tools and the newly cut iron bars were scattered about him. A trickle of red ran from his left temple and had formed a little pool on the ground.

The door of the magazine stood wide open, and on the inside of it a leaf torn from a notebook was held in place by a large cactus spine, thrust into a fissure in the wood.

Chet lighted another match and read in a pencil scrawl: "Oh, yes, sir!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THREE REPORT TO KARLO.

THE Full Moon saloon was perhaps the most popular resort in the mushroom town of Blister, on the banks of the Western River. It was built of new pine and galvanized corrugated iron, and in this it was more pretentious than the other "dumps" in town, which in most cases were sheltered by canvas tents.

On one side was the bar; opposite it a faro layout, a Klondike game, two roulette wheels, poker and dice tables, and the games of chuck-a-luck and monté. In the rear end was a short-order restaurant. And just out the back door was a bunk house, where bunks were built in tiers three high.

In the end of the bunk house, farthest from the saloon, however, there was a small room, partitioned off for the chance fastidious guest—and a pretty penny it cost him, too. But now no transient guests could rent this room, no matter how willing they were to pay the exorbitant price. For a man who called himself Lytle Wabash had rented it indefinitely, and he had moved in his few belongings for what portended to be a lengthy stay. More, he had asked permission to have both sides of the partition covered with the heaviest wall board, for which he had cheerfully paid. This double thickness of wall board made the little room almost sound-proof, which seemed to be what Mr. Wabash wished.

It was close to midnight. The notorious Karlo, the Naught, sat in his little private room in a flowered dressing gown that swept the bare boards of the floor; his feet were encased in slippers. He was smoking an expensive cigar and reading a book, the title of which was "The Einstein Theory Explained." His astute mind absorbed with keen enjoyment an erudite subject that has driven to despair many people who consider themselves well educated and far removed from the unthinking herd.

Occasionally he glanced at his thin watch and frowned, then listened a while, and continued his reading. Presently he was interrupted by a soft knock on the door.

He laid down his book and answered the summons, opening the door to the tiniest crack.

"Well, Duffy, it's you, is it?" he greeted the supplicant for admission. "Come in. Everything go off smoothly?"

Shortwing Duffy entered, and the master crook carefully locked the door again. Duffy seated himself and blinked at Karlo in the light of the oil lamp on a little table. He laid his puny ten-inch arm across his breast, and the long sleeve hung down. Many people thought

Mr. Duffy a one-armed man, for he wore the sleeve that covered the deformed member as long as its mate on the other side. Some had thought him a one-armed man to their sorrow; for Duffy had way of slipping that little arm out of its long coat sleeve and appropriating the watch or pin of some man that he might be facing and talking with.

"Yes," he said finally, "ever't'ing went off all right, wid de exception dat I gets glommed an' trun in de can."

"What's that?"

"De five shots went off wonnerful," explained the petty crook, "but a couple o' dem Mexes of O'Fallen's trun ropes 'roun' me an' drug me to Camp Four. An' Fannin' slammed me in de hoose-gow."

"Do you mean that O'Fallen's Mexicans roped you and took you to Fanning, and that he was trying to hold you?"

"I'll say so! He trun me in an ole powder magazine."

"And how did you get out?"

"Well, dat boid dey call Rocky Skyles, he comes an' tells me he's gonta turn me loose. An' w'ile he's beatin' up de lock wid a hammer er sumpin, here comes dis big blacksmi' of Fannin's wid me chow. An' Skyles digs into um an' knocks um out, den goes on bustin' de lock. An' here I am. I'll croak Fannin' f'r dat, Karlo."

"Aw, forget that stuff!" chided Karlo. "Just the fortunes of war, Shortwing. You may be thankful that Chet didn't do something worse to you. And you're out of it—so what's the difference? This Skyles is all right, is he?"

"Sure, he's a good plug. I know um sev'r'l years. He was one o' de foist ones I got to join us, w'en I begun woik-in' on de stiffs. He don't like Fannin' f'r some reason er udder."

"And so you ruined the road, eh?"

"I'll say we did! I don't know nuttin about it, but if youse ast me, dey won't get dere ole wagons to runnin' f'r

many moons. An' dat'll put de fixin's to Paxton, won't it?"

"I hope so. But I don't know all of his resources. One thing I do know, however, is that in less than two weeks he is due to finish the piers and abutments for that bridge, or he gets not a cent more from the railroad company."

"Dat's de stuff! Well, we set um back a jerk er two to-night. Wot's dat youse got in dat package, Karlo?"

"You're a little curious, aren't you?" Karlo retorted coldly. "But if you think you ought to know, it's the telescope that I sent for two weeks ago."

"Oh, she come, did she?"

"Yes," said Karlo. "But I've been so infatuated with this book that I haven't had time to open the box. You're so interested, suppose you get some tools and do it for me, Duffy."

"W'en youse gonta see dis fella Fletcher?" asked Duffy, as he rose to go into the saloon to borrow a hammer and a chisel.

"He was to show up to-night," was the reply. "That's one reason that I haven't gone to bed—that and my eagerness to hear how your shots turned out."

Mr. Duffy left the room, returning shortly with the necessary tools to open the long, slender box that stood in one corner of the room, which the mail stage had brought in that afternoon.

Karlo continued his reading, while Shortwing worked, awkwardly because of his diminutive arm, at opening the box. But when it was accomplished he laid on the floor the brass tube of a telescope fully seven feet in length, the diameter of whose objective lens was two and seven-eighths inches. Beside it he laid a folding tripod and three short eye-pieces, to be inserted at the discretion of the observer for different classes of work.

"Some baby!" remarked Mr. Duffy. "Is dat better dan dese here binoculars, Karlo—de expensive kind?"

"Certainly," Karlo told him. "A pair

of binoculars can't compare with a telescope of that length and diameter. According to the advertisement you can see the craters and other markings on the moon with a glass like that. At a distance of seven miles you can see the cross pieces in the windows of a building, and with binoculars it is doubtful if you could make out the windows."

"Gysh!" breathed Shortwing Duffy. "Dat oughta be de dope f'r us."

"It ought to suit our purpose—it cost enough, the Lord knows!"

Duffy sat on the floor admiring the new telescope and wondering over the mystery of such an unfamiliar instrument, and Karlo continued his reading. In a few minutes there came another stealthy knock, and Karlo answered it.

"Well?" he challenged the roughly dressed, bewhiskered man who confronted him when the door was opened.

"I'm Bill Fletcher," said the man. "I was comin' horseback and stopped at the Diamond Ranch. My horse stampeded with some o' the ranch stock, and it took sev'r'l hours to ketch 'im. That's why I'm so late."

Karlo looked him over keenly, then, seemingly satisfied, invited:

"Come in, Fletcher. I've been expecting you all evening."

The man, a great, shambling hulk of humanity, slouched into the room, and Karlo closed and locked the door.

"Have a seat, Fletcher," he invited. "This is one of my associates, Shortwing Duffy. Now, Fletcher, you were given to understand, were you, that my business with you is more or less of a secret, and that you are to keep your mouth closed?"

"Oh, sure. Your man, Havens, told me all about that. I got no reason to butt in. Gi'me my hundred dollars, and I'll see what I c'n do for you in my line."

"Well," Karlo replied, "you'll get your money all right. All I want is your candid opinion of what is going on in a



certain place, to which I will lead you to-morrow. You can watch the man who is doing the work through that telescope. There's a rocky eminence a mile or more from his camp. It is almost hidden by the trees. It is the only spot near there where anybody could climb and spy on him without being seen. He does the work in a little cabin and stands directly between two windows, both of which will be in line with the telescope. I've seen him at his work—stumbled upon him one day when I was entering his camp, and I saw him through the east window. But I had no idea what he was about, and I want to find out. We'll get at it to-morrow morning. And now you'd better hire a bunk for yourself outside and get some sleep, Fletcher."

When the latest arrival had taken himself off for the night, Karlo did not resume his book. Instead he seated himself and looked steadily at Shortwing Duffy, who as yet had not lost interest in the absorbing telescope.

"So it was O'Fallen's Mexicans that caught you, eh?" Karlo asked.

"Yeah," indifferently returned Duffy. "An' dey was all dolled up like a gambler after pay day."

"What do you mean, dolled up?"

Mr. Duffy then explained the transformation that had taken place in the garb of the Mexicans.

"If youse ast me," he finished, "dem boids ain't wot dey seem to be a-tall. Dey ain't no shovel stiffs. Dem rags cost money, Karlo. An' de way dey ride an' handle dem ropes—well, youse oughta seen um, ol'-timer!"

"But how did they come to butt in?"

The casual listener to this dialogue might have been misled into believing that, up until now, Karlo had had no interest whatever in the strange adventure that had befallen Shortwing Duffy. It had been in the back of his mind, however, while he was reading his book. But Karlo had a rather remarkable mind. He was in no way excitable.

Knowing that eventually he would find out all about the happenings of the night he had elected to continue his reading until he felt that a change of subject would benefit him.

"Can't prove it by me, Karlo," Duffy replied. "But dat wagon boss o' Fanin's has got sumpin to do wid dis business. He's t'ick wid dem Mexes."

"Yes? Strange, Shortwing—very strange. The mystery of John J. O'Fallen deepens. I'm consumed with curiosity over that man."

"Den w'y don't youse get Jerry, de Crow, in here an' fin' out wot he knows?" was Shortwing's suggestion.

"I expect him to report in a day or two," said Karlo.

"W'y not now? He's in town. I seen um w'en I rambled in to-night. He was out at de bar moppin' 'em up to de queen's taste."

"The Crow is in Blister to-night?"

"Surest t'ing youse know. I seen um. An' he's paralyzed from de eyebrows up."

"Go get him," Karlo ordered sternly.

Mr. Duffy tore himself away from the telescope and left the room. In ten minutes he had returned, leading by the arm a very wobbly derrick man.

"Well, what does this mean?" Karlo demanded, after Shortwing had locked the door.

"Means I'm fu-fired," stammered Jerry, the Crow. "An' it means I ain't got no job any more. An' all—all because o' you."

"Here! Here!" snapped Karlo, his black eyes taking on a menacing luster. "Don't get accusative with me, Crow, or you'll wish you hadn't. When were you fired?"

"'Safternoon."

"And instead of coming direct to me, you got drunk, eh?"

"I was comin' to-night all right," sullenly defended the engineer.

"Yes, I understand. You had it in mind to give me a raking over the coals,

didn't you? And you wanted to brace up your courage a little before you came, didn't you? Well, you seem to be sufficiently braced. Let's hear what you have to say."

"I got nothin' at all to say," mumbled The Crow.

"You're entirely mistaken," Karlo coolly told him. "You have a great deal to say."

Karlo deliberately rose from his chair and stepped before the man.

"And you're going to say it right now," he finished, his black, fanatical eyes gleaming like jet beads. "Say it, or I'll kill you in your tracks."

There stood the wispy, physically insignificant master crook, facing the big, hulking machinist who could have hurled him through the window with one hand. Karlo had no weapon and made no move to deceive the other into believing that he had one. But in a moment or two the big fellow's glance dropped to the floor, and he wearily shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"Well—I—— They ain't no need you gettin' so sore, is they? What d'ye wanta know?"

"Everything that you have found out about John J. O'Fallen," clicked Karlo. "And you'd better start talking right now."

"Well, I got the engine to runnin' and the dynamo installed; then he—he said he wouldn't need me any more and paid me off."

"Oh! Well, that's a beginning. Now sit down and tell me all of it."

The big man found a seat and sank into it with a sigh of relief.

Mr. Duffy made low-voiced speech, apparently to the telescope.

"How does he do it?" he wanted to know. "He couldn't kill a flea, but he always gets away wid dat stuff."

"I didn't find out much about what he was doin'," began Jerry, the Crow. "I don't know now what the engine and motor are for. The engine's to charge

the motor, of course, but I don't know what the motor's gonta run."

"You don't know what it is going to run! And you call yourself an engineer and machinist!"

"Well, the motor's set up in a little cave that the Mexicans dug in one side of the big hole. There's a long shaft runnin' from the motor to the exact middle of the hole, and there it's geared to make somethin' go 'round horizontally. The shaft's heavy, and the gear's heavy—and that's all I know about it. I finished riggin' it up to-day and run the motor for 'im. Then he fired me."

"And is there no excavation going on down in there at all?"

"Yes, a little. First they dug the cave that I was tellin' you about, where I set up the engine and the motor. That's where the Mexicans hid when they were blastin', I guess."

"What was the blasting for?"

"It was done before I went there. But it seems they shot up all the big boulders on the bottom of the hole an' leveled the land. The bottom's as level now as the floor of a dug well."

"Now, about the rest of the excavation?"

"Well, the Mexicans sometimes continue diggin' in beyond the engine and motor, makin' the cave longer. And one day one of 'em brought O'Fallen a little idol thing, all covered with red mud, that he said he'd dug up. It was a funny-lookin' thing and seemed like it was made outa clay. Then they found some bones, and O'Fallen jumped up and down like a kid that's just been told he c'n go to the circus. He grabbed one of them bones and hugged it, and you'd 'a' thought it was a cane with a diamond knob on it."

"Yes? What sort of a bone was it?"

"You c'n search me! I don't know anythin' about bones. But the Mexicans dug up a man's skull one day—I guess it was a man's—and O'Fallen pretty near had a fit over that."

"Yes?" Karlo was smiling whimsically. "All that sounds pretty logical. But tell me what has become of all that quicksilver?"

"That's down in there, too—in back o' the engine and motor."

"Still in the metal cylinders?"

"Yeah."

"And has none of it ever been used?"

"I guess not—not to my knowledge anyway. But there's one thing more that maybe you want to know. The other day one o' the Mexican's freighted in—"

"Yes, I know," Karlo interrupted. "A lot of metal plates, of various shapes, all drilled and ready to be riveted together."

"Yes, that's it. They lowered 'em into the pit, and the Mexicans began to rivet 'em. I can't make sure, but, from what they'd already done, and lookin' at the rest o' the plates, it looked to me like the thing would be a big steel saucer when it was all together."

"A big steel saucer! *How* big?"

"Well, just as an estimate, I'd say she's gonta be about as big as the bottom o' the hole."

"Listen here!" Karlo sternly commanded. "Do you mean to tell me that those plates, when all of them have been riveted together, may form a metal saucer seventy-five feet in diameter?"

"That's what I calculated, Mr. Wabash."

"For the love of Mike! And how deep will the thing be?"

"Oh, five feet, maybe."

"What on earth do you suppose that's for?"

"I ain't got the remotest idea," replied Jerry, the Crow. "But I thought maybe the mercury was goin' into it."

"What for, in Heaven's name?"

"You got me. That's just a guess, Mr. Wabash. But I don't know where else the mercury is goin', and I can't think of anythin' else that the big dish would be for."

Karlo dropped into a frowning silence. Presently he roused himself.

"And what else do you know?" he snapped.

"Nothin'—honest."

"What are you going to do, now that you've lost your job? Fanning won't take you back, or I miss my guess."

"I don't know," answered Jerry.

"Well, keep sober and you can work for me. Duffy here will tell you what's wanted of you. Now leave me, both of you. I want to go to bed and think. Be on deck early to-morrow morning, Shortwing. And have a pack burro ready to take this telescope into the hills. Rout Fletcher out at six o'clock, and both of you be ready to go by seven. Understand?"

"Sure," said Duffy and led the way out ahead of Jerry, the Crow.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### ACIDS.

A LAZY, shaggy, mouse-colored burro slowly felt his way over the rock-strewn country that lay back of the string of deep holes at the edge of the level lowlands. There were plenty of brush, Spanish daggers, soapweed, giant cactus and piñon pines to hide the three men that accompanied the burro. On the little animal's back was the telescope with the tripod. The men could have carried these articles, but Karlo preferred to go through life as comfortably as possible, and he had the same consideration for those who worked for him—up to a certain point.

Ahead of them was a picturesque eminence, topped by a great, ragged rock with a frowning overhang. Interesting desert growth clambered up the side of the steep little knoll. The whole made a picture of ruggedness altogether pleasing for those who are content to accept Nature as she is and are not so stupid as to compare woodlands and deserts and marine views and cañon-scarred



countries with one another, to determine which, to their way of thinking, is most wonderful. All of them were wonderful to the thoughtful Karlo, and he accepted what Nature put before him in the particular region where he chanced to be.

They left the burro at the foot of the knoll and tied it. With the telescope they climbed to the craggy rock on top, where Karlo began setting up the instrument.

About a mile to the west, through a break in the trees, a part of John J. O'Fallen's camp was visible, the cabin that the little gray man occupied being directly in line with the telescope, when Karlo had trained it. Duffy and Fletcher, at Karlo's command, were cutting brush. This they piled in front of the tripod, so that the brass tube reached out directly over it. Behind this flimsy, but screening, breastworks they crouched, and, without strong glasses, nobody at O'Fallen's camp could see the brass tube glistening in the sun, or the head of the observer.

Karlo looked a long time at O'Fallen's cabin.

"Both windows are open, as usual," he announced. "But O'Fallen is not in the shack. I can read the titles on books that I see on a shelf beside the farther window. The light in there is good.

"Well," he added, leaving the instrument and seating himself on the ground, "we can do nothing more until O'Fallen shows up. And maybe he won't be doing his work in the cabin to-day. If so, it's up to us to come to-morrow and the next day and the next—and so on indefinitely until he does come. I'll appoint you watchman, Duffy. Every few minutes you look through the telescope and see whether O'Fallen is in his cabin."

They had brought along their lunch, and they had eaten it and whiled away about an hour afterward, when Shortwing, on one of his observation trips

to the instrument, reported that O'Fallen had just entered his cabin.

Karlo was all alertness at once and hurried to the telescope.

"Yes, yes!" he muttered. "He's there all right. Now, Fletcher, if he goes to work, it's up to you. They tell me you are an expert prospector. I want you to tell me whether what O'Fallen is engaged in has anything to do with the discovery of precious metals. Here, put your eye to the lens and watch."

"What did he seem to be doin' when you first noticed 'im?" asked Fletcher, after a lengthy look through the glass.

"He had a large spoon, as near as I could determine," said Karlo. "And he seemed to be coating it with some sort of paste."

"Great guns!" cried Fletcher. "And you don't know what that means? He's was makin' a roastin' spoon."

"And what in thunder is that?" barked Karlo.

"Why, he was coverin' that spoon with cement—either reg'lar cement, or some that he made 'imself outa wood ashes and salt. It's to hold over a fire in testing pulverized ore for precious metals."

"Ah!" breathed Karlo happily. Then to Duffy: "I knew it all along, Shortwing. Do you remember that stuff Jerry, the Crow, was telling us last night about the muddy idol, the bones, and the human skull?"

"Yeah," drawled Duffy.

"Well, that was all bunk, designed to make Jerry think the old man is hunting relics down there. He planted them for the peons to find. He's after precious metals of some kind, and—What's that, Fletcher?"

"I said he'd just gone out of the cabin and come 'round on our side. He's buildin' a fire on the ground. This is gonta be easier than we thought."

"Watch him like a hawk," said Karlo.

About fifteen minutes later the prospector made another report to his chief.

"There's no use talkin'," he said, "the old boy is gonta make a test over that fire. He's been crushin' ore in a mortar, and now he's gettin' ready to roast it. It'll take half an hour more for me to decide just what he's got on his chest—when he gets through roasin' that ore."

Karlo's patience throughout that half hour was admirable. Once he looked through the glass and saw John J. O'Fallen, as plainly as if he were ten feet away, "roasting" something in the long-handled, cement-covered spoon which was held over a hot fire, by wires attached to planted, upright sticks.

Fletcher was on watch, however, when the scientist made another move in the course of his work.

"The fumes have stopped, I guess," reported the prospector. "He's takin' the stuff off the fire. Now he's settin' it to one side to cool. Nothin' more'll happen until it's cold, I guess. But that won't take long."

Later came Fletcher's report:

"He's puttin' it in a dish and coverin' it with water. Now he's addin' salt. I c'n read 'Salt' on the paper box in his hand. He's makin' what prospectors call 'the pickle,' and there's nothin' more doin' to-day unless he starts somethin' new. The pickle'll have to set about ten or eleven hours at least; so, if he don't start somethin' else, we might as well beat it until to-morrow. But say," he added, "he might take her out o' pickle to-night. It's about two o'clock now. Ten hours would be—le's see—three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve—midnight to-night. Wanta try and sneak up on 'im then, or shall we take a chance on his finishin' the test by daylight?"

"I never take chances on a thing like this," said Karlo. "Let's hide the telescope and return to Blister with the burro. At midnight to-night we'll try to get a look at the old man through his window."

"Youse wanta watch out f'r dem Mexes," put in Shortwing Duffy.

"I'm not afraid of them," Karlo assured him. "You can do something on the other side of camp to draw them off, while Fletcher and I are spying."

At once they returned to Blister, seeking obscure paths, Karlo's patience never deserting him. He played pool during the afternoon and whiled away the evening at stud poker. About nine o'clock he set for Duffy and Fletcher, and they sent out on horses to continue their observations of the morning.

They tied the animals in the trees a couple of hundred yards from the camp. Shortwing Duffy was left with them, while Karlo and Fletcher crept up on O'Fallen's little cabin. It was after eleven o'clock.

Cautiously the two men circled the camp and reached a spot in the trees from which the cabin was visible. A light streamed from the window.

The camp was silent, but for the occasional stamping of the mule's hoofs in the little corral. They grew bolder and crept close enough to see, by the aid of the starlight, an armed Mexican sentry pacing around the board fence that inclosed the mysterious hole.

"Sneak back," whispered Karlo to his companion, "and tell Shortwing to creep as close to the inclosure as he dares. Tell him to make an occasional soft noise, by tapping with a stick on the trunk of a tree, for instance, or scraping against the bark, to attract the Mexican's attention. Tell him not to overdo it by tapping or scraping too frequently. And he'd better be ready to make himself scarce, if any of the men go out to see what's up. Then hurry back to me, and we'll steal as close to the cabin window as we can."

In fifteen minutes Fletcher returned.

"All right," he reported. "He's wise, but he's leary of those Mexican's ropes. If they start out after him, he won't stop this side of Blister."

The pair waited in silence until suddenly they saw the pacing sentry come to a halt and stand as if listening.

"Duffy's at work, I guess," decided Karlo. "Now's our chance to get closer to the cabin."

Stooping low, dodging from tree to tree, they drew in on the new pine shack until they were directly abreast the window from which the faint light streamed. Karlo produced a pair of six-power night glasses and trained them on the figure of John J. O'Fallen, who was seated at his desk, his head supported by his hands, as he read a book laid before him. Across from him, on the other side of the desk, his golden-haired daughter sat in a little rocking-chair, also reading. The window was open.

For nearly half an hour the two watched this tranquil scene. Not a word passed between father and daughter during this period. Occasionally Ingeborg smiled, as something that she had read struck her funny bone; but O'Fallen remained almost motionless and utterly absorbed.

Then suddenly he made a quick move and jerked out his watch.

"Dear, dear, dear, dear, dear!" the spies heard him ejaculate. "How time does fly when a fellow's reading something that grips his mind as this work does. Time to take that stuff out of pickle, Ingeborg."

The girl looked up from her book and smiled, but offered no remark.

"Why don't you go to bed?" asked O'Fallen.

"I'm not sleepy, father," replied the girl. "And I want to finish this story before I go to bed."

O'Fallen rose and went to one corner of the room. He stooped and dragged something heavy to the middle of the floor. Then he went to another corner and out of the watcher's range of vision. When he came in sight he carried the porcelain dish that he had used that afternoon to make his "pickle" in.

"What'd he drag across the floor?" asked Karlo in a whisper.

"Dunno," returned the prospector. "I'm gonta climb this tree. Then maybe I can see. Wanta let me have them binoculars?"

Karlo passed him the glasses. Adroitly he clambered from limb to limb of a close-by piñon pine. Then down floated his whisper harshly:

"It's a tub o' water. That's about what I expected to see."

O'Fallen made another trip across the room, and down came Fletcher's report:

"He's got a miner's pan."

"Ah!" breathed Karlo. "Now we're getting down to business."

For more than half an hour no further message came from the treetop. Then Fletcher began descending and presently stood once more at Karlo's side.

"Well?" asked the master crook.

"He turned the pickle into the pan," said the prospector. "Then he put some water in the dish and rubbed the sides and the bottom of it. Then he turned it upside down over the pan, quick. He did that three or four times more. That was to make sure there wasn't any brine left in the pickle dish."

"Then he began rubbin' the ore with his hand and puttin' in and drainin' off water. Kept this up quite a time. He savvies his business all right. Then finally he washed away the sediment and studied what was left in the pan. He didn't seem satisfied, so he turned her back into the porcelain dish again and added about one part nitric acid and three parts hydrochloric acid. Then he set her aside again. He won't be doin' anythin' more with it till daylight tomorrow mornin'."

"Then he'll pour her out again and boil her pretty near dry. And next he'll put in about a spoonful o' water and a few more drops o' hydrochloric acid. He'll warm it up again and then add a



few drops of chloride o' tin. And then he's through with his test."

"How do you know he'll be doing all that?" demanded Karlo.

"That's what you're payin' me for," retorted Fletcher, "because I do know. But I didn't know for sure until he begun puttin' in the acid."

"And what does that signify?"

"Why, it means that he's testin' rocks that contains iron, copper, or arsenical pyrites, instead of rock that looks to be free from metal. And to-morrow when he drops the chloride of tin into the solution, she's likely to turn a pretty purple color immediately."

"And if it does?"

"Then he's got gold," answered Fletcher. "It's certainly a gold test that he's been makin', but I couldn't tell for sure till he'd gone far enough to gi'me the dope. Now, if he'd been testin' for radium, we'll say, or uranium, or silver, or selenium——"

"All of which would not interest me a particle," interrupted Karlo. "We must be on hand to-morrow at the telescope and find out whether that solution turns purple when he completes the test. Is that the idea?"

"Sure—then you'll know. If——"

"Sh!" warned Karlo. "He's speaking to his daughter. Listen!"

Evidently Ingeborg had asked her father a question regarding his test, for she was now looking at him over the top of her book. Fletcher's whispering had prevented Karlo from hearing what she had said.

But John J. O'Fallen's reply, which was plainly heard by the eavesdroppers, revealed to them what the girl had asked.

"Oh, I won't know anything about it till to-morrow. I'll finish the test right after breakfast. If the solution turns purple, there's gold present. I'll know to-morrow morning."

"Oh, I'm so anxious to have it turn out right, father!" exclaimed the girl.

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Her father smiled at her, but made no reply. He sat in deep thought for a little, and Ingeborg had resumed her reading, when he suddenly spoke to her.

"It's the old river bottoms that interest me," he said. "And the book I've been reading offers some sound theories about their formations."

"Yes, of course," replied the girl, without looking away from her novel.

"Listen!" husked Fletcher. "Old river bottoms. That old bird believes, or maybe can prove, that he's workin' in the bed of an ancient river—a dead river, as we call it. And, by golly, I believe he's right! Millions o' years ago, maybe, there was a big river here. It's bed was covered hundreds o' feet deep by earthquakes or slides or somethin'. And this string o' deep holes are just cave-ins, from the surface of the earth to the bottom of the old river bed. And, man, there's been more gold found in the beds of dead rivers than you c'n carry in a train o' box cars. I wonder nobody ever thought of it before, when they see them deep holes all in a line like they are! Say, science ain't so foolish, after all! I'll bet——"

"Shut up!" snapped Karlo. "Listen!"

"Yes, sir," O'Fallen continued, "the river bottoms are the most interesting of all, Amapola. And if I can only——"

He stopped short, as the sharp bark of a rifle brought to life the dormant echoes of that vast solitude.

Then came a second and a third, while John J. O'Fallen and Ingeborg stood side by side, listening, waiting, a look of wonder on their faces.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A LETTER.

**WHILE** Karlo and Fletcher were engaged in their absorbing task of trying to ferret out John O'Fallen's secret, a man was riding through the piñon pines not far from them on a calico gelding.

Big Indian Majette had saddled Ham about eleven o'clock, fortunately failing to wake the stable boss, sleeping in a small tent close by the corral. He had led the horse through the slumbering camp and mounted, when he entered the trees.

He had had a hard day of it. Since early morning gangs had been at work under his supervision, throwing up the board retaining walls against which Nielsen's shots were to fall in the attempt to fill up the gaps in the French Road. Night gangs were now at work on the job, and, as the wagon boss rode through the trees, he heard several muffled shots from the direction of the cañon.

"To-morrow night'll see all five gaps filled," he told Hamlet, "if the night gangs do as well as the day shift did."

The pinto rolled the wheel of his half-breed bit with his tongue in answer, and Big Indian leaned forward and patted his fine-haired neck. They traveled toward the camp of John J. O'Fallen, traversing an obscure route that the rider had picked out some time before, and which the horse now followed without pressure on the reins.

When they neared the camp of the scientist they made a wide sweep, so as to come upon it from the side where was the deep hole with its board stockade. Big Indian and the calico knew just where to stop, though the only light was that of the stars. The horse halted suddenly about fifty yards from the board fence, and for a little time Big Indian remained in the saddle, listening.

He had just dismounted and lowered the reins over Ham's head to "tie him to the wind," when, close at hand, he heard an odd scraping sound.

It ceased, and for several minutes everything was quiet. Thinking it to be some wild animal prowling about in the night, Big Indian left the horse and started cautiously toward the camp, when there came a series of dull thuds,

as if somebody was tapping on the trunk of a tree with a heavy stick.

The wagon boss halted in his tracks. "Now what can that be?" he muttered to himself. "An animal might make scraping noises, but he'd hardly pick up a stick and pound a tree with it."

Three minutes he waited, then came the scraping sounds once more.

But this time Big Indian became active. He started trotting easily through the trees, taking care that his feet snapped no twig on the ground, in the direction of the sound. Now and then he stopped to listen and found that the noise was continuing. Sounds traveled far in that wilderness solitude, and he was surprised to find, after he had covered quite a bit of ground, that the mystery was still unsolved.

Now he halted again, but this time heard nothing. So he waited for a repetition of the sounds in order to know which way to go. But for fully ten minutes there came to his listening ears only the familiar night sounds of the wilderness—low, soft, blended waves, the origin of which no man can exactly determine. Sometimes the lonely dweller in the far-flung outlands, if he has imagination, may fancy this indescribable blending of sounds to be the soft breathing of the trees.

Suddenly the scraping began again, and Big Indian was away at a brisk trot, headed directly toward it.

Then, as he ran along, he had the distinct impression that something or some one was running straight toward him. He seemed to feel that he ought to swerve from his course to avoid a crash. No sooner had this odd sensation taken hold on him than a black bulk loomed suddenly before him, the next instant the crash came. Something catapulted into him with terrific force. He heard an agonized grunt, and bright sparks shot before his eyes. His head struck against an exposed root, as he was hurled to the earth, and, as his

senses swam away, he heard, as if from a far distance, the rapid barking of a rifle.

It all came about by reason of the panic that had seized Shortwing Duffy when he heard quick footsteps close to the tree against which he had been rubbing a stick to attract the attention of O'Fallen's sentry. He had succeeded in attracting the man's attention entirely too well, it seemed; for of a sudden, as he stood there scraping away and remembering how the ropes had burned his flesh two days before, he heard the sounds of running feet bearing down upon him.

Then Duffy lost his head and every last atom of his courage and gave himself to flight.

Mr. Duffy had no especial fear of a gun. He was no more apprehensive over a possible fistic encounter than the average man. He had been stabbed twice during his checkered career, and the thoughts of a knife between his ribs would not have caused his feet to run away with him. But he had been roped only once, and, as the noose of one of the Mexicans began to tighten about his neck directly after the throw, the crook had experienced that terrible sensation that comes with strangulation, and his very heart had turned cold. So Mr. Duffy did not want another manila cravat about his neck.

And thus it came about that, when he heard the footsteps close at hand, he lost his nerve and ran. He collided with the wagon boss, also running. Both crashed to the ground, but Duffy was unhurt by the fall. Then, as terror set him on his feet again in one nimble spring, a rifle barked five times, and he heard the bullets zipping through the treetops, as he plunged on blindly, through the night.

But Big Indian Majette, the warm blood flowing freely from the back of his head, lay there in the darkness without a move.

Karlo and Fletcher stood motionless after the five shots rang out. In the cabin the little gray man and his fair-skinned daughter stood side by side, also motionless, listening.

Of the four it was O'Fallen who made the first move.

"Ceballos is on watch to-night," he remarked calmly. "Something's wrong. I'll go and find out what he was shooting at."

He started for the door, Ingeborg following closely.

"You'd better stay here," advised her father.

"No," she said, and her face was as white as chalk in the thin light of the oil lamp, "I don't want to be alone. I must know what's going on."

They left the cabin and passed out into darkness. Then Karlo roused himself.

"Duffy put it on too thick, I guess," he said to Fletcher. "He's drawn one of the Mexicans to him, and the fellow's tried to pot him. Let's circle around the camp to see if he's in serious trouble. We'll get no more out of O'Fallen to-night. He was on the point of going to bed, when the shots came, I believe."

They backed away from the cabin into the trees, and began circling the camp. All was quiet now; no more shots were fired. The two completed a half circle through the trees and grotesque growths of the desert and came to a halt on the stockade side of O'Fallen's camp.

"Now what?" whispered Karlo, the Naught. "Duffy ought to have been somewhere near here. Do you know just where we left the horses, Fletcher?"

"Sure," was the response. "They're over that way." Fletcher pointed west. "I c'n go straight to 'em."

"Then, provided Duffy is not so badly turned around as I am, he would run toward the horses. I think we'd better put more space between ourselves and that shooting Mexican. Let's make it for the ponies. Keep your eyes open



for Shortwing. He may have been hit and fallen somewhere along the route."

Everything was still silent. They waited a little, listening for more shots or voices or the sounds of running feet, but heard none of these. Then, with Fletcher leading the way, they started toward the spot where the ponies had been left. Fifty feet from the start Fletcher pitched forward, cursed, and sprawled flat on his face.

"What is it?" "What's wrong?" demanded the master crook.

"It's Duffy," replied Fletcher. "I fell over his body. Strike a match."

But instead of a match, Karlo produced from his baggy clothes a pocket electric torch and sent a shaft of light hither and thither over the ground.

"Duffy nothing!" he chuckled gleefully, as the light revealed the prostrate figure of a man. "Duffy's safe, I guess. This is Fanning's wagon boss, and he's been knocked cold."

He stooped and felt of the unconscious man's heart.

"Alive enough," he observed.

Then he searched over Big Indian's body for a bullet wound, but found none. He turned him over, exposing the bloody bruise at the back of the head.

"He fell and struck his bean against that root, I guess," was Karlo's surmise. "Wonder what he was doing here. I'm going to frisk him and see if I can find anything on him to help out our worthy cause. I've had my suspicion of this bird ever since I met him. He's a mystery. I can't just make him."

A swift search of Big Indian's pockets netted only a handkerchief, a pocket-knife, a few ten-penny nails, and a folded piece of paper. The last interested Karlo. He unfolded it and trained his light on a note, written in a bold, characteristic hand, and signed: "Bim."

"Majette's his name," was Karlo's quick thought. "And, for some reason or other, they call him Big Indian. So there's your Bim. But our puzzlement

begins when we note that it is addressed to 'My dear Y. T.'

"Well, we'll see what Bim has to communicate to 'Y. T.,' anyway."

He did not read the communication aloud, however, for it was doubtful if its contents would concern Fletcher.

"I got a fine idea to-day," the letter began. "I really think it's a gem of an idea. It is getting dangerous for me to go near the big holes, even under cover of darkness. I am half inclined to believe that somebody whom you and I know pretty well is getting wise. In fact, Fuentes, Lope de Vega, and Lopes all told me that they think this estimable gentleman, for whom, I assure you, my dear Y. T., I have the deepest regard, is, in the slang of the day, getting hep. That's a rather involved sentence, isn't it? But I guess you'll understand. Also, since the Mexicans have taken up arms in Chet Fanning's behalf, Rafael informs me that he thinks headquarters is watching them. So they have become a risk as note bearers. So you continue to look for communications from me in the twisted tree. But my idea calls for you to send yours to me in an entirely different and more novel manner.

"I learned from that precious rascal, Rafael, the other day that there lives, about two miles from Campo de O'Fallen, a brown gentleman of Mexican ancestry known to the world at large as Serrano Flores. The particular hobbies of Senor Serrano Flores are gaudy, strutting peacocks, white mice, and carrier pigeons. We come in on the last.

"Rafael has made this man's acquaintance and, since he is a countryman of his, has succeeded in engendering his confidence. The result is that Rafael has persuaded Serrano Flores to let him make use of the homers—for a consideration, naturally. Rafael will smuggle them in to you to-morrow, if everything goes well, and you can tie messages on their legs and turn them

loose, to fly back to Serrano's. Once a day Rafael, or one of the Mexicans, or even I, can ride to Serrano's and find out what you have had to communicate. When you have sent out all of the birds, Rafael can bring the whole batch back to you for another flight. And my answer you will find in the old twisted piñon, as heretofore.

"All this may seem unnecessary to you, but I don't believe it is. I know John J. O'Fallen pretty well, I think, and I am sure that if he suspected what is going on he would fire Rafael and his friends and make it more or less uncomfortable for you, to say nothing of myself. And I am almost positive that suspicion was eating at his heart a couple of nights ago, when he rode to the French Road to see what the five explosions meant. I ducked away, as soon as my flash light showed me who it was, but I'm not sure that I escaped those keen blue eyes of his. If he recognized me he will be on his guard and will watch the Mexicans. But if from now on they do nothing suspicious, and if his watching you brings no results, he may think that he only imagined he had seen Bigendian Majette down there in the road. Then perhaps he'll forget it.

"You can keep the pigeons in a box, with slats nailed across the open end of it, in a tree some distance from camp. One of the boys will feed and water them, and he can string barbed wire about the trunk of the tree, so no carnivorous animal can climb up and feast on the birds. I'll have him fasten the box in the tree at just the right height for you to reach in when you're on your horse. And if all this doesn't appeal to your imagination and love of romance, then I'm a dumb-bell. —

"So I guess this is all. Rafael or Lope de Vega will get the birds to-morrow and build the dove-cote in some remote tree. Then he'll show you the location, and everything will be lovely.

"And now——"

But at this point in his reading a strong hand suddenly snatched the letter from his fingers and crumpled it to a wad. Karlo, realizing that the injured man had regained his senses and was full of fight, sprang away from him and called to Fletcher. Big Indian was half-way on his feet, when the prospector's heavy fist struck him a blow in the face, and he went down again, with the big man on top of him.

Still weak and dizzy from the shock of striking his head on the exposed root, the wagon boss nevertheless put up a stiff fight, and three times succeeded in hurling Fletcher off his chest. But each time this occurred, Karlo would be upon him before he could struggle to his feet. Then Fletcher would renew the attack.

A blow in the temple finally stunned Big Indian a second time. And when his senses returned he found that his hands were securely bound behind him with handkerchiefs, and that the carrying strap of Karlo's leather binocular case had been buckled about his ankles.

Only Karlo stood close by and looked down upon him, training his flash light in his face.

"Feeling better?" he asked, without either gloating or sympathy in his voice.

Big Indian thought it unnecessary to make reply.

"My companion has gone for our horses," Karlo said, not in the least resentful over the wagon boss's silence. "I hear him returning now. You're going to get a ride." And then he added briskly, throwing the shaft of light horizontally through the trees: "On your own horse, too, it seems. My companion is coming with three animals, and one of them has red and white spots. You're going to have a long ride."

Karlo held up the note which, in the scramble, had been literally ground to fragments in Big Indian's closed hand.

"I had already read all but the last paragraph," remarked the crook. "You

came to, a little late. A good idea, the one you expressed in that note. I may be able to use it."

The tramp of hoofs came closer, and now Karlo spoke to Fletcher.

"See anything of our friend?"

"No, I guess he got to his horse and made it away from here on the jump."

"Just as well. I see you found this man's horse."

"Yes, I heard 'im snort, as I was goin' for the others. So I looked 'im up, and there he was, standin' and waitin', with his reins trailin' the ground."

"Good! Let's hoist this man into his saddle someway and get out of here. A pretty good night's work, all in all, I'll say. A good idea, Mr. Majette. And, since ideas breed ideas, it has given me a good one, too."

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE



### AN ACTIVE FIGURE OF EARLY CALIFORNIA DAYS

A SHORT time ago Asbury Harpending, discoverer of gold in the famous Clear Creek district in Kern County, California, died in New York. Harpending, who was also the founder of the town of Havilah and the promoter of mining developments in the Kern Mountains from 1864 to 1866, lived a life that was full of incident and romance.

Before he was twenty-one Harpending had accumulated a fortune in a mining venture in Mexico and had identified himself with the cause of the Confederacy. He was arrested by the Federal authorities, but escaped and made his way from San Francisco down the Santa Clara Valley across into the San Joaquin Valley, and finally hid in the obscure mining town of Kernville. Learning that the government authorities were still hot on his trail, he established a camp in the mountains several miles from Kernville, near where he later founded the town of Havilah.

Harpending's experience in mining led him one day to discover signs of gold in the sands of Clear Creek. He realized that he was in the midst of a gold-bearing sand section and at once staked out a number of mining claims. The news of the strike spread like wildfire through the State, and miners, traders, and adventurers began to rush in. Seeing the possibilities of a town, Harpending staked out a site, and in less than a year Havilah had a population of 2,000.

In a short time he accumulated a fortune and was able to justify himself to the government authorities for the part he had played. At the time Kern was a section of Tulare County, and Harpending was one of the representatives who went to Sacramento and secured the formation of Kern County. He had come into the county a fugitive from justice, and in less than three years he had left it with more than \$2,000,000.

In the following years Harpending had a spectacular career. He became interested in the great "diamond hoax," one of the most remarkable cases of salting a mine on record, and he expended vast sums of money on that enterprise, only to learn that he and his associates had been duped, and that the ground for which they had paid vast sums in Nevada had been cunningly planted with diamonds by plotters from the East.

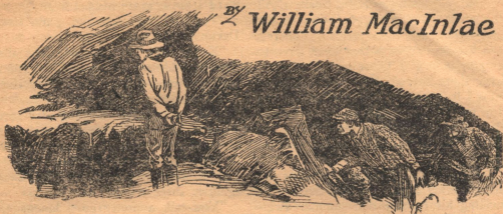
Harpending was associated with many financial ventures in San Francisco and was the friend and associate of W. C. Ralston. He also claimed the distinction of having put General Grant upon his feet financially when misfortune overtook the great soldier.

He made several fortunes in San Francisco realty and lost them, but later he again accumulated a competency. In addition to being a successful miner and speculator, he wrote the story of his early days in California and the tale of the diamond hoax.



# Buried River

By *William MacInlae*



Author of "Canteened Alkali," "Cracker Crumbs at Seven Buzzards," etc.



HERE was just one thing that stood in the way of a small-sized fortune for Orlin Devlin, and that was a labor shortage. For many months past he had

been laboring himself, saving his overtime money and forgoing the pleasures other men considered necessary to life. He had lived on a dollar where others spent two, stinting himself in every possible way that he might have enough money to finance the project that was to make his fortune.

During those excruciating months he had cherished a dream and a secret. The dream was nobody's business, and the secret he hated to share, not that he was more than ordinarily selfish, but he had met none of his acquaintances on that ground upon which partnership is founded. Yet he knew that help he must have to unearth the fortune that lay for him back in Thunder Cave Hills. He would have shared willingly with good, deserving men; but good, deserving men were as scarce as water holes in Thunder Cave Hills.

There were three jobs for every man who could wiggle a finger toward work. An able-bodied, idle man was looked

upon with scorn, even if he could afford not to work. Yet, like every other town of its size in the interior, Red Rock had a few idlers who hung around employment offices merely to use their moral presence to discourage others from jumping at the jobs announced on the blackboards with begging exclamation points. They sneered at work, yet were jealous of anybody else who canceled the jobs on the boards by their willingness to take them. These idlers preferred the indoor sport of watching these jobs go begging.

Orlin Devlin had chosen a hot time of the year to make his break for wealth. Red Rock's idlers had dwindled to two men when he stepped out of his well-driven flivver in front of a local employment agency and made his wants known to the clerk in charge.

"If you can get those birds over there to do anything better than settin' around, maybe they'll work for you," whispered the clerk, pointing to two of the aforementioned class of idlers lolling upon a bench.

Devlin followed the clerk's finger with appraising eye and instantly catalogued the two loungers in their proper places in his records of human nature.

"Them the only excuses you can offer?" he whispered back contemptuously.

"Sorry," apologized the clerk. "All the good men have gone away to the shipyards or the farms. There's ranches around here that even have to employ women. Those bench polishers over there turned down the last three jobs I had to offer 'em without waiting for me to tell them what they had to do. I wish somebody would take 'em away. They're gettin' to be an eyesore."

Devlin studied the idlers a while before making a move. His chances of making his fortune that summer dwindled down to these two good-for-naughts and the labor of his own hands. Figure as he would, he could not possibly see how he was going to accomplish much without the aid of two other pairs of hands. How to inveigle these two now to leave their preferred occupation of sitting around, and to accompany him upon the heatbound journey to Thunder Cave Hills and work the pick and shovel for the rest of the summer, assumed the proportions of a sensitive problem. But Devlin attempted to solve it, resolved to abandon the trip for another year if he failed.

Choosing the best form of approach he could call to mind, he strode over to the bench.

"Looking for money?" he asked at length in tones as remote as possible from the more disagreeable question of "Looking for Work?"

One of the idlers was alternately scraping the bowl of his pipe with the small blade of a jackknife and tapping it against the edge of the bench. His companion, scornful of such industry, reposed upon his elbow against the bench's top rail, the brim of his slouch hat pulled low over his eyes.

At Devlin's speech the pipe cleaner looked up askant, showing, as he did so, no overabundance of respect.

"What's your definition for money?" he asked bluntly. His companion shifted his position a little to gaze upward from beneath his hat brim.

"Ten dollars a day and grub," was Devlin's prompt reply.

"Not so bad," condescended the pipe cleaner, folding his knife and returning both knife and pipe to his pocket. "What's the graft?"

"Pick and shovel. Mining of a sort. Probably a month's work." As an afterthought of special inducement Devlin added: "I'll pay you for a month, even if we can finish up and get away again in three weeks."

"You talk a pretty good language," commented the wearer of the slouch hat. "Does that go for the two of us? We're pals, and we don't work unless we get a job together."

"I need two men," affirmed Devlin. "I'm ready now to start for the hills."

The idlers looked at each other. Like their kind, they talked mostly with meaning glances.

"Let's grab it," suggested one.

"Very well! Let's be going," urged Devlin, eager to get them before they were tempted to procrastinate. "My name's Devlin. What's yours?"

The pipe cleaner acted as spokesman. "Mine's Theodore Hunt, and my friend's, here, is Terrance Cumber. Todd and Terry will do for short."

"Todd instead of Ted, eh?" remarked Devlin.

"That's me!"

"All right. Come along, then. We've got fifty miles to go, and we want to get there before night." Devlin had paused in reflection over the two nicknames. "Terry" might signify anything; "Ted" always suggested trustworthiness to him; but he was not so sure of "Todd."

The journey to Thunder Cave Hills was hot, tedious, and uphill. Devlin's two prospective helpers felt that they

were earning their promised wages just by riding through the heat. Devlin occupied the front seat alone, and his two pickups found what comfort they could between the bundles of camping paraphernalia in the tonneau. Devlin's attention was fully occupied in breaking a trail over some of the more trackless of the wastes, and he made no attempts to be communicative further than he had been. And, because their thoughts were incapable of being expressed in the presence of their employer, Todd and Terry remained silent.

After a long pull up a white slope undotted by rock or bush Devlin resorted to low gear for two steep miles, keeping his eyes open for tracks of a former trip. Soon he came upon two partially submerged tire tracks and followed them all the way around a roadless mountain, then up to a ridge skirting a huge desert basin, tilting the car at such a precarious angle that it made his two pickups think even less of their ten-dollar-a-day jobs. But Devlin was an accomplished driver. Soon he was safely over the worst of the road and passed through a granite-walled gap into the Thunder Cave Hill country. At the end of the journey he attempted to atone for his unsociability by explaining:

"This is Buried River Valley. Somewhere beneath us flows a river that got covered with more country than it could wash away in some big upheaval long before any of us were born. It had to bore a channel beneath, and it empties out into the ocean somewhere. Up yonder on that sidehill is Thunder Cave. That's our only water hole. The melting snows in the mountains swell Buried River into a sort of underground flood and back the water up into the cave. Our first job is to fill a reservoir I built up there last summer. We'll need it in our work. What we've got to do now is make camp and dip water for our canteens."

Devlin did the work of dipping water

for camp supply. He had always been fascinated to peer down into the great black depths of the cave and speculate what might be there. Some twenty feet from the entrance of the cave the huge throat of it turned sharply downward and from the enormous submerged cavern of it boomed the flood waters of Buried River. At times it seemed as if tons of dead weight were being catapulted against the supports of the mountain. The throat of the cave megaphoned it to the remote ends of the little valley. It was thunder season for the cave now. Devlin dipped and lost his first bucket in the thrashing waters. But he had brought two; he had lost others. He dipped again, filled his canteens, and returned to camp.

Not till the end of the labor of filling the crude reservoir on the hill below the cave did Devlin's helpers learn the reason for which they had been hired. It took all of three days to fill the reservoir. They would have made three or four of it if they were given their way, but Devlin was a hard worker himself. But he was not a hard master, and they fell naturally into his pace.

When this task was finished Devlin took them to the floor of the valley and showed them a broad, yellow flat marked like a railroad map with bluish-gray streaks. Unlike the broad sand sweeps west of the hills, Buried River Valley was a great expanse of yellow clay streaked here and there with veins of blue. Devlin had given his helpers picks and shovels and said:

"Dig out the clay from those blue streaks and heap it in neat piles. Follow the blue wherever it goes, and dig as deep as you can. That's all you've got to do." With that he left them to their jobs and went about connecting a pipe line from the reservoir to a tank arrangement at the head of the flat.

When he was out of hearing Todd remarked to his companion:



"This is all we got to do, eh? Well, you betcha life we'll take our time doing it! This is a nice fix we got into! If I'd 'a' known what we were coming to I'd 'a' held out for twenty instead of ten. He'd 'a' been lucky to get us at that, what with the high wages they're paying in Imperial."

"Sure, take it easy. We ain't going to kill ourselves just because he wants to work. I wonder what's in this darn stuff, anyway, to make it worth ten dollars a day apiece for us to get it out for him? More'n we'll get out of it, that's one sure thing."

The speaker kicked over a lump of the clay, then stooped and picked it up. The clay was of intense blue, fibrous and heavy. All through it ran a peculiar, brilliant glitter. Pinching a chunk of it between his fingers, he saw that it left a glittery splash upon them. The substance was powdery and very fine.

"What do you suppose it is?" queried Todd, who made no offer to examine it on his own hook.

"You got me there," replied Terry. "I ain't up none in mining. Funny stuff, though."

Some time later Devlin came down and surveyed the amount of clay they had unearthed, and was altogether pleased at it. But he said nothing. He had not come to keep check on them.

"Terry, I'd like you to help me prop up the pipe line. It's a little more than I can handle alone," he said.

Orlin Devlin might have been called an easy man to work for. His orders were more like requests. While some might warm to his method of supervision and do all they could for him, the two whom he had picked up to help him dig out his fortune had little respect for his class of superiors. They worked better when ruled by iron-tongued and iron-fisted bosses.

"Sure, I'll come," condescended Terry, darting a wink to his companion

that might mean anything. He followed Devlin to the pipe line.

There was little for him to do except raise the pipe while Devlin propped it with poles cut from the branches of a few scrubby trees in the valley. But during the proceedings Terry kept rubbing at an irritation growing in the ends of his fingers where he had pinched the clay. It became so annoying that finally he asked:

"What's in that clay down there? I picked up some of it a while ago, and my fingers itch where I pinched it."

Devlin showed immediate concern.

"Did you get some of it on you? I should have warned you about it," he said. "There's a fine, sharp powder in it that is very penetrating and works its way into the pores of the skin. Put your fingers in water right away and squeeze them downward toward the ends. The water will draw the stuff out. It's the only remedy. I discovered it by accident last year. When you go back to your partner, tell him not to let any of the stuff get on him."

Further information about the strange, glittering powder Devlin did not divulge. When Terry joined his partner he gave the warning but did not think to mention the remedy.

Several days later they learned that it was this very powder that Devlin came to get. Devlin had rigged up a scheme to separate it from the clay by cutting the bottom out of a small tank he had brought on a previous trip, and by binding heavy woolen cloth tightly over the end. This he set up on a frame and ran the pipe line into it. To the tank he had his helpers pack the clay on a stretcherlike carrier, and he shoveled it into the tank from time to time, stirring it under water. Strangely enough, the blue clay hardly discolored the water, but the brilliant substance was carried through the cloth and caught in a large can directly under it. When the can was full of the powder,

Devlin poured the water off the top and placed the glittering contents into leather bags. These bags he propped against a small log for the sun to evaporate whatever moisture remained before he sewed them up. Five small bags of the powder had been so processed in as many days. Each bag weighed approximately forty pounds.

Todd and Terry came upon their enlightenment concerning the glittering powder through their employer's carelessness with his private effects. Devlin's suit case stood open in one corner of the tent, bulging the canvas outward. Some of his letters were scattered promiscuously in the bottom. One of them had worked through and now lay partly out of the tent under the flap.

It was a moonlight night, and Devlin was snoring in his tent. His helpers had remained awake to take a long draw from their pipes. Todd caught sight of a bit of white protruding from the boss' tent and took a silent liberty of appropriating it. The moonlight not being bright enough for him to read, he whispered to Terry:

"Let's light up and see what it says. I've got a hunch it's worth something to us."

They crawled into their tent, and Terry lit a candle lamp made of an olive-oil can cut in half lengthwise, with the top and bottom left whole. Together they bent low and read the purloined missive. It contained the following good news to one Orlin Devlin:

MR. DEVLIN,

DEAR SIR: Your samples of what you term "diamond powder" have been received and experiments made as suggested. The powder indeed indicates that it is composed of carbon crystals of extreme fineness. We will be frank to say that your discovery will revolutionize the lens-grinding industry. We will take all you can send us at your price of fifty dollars per pound. Send all shipments to address below. Yours sincerely,

HOLBROOK LENS & OPTICAL CO.  
27 Lombard Street, Witchita, Kansas.

"Fifty bucks a pound!" whistled Terry softly. "And we've been getting out forty pounds a day for the old buzzard! Two thousand bones a day, and it only costing him twenty to make!"

Like most men of his class, Terry considered that their labor was Devlin's only expense. Dreams, hopes, struggles, preparations on the part of the owner counted for nothing.

"Say," he whispered a little later, "this fellow Devlin has fooled onto something he ain't fully wise to the value of. Chances are he's the only one who knows of this stuff. Diamond powder for grinding lenses! This ought to be worth something to us. Maybe they'd pay seventy-five or a hundred dollars a pound for it. We ought to cop on to that." Then he whispered a plan which he had just formed.

The next day, the letter having been copied and returned to the suit case, the plotters exhibited an earnestness in their work never before displayed, and kept it up till the last bag was filled. Orlin Devlin might have become suspicious of their sudden industry, but he was a man more inclined to sound his own motives before attempting to dissemble those of others.

So pleased was he with their output that it began to trouble him how little he had offered them in proportion to what they were doing for him. For several days principle battled with greed. He was giving them the best of wages, more than he had ever earned in his life. Nevertheless, when a thing bothered Orlin Devlin it got under where he liked to feel comfortable. He liked comfort, even of thought.

One night at the supper board he brought the matter to an end by saying:

"Fellers, I've decided to treat you better'n I first offered. You've done mighty fine since you got hardened to the work, and I like to see young fellers like you get out of the laboring man's rut. I've labored myself, man and boy,

nigh on to thirty years, and it ain't brought me nothin' to set by me in old age. I run onto this diamond dust when I was prospecting for something to lift me up from bein' another man's go-devil. I found out what it was good for and landed a market. But that's neither black nor white. I'm goin' to split three ways on the proceeds of the dust and give you each fifteen thousand dollars. It will give you something to go into business on, and you can make something of your young lives. Me, I've got this flat up here with a lot more of the dust to come to whenever I need dough. I'm figgerin' on giving other young chaps the chance I'm givin' you."

Devlin's helpers eyed each other across the rough pine board that did service as a mess table, and around the corners of their smiles played the hint of sneers. Todd spoke.

"Now that sure is generous of you to do all this, Devlin," he said with just a trace of irony in his voice. "We sure appreciate it. Fifteen thousand smilers ain't to be sneezed at."

Devlin was just a little doubtful of the genuineness of the thanks, but he was lost in self-satisfaction for having made the offer.

The last bag was filled and the machinery taken down and stored in one of the many caverns in the rocky rises that walled in Buried River Valley. Everything was set for the journey back to civilization.

"Finish ropin' the load, you two, while I fill these canteens," ordered Devlin, and began climbing the hill to the cave. They saw him disappear into the black hole, and then they stopped work.

"This thing is dead easy!" exclaimed Terry. "Like taking candy from a kid!"

"You ain't got nothing against those sentiments, have you?" returned Todd.

"Nothing whatever."

"And men who cease to live spring no comebacks," continued Todd with a meaning wink toward the cave. Terry understood. They hastened toward the cave and crept quietly into it, hugging the floor.

Devlin had filled the canteens and was now giving one last, fascinated look down into the black chasm. A subdued murmur rose from the obscure depths. The flood waters of Buried River had subsided; their thunder was over for a whole season.

Devlin stood up to break the peculiar spell the cave was weaving about him. The two streaks of light that lined his shadow against the curve in the great throat were suddenly blotted out. Talonlike grips clutched at his ankles. A sharp impact caught him in the middle of his back. For an instant he hung over the abysmal blackness, then plunged downward.

He heard Todd's voice whisper "How easy!" then his only sense was that of night rushing upward to engulf him.

This obstacle removed, the two rogues hurried down to the machine, carrying with them the canteens of water. Not till they had secured the load for travel did they speak, then Todd said:

"You're a better driver than I am, Terry. Suppose you take the wheel till we get by the bad stretches, and then I'll drive the rest of the way."

"That's a go. I'd feel safer in driving around those potholes. This load's apt to give us some worry."

Terry's prediction was not unwarranted. Around the slope where Devlin had found little difficulty in piloting the machine empty, they found it extremely awkward in passing with a load. But after a while the worst of it was apparently over, and both began to breathe easier. Then Todd began to calculate and dream. The price they would demand for the diamond dust would be nearly double that offered to Devlin. Todd saw himself doing twice as much



with all of it as he could with half of it, and his eyes narrowed to slits as he contemplated his partner. Terry's services to him in getting over the bad road had come to an end. He would drive the car soon—but he would drive alone!

A smooth, downhill stretch of sand-way suggested his chance. Todd spoke.

"Get out and see how the tires are holding up, and I'll take the wheel for the rest of the way," he offered.

Suspecting nothing, Terry followed his habit of obeying Todd's suggestion and climbed out. He first enjoyed a delicious yawn that took in his whole body, and then turned—startled. Todd had thrown the gears into high, and the slope of the hill aided the machine in getting under way. Terry grabbed for the running board but missed it and landed in the dust. He rose quickly and shook his fist in sputtering wrath.

"That's no way to treat a pal, you double crosser, you!" he shouted after the departing machine. Then, apparently oblivious of the hopelessness of making the journey afoot without water, he trudged on through the alkali dust.

A small ridge of hills still lay between Todd and Red Rock. He had forgotten that among them was another stretch of very bad road. He realized the folly of dispensing with Terry's better manipulation of a machine so soon. He stopped the car and got out to look at the bad stretch. For over a hundred yards it curved around a slope before it would be safe for him to drive a loaded machine. The only thing for him to do was to unload, pack the bags of diamond dust on his shoulder around to the good road, take the empty car over, and load up again. He looked back. Some five miles to the rear his late partner was plodding through the alkali. If he hurried, Todd figured that he might finish the job before Terry caught up with him. He set about it at once.

But Terry was a fast walker in his

mad, half delirious wrath. Todd had not quite finished reloading the machine after he had successfully negotiated the bad stretch before Terry came up. One of the bags had broken open and spilled the glittering contents down Todd's neck, but he had worked on regardless till, with the help of salty perspiration, the irritant dust was fast inflaming every spot where it covered his flesh. Agony mounted with every second.

Terry caught this all in a glance. Remembering his own experience with the dust, he felt a keen satisfaction in Todd's discomfiture. Unarmed, neither had the advantage materially, but Terry took an advantage of another kind.

"So you've took a shower bath of diamond dust, have you?" he asked with a sneer. "Finish loading that machine, and I'll tell you how you can get that powder out of your skin."

"For Heaven's sake tell me now!" Todd begged in agony. "This pain is killing me! We'll split fifty-fifty as we said we would. I played you a mean trick, I know. But if you tell me how I can get this powder off of me I'll be your dog for life!"

"Oh, you will, eh? Well, you can just begin right now. Put that stuff back in the car for me, and I'll tell you what Devlin told me about it. There was only one remedy he knew, and he told it to me. Hurry up, now. I don't fancy loading it myself."

With savage desperation Todd returned to the task while Terry looked on, gloating. Every move to Todd was torture. When he was through Todd all but fell on his knees before him.

"Tell me now," he begged. "My back's burning up. I'm dying, man!"

Terry said with slow deliberation:

"Go take a swim for yourself. Water is the only thing that will draw that powder out of your skin. Over east about four miles is Potter River. Maybe there's some water in it. Better take a walk over there and see."

Todd, enraged jointly by his agony and the way Terry had tricked him, flung out a vile oath. Terry jumped and struck at him. Todd dodged the blow and worked to higher ground. Terry came with another swing.

Just then Todd caught sight of the half-empty bag of dust on the running board. Prompted by inspiration, he snatched it up and threw the contents in Terry's face. Then they fought blindly, smearing themselves all over with the deadly dust, thrashing it about, inhaling it and swallowing it, driving it inward with the impact of their blows. Then with the leaping pain they went blind and mad. A mutual thought took sudden possession of them, and they stumbled forth toward the river, the downward motion of their gait directing their steps.

Orlin Devlin did not meet death as quickly as he expected it after being shoved into the black chasm, nor was the cave as deep as he thought. In his descent he breathed a justified, bitter comment upon the untrustworthiness of human beings, and then he hit the icy water of Buried River.

The depth of water broke his fall, but the speed of the current bore him suddenly onward through black, clammy caverns. He was relieved to find air space above the underground stream, but he was sure he was being borne straight to the ocean. His body would reach it some months hence, he figured rather gloomily. Yet he fought to keep his head above water, and was rushed into one subterranean windstorm after another as he passed tributaries pouring into Buried River. The blackness pained his eyes with its density, but the rushing current slowed at last, and he began to feel that some kind of an end to the journey was near.

A distant snapping and popping that reverberated through the throaty caverns warned him he was approaching a

crisis, but that crisis was wholly in the hands of fate and the swirling waters. After what seemed hours of slow progress, with the thunder of slapping water growing nearer, the stream suddenly shot downward, and the snapping became a roar. With a suddenness that deprived him of breath for a moment, the stream, with its buoyancy, left him, and he felt himself rushing through space. He had been catapulted over an underground falls!

But the drop was not great. He found himself in a large, wide pool, the size, length, or direction of which he could not tell; but he edged away from the churning fall and stuck close to a slippery bank at one side. He was now apparently the master of his own destiny from there on. He might remain where he was indefinitely unless he could do something, but what to do was slow in presenting itself. He thrashed about in the water to keep his body from becoming numb, and drifted along the shallow side of the pool.

Suddenly it deepened. A broad splash of light appeared on the sandy bottom. A downward tug threatened to pull him under, and he caught the wall for support. He remained there for a moment and studied the patch of light. It came in through an opening under the overhanging wall. For several feet this light stretched, broken by pillarlike supports of the wall that also roofed the cavern. This was where Buried River decided to flow in the open for a while. Devlin's only chance for life was through one of those openings. He chose the larger one, took a deep breath, and dived under. The pull of the water caught him, and he was buffeted through.

After an agony of effort he wiggled through and was thrust upward to the glaring light of day. He dragged himself wearily to the sandy bed of the open river and lay down for a long time to recover from exhaustion. In time

the warmth of the sun restored him, and he began thinking again.

"Potter River!" he exclaimed as he surveyed his surroundings. "But I ought to have known it. Buried River feeds it. In that case I'm about thirty-five miles from Red Rock. A long hike without water, since I haven't any means of carrying it."

But Devlin's surmise in this was made too soon. He spied the bail of one of the buckets he had lost in Thunder Cave, and then concluded that fate had figured out his salvation once it had discerned the schemes of his treacherous helpers. Devlin was a strong believer in fate.

The bail made an awkward water carrier, but it was welcome. He filled it and climbed the river bank to get his bearings. Then he set out for Red Rock.

He had covered hardly half the distance to a ridge of pinkish hills before he made out the figure of a man stumbling toward him and clawing the air wildly. Screams were borne to him on the hot breeze. Then the screams ceased, and the man fell, not to arise again. Devlin hurried toward him and recognized Terry, not by his face but by his

clothes. His face was a ghastly bloat. Even as Devlin felt for heartbeats, they stopped, and he knew that the man's agony had been too much for nerves to stand.

As he looked down upon the form of the rogue Devlin's heart softened.

"One who couldn't be satisfied unless he was a whole hog," he mused aloud. "Must have been double crossed."

It would be risking his own life to try to do anything for the body. He just turned and looked up at an encircling buzzard. He smiled sadly, significantly, and trudged onward.

Less than a quarter of a mile farther he came upon Todd, already succumbed to the terrible dust. He looked upward and saw three buzzards hovering close. Then his eye caught the glistening top of his machine.

"This gets me what I come after without havin' to pay for it, but darned if I wouldn't a whole lot rather've had it turn out the other way."

Once more mindful of the trick they had played him on top of his offer, Devlin set his face grimly toward his machine, saw that all was well with it, climbed in, and continued the journey to civilization and wealth.

#### LIVED FOUR YEARS WITH ESKIMO FAMILY

MRS. VASHTA DALTON, who has explored the arctic farther north than any white woman, lived for four years with an Eskimo family and is the first person, it is said, to preserve in written form the language of the Eskimos. For seventeen years she has mushed across the barren wastes of No Man's Land of snow, and often, when alone on the trail, she has built an igloo, cutting the blocks of ice and cementing them together by filling the cracks with snow.

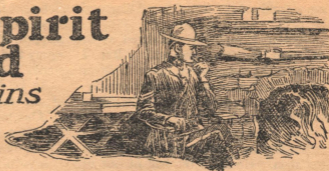
A Castilian by birth, Mrs. Dalton went to Alaska in 1897, when she was still a young girl. For some years she mined, staking claims that one week assayed and the next petered out. Her prospecting experiences brought her about \$6,000 in cash, and then she went from Fairbanks to Nome, where she lived eleven years. Next she decided to strike out and blaze some new trails. By whaling boat and dog team she went to Point Barrow, the northern outpost of civilization. She lived with the Eskimos for four years, 600 miles beyond the white man's territory, accepted and honored by these primitive people as a guest.

She says they are a simple and primitive people, but they have a certain moral code, and they are religious in its enforcement.



# From Spirit Land

By Earl Watkins



AM the spirit of Corporal Ladd of the Mounted. And I speak to you from Spiritland to free Jacques Fournier. For Jacques is not my murderer, as many good comrades have been led to believe.

In a log cabin a hundred miles or so from Lost Post lived Jacques Fournier. He lived alone. He was a trapper, but not an honest trapper. For he trapped out of season as well as in. This is against the Northwest Territories Game Laws. And the Royal Canadian Mounted Police decree that all laws must be obeyed. For this reason I was sent into the North after Jacques Fournier.

On the evening of the third day I came upon Jacques Fournier's cabin and entered. But Jacques Fournier was not at home. So I brought forth my pipe and sat myself before the open fireplace for a smoke, since there was nothing else to do but await his return.

I had not taken ten puffs from my pipe when from outside the cabin there came the crunch, crunch of heavy boots in the snow. Some one was moaning. Not dreaming of a trap, I stepped out-

side to aid the unfortunate one. And to my astonishment, Jacques Fournier stood before me with a leveled revolver in each hand. But only for an instant did I see Jacques. For there came before my eyes a blinding flash of red, accompanied by a deafening shot which smashed my pipe into bits.

Instantly I realized that I was blind, and that I had been wounded. I could not see, and in my chest was a terrible pain. I called for Jacques. I expected a sneery laugh in answer to my call. But none came. And then on the moment I remembered that after the sudden flash I had heard Jacques flee from the spot. All at once my legs weakened. And then I sank to the ground—dead.

An exploded shell and scattered bits of tobacco pipe lay near the cabin door. If my good comrades of the Mounted had only investigated, they would have found the shell which I had been carrying in my coat pocket, and which had lodged in my pipe. After becoming heated, it had exploded, rendering me blind and sending the bullet into my chest.

I, the spirit of Corporal Ladd, speak to you from the border of Spiritland to free Jacques Fournier of the murder charge!



# Hired Guns

By Max Brand

Author of  
The "Jim Curry" Stories, etc.



## Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

FOR nine years a feud has been carried on in Gloster Valley between the Camps and the Benchleys. Parentage and custody of a beautiful girl called Nell Benchley, though she is really Nell Camp, is the issue. William Camp realizes the need for aid, so he rides out of the valley to hire a fearless fighter and expert horseman. He finds Billy Buel, and they strike a bargain.

They go to the Camp stronghold, where they meet the faction. They are eating when an outpost messenger rushes in and announces that Ames Benchley, leader of the opposing side, is coming to the house, carrying a white flag of truce. Ames Benchley arrives and proposes that they make an end to the purposeless killings, and that they decide by combat, once and for all, which side will have Nell. The agreement is that one man from the Camp faction shall meet Ames Benchley and fight to a finish, the victor to claim the girl for his side. Billy Buel is picked.

Billy beats Ames Benchley on the draw, but a bullet from the gun of Hal Moore, a Benchley follower, fired from cover, brings down the Camp champion. Ames Benchley, knowing nothing of this treachery beforehand, is furious. He brings Billy to his home and has Nell tend his wound. Billy gets over the shock, and in an hour he has regained his strength. He is lying in bed feigning sleep when Alice Benchley, whom Nell thinks is her mother, comes in and tells Nell that she put Hal Moore up to killing Billy Buel from cover. When Alice goes, Nell binds Billy with a promise that he will never tell any one, because it will mean a resumption of the feud. Billy promises, on one condition—that Nell ride with him and pay a brief visit to the Camps. Nell accepts, and together they ride to Art Camp's house, where the clan is assembled.

Nell is introduced and is pleasantly surprised over her reception by the women. She tells them she has something to say. When they put her up on a chair, Art Camp tells William that the feud is sure to be resumed, now that the Camp followers have had a look at Nell and have fallen under the spell of her charm. While they consider this possibility, Nell starts to talk.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

NELL SEES THE TRUTH.



It was a slow and quiet voice that they heard, not shrill with excitement nor broken with nervous laughter. It was a steady and slow voice. Lanterns and lamps were raised through the spacious hall, and there was a steady light falling upon the face of Nell. And still, as she talked from that small eminence of the chair, they saw her arms go out, and they saw the flicker and gleam of her hands as though inviting more light, more to show upon the in-

side of her mind. And it seemed that the same light played with continual variations upon her face as she spoke.

"I've come here like an enemy," said Nell, "into an enemy's house. But, oh, I take you to witness that there's no enmity in my heart. There's nothing but gladness, my friends, that the war is over, and nothing but sorrow that it has lasted so long. Who was right in the beginning, and who was wrong, I cannot even guess. All I know is that many people have been unhappy for my sake, and many people have fought, and many, alas, have lost their lives. I am sorry for it. I wish that there was in me enough riches and strength to repay

all those who have lost. But I have not such riches, and I have not such strength. All I can do is to come to you and tell you how I grieve for you and with you, and to ask you humbly to forgive for the griefs which I have brought on you.

"Oh, I know that there are those among you who will sneer and be hard with me, and to those I can only say, over and over, that I have never willed it, that I have never wished it. I know that it has never been truly for me that the war had been fought, but for something beyond me. It was something far more important, of course; and to that thing of pride or sternness or whatever it may be, my name has been attached.

"Do not hold me too close to it. And believe me when I say that for every tear the Camps have dropped, I too have wept. And every brave man who has fallen in this long and costly war I have mourned for, knowing that I am the small cause of it all.

"Perhaps you will wonder why I have come to-night. It is not to gloat over those who are defeated. It is rather to see you face to face and tell you the truth as I know it, to hope that this day will see the end of the cruelty. And, above all, I have hoped that to-night I may see face to face those who have stood for my parents among the Camps. Do not think that I have foolishly misjudged them, but believe that I have always known that they are too kind and generous of heart, having adopted me. And I wish to go to them now, not proudly, but on my knees, and beg them to forgive the sorrow which I have caused them, and, if I cannot be their daughter, at least I wish them to know that I am open to them.

"All of this is because the man you sent to us was Billy Buel, and if ever there was a fine and upstanding man it is he. He has brought me close to you, although he is not one of you. And he has filled me with the desire to make

you understand me and so to force this to be a lasting peace in more than name. Oh, my good friends—and I know that I have friends among you—help me to make this truce a lasting peace, and help me to make you all understand without malice."

She ended in the complete silence which comes after many have listened. And though every face was lifted, there was no response. It was Arthur Camp who spoke at last for the crowd.

"Nell," he said, "what you've said stands well enough, but the main thing is for you to see Margery and Lew. You may wonder why they ain't down here with the rest of us. I'll tell you. It's because Margery is pretty nigh onto death, and Lew is watching over her. It may be they ain't your father and mother. It may be that they are. But either way it may mean the turning point for Margery to see you close. Will you go up and see her?"

While he spoke Nell had gotten down from the chair, and now she looked around her. She saw many a keen-eyed man, she saw many a curious woman, but there was only one face which spoke to her in the crowd, and that was the face of Billy Buel. She sought him at once.

"Shall I go?" she whispered to the man with the hired guns.

"Go, and go quick," said Billy Buel, "because Hal Moore might come on your traces almost any time."

And he led her through the crowd to the side of Arthur Camp.

"Mr. Camp," she said faintly, "will you take me to Margery Camp and her husband?"

The leader of the Camps looked down to her with a smile.

"They was a time," he said, "when I expected to see you here and saying that same thing not as a Benchley but as a Camp, and, though you ain't here now in that way, I think I understand. Come with me, Nell, and we'll find 'em,



and Heaven teach you to think as kindly of them as they think of you!"

"I'll go," said Nell. And she added softly: "Don't leave me, Billy!"

"Not a second," he assured her instantly.

Under the guidance of Arthur Camp they gave way before her, the rest of the crowd. There was a species of awe which attended this quiet-voiced girl. And as the women turned back to the right and to the left, so did the men also. And out of this soft-footed turmoil she found what she was approaching, having mounted a stairway and turned down a long hall, a new part of the house. They ended before a door where Arthur Camp himself paused, stroking his curly beard.

"Nell," he said, "inside of this door the two of 'em are. Here's my brother that's been figuring all these nine years that he's your father. And here's my sister that's been thinking all this time that she's your mother. Maybe me and some of the rest, like William and the judge, could convince Lew that he's had the wrong idea, and that because Billy has lost in the fight it must be that Joe Benchley and Alice was mother and father to you instead of Lew and Margery. But no matter how much we could talk to Lew, which he's a reasonable gent, no matter of talking could ever make us sound with Margery. Keep that in mind when you come to her. Be soft with her—be terrible soft with her, Nell!"

And, as he spoke, he thrust the door softly ajar.

What Nell saw was not the dull-tinted room and the low-raftered ceiling; neither did she look to the squat and ponderous furniture; but she saw, first of all, a grim-faced man of middle age with broad shoulders that were obviously meant for the lifting of burdens, and she knew, without asking questions, that this was her pseudo father, Lew Camp. Pseudo father? Indeed, he

was more than that! Sincerity looked at her from under his deep-shadowed brows, and sincerity spoke from the low voice which said:

"Whatever foolishness you gents may be up to, and whatever rejoicing you may have because the war's over, for Heaven's sake take the noise of it some other place in the house, because Margery ain't up to it. She sure ain't up to it, being dead closer than she is to alive! Go where you want and do what you want, but don't bring your noise close to Margery!"

The last words came as he saw the face of Nell in the crowd. And suddenly he had come to her, brushing aside those who intervened, and stood holding her by the shoulders with his two big, brown hands.

She heard a voice with a fiber in it such as she had never heard before: "Nell! And have you come to us now, girl, in this time of all times? Have you come to us now, Nell?"

There was a sob in her voice as she answered: "What shall I do, and what shall I do that's the right thing to do?"

The slender form of Billy Buel made his way to her out of the crowd, and he stood beside her, pointing with an outstretched arm.

Ordinarily it might have been hard enough for her to understand what he meant by the gesture, but now it was not hard, and if there had been any doubt it would have been dismissed by the steady voice which was saying to her: "Look yonder to the wall, Nell. Before you do anything and before you so much as say a word, look yonder to the wall!"

She obeyed his pointing arm and his steady eyes, and the others in the room obeyed the same direction. They heard the voice of Billy saying: "Keep the rest of 'em out of the room, Camp. Keep the rest of 'em clear so's the girl can do some thinking on her own account!"

Art Camp, without a word, turned on

the herd behind him and began, not too gently, to urge them toward the door, and for those who resisted there were softly voiced curses so pitched as not to reach the ears of the woman who lay on the bed with her arms helplessly outstretched and her eyes fixed on some indeterminable point in the ceiling, with its myriad cracks which ran this way and that.

But finally the crowd was pushed and hurried out of the room, and the door closed with a jar as Arthur Camp turned back upon the little assemblage.

"Now, Billy Buel," he said gravely, "suppose you make it clear why you've brought her here, which I sure want to state that I don't see any reason why she should be here. Speak up, Billy, and let's have a look inside of that mind of yours, if you don't mind."

And Billy Buel answered simply enough: "If I could answer you with words, I'd sure be a happy gent to do it, but sometimes words fall down a pile, and we got to look to something else. That's what I look to now, and that's what I ask the rest of you to look to, and then turn around and look at the girl that a pile of fools has called Nell Benchley, which she ain't any more of a Benchley than I am."

He paused and lowered his voice, for Nell was going steadily, slowly, as though impelled by a volition other than her own, straight toward the bed where Margery Camp lay.

"It's an instinct working in her and showing her the truth even more'n I can show it to the rest of you. But there's what I mean. There is the shadow on the wall!"

As he spoke he caught a lamp from a stand beside him, and, raising it well above his shoulder level, he advanced a pace or two toward the center of the room. The illumination fell at once into the bed corner of the room and showed more distinctly than ever the worn, weary face of Margery. It showed,

also, the thing to which Billy Buel was pointing.

It was a picture of Margery taken some twenty or more years before, and enlarged. She was wearing the stiff bodice and the quaintly high-shouldered sleeves of that period of fashion, so that the whole picture had an indescribable air of primness. But the face and the throat, with the edging of soft ruffles about its base—nothing could change their beauty. And many an older man, looking to the worn woman on the bed and then up to the picture of her beautiful girlhood, felt his heart leap with pity. It seemed only yesterday that Margery had been the cynosure of all eyes, the observed of all observers. It seemed only yesterday that they had wooed her so hard and long and had envied lucky Lew Camp so bitterly. And now what a change! It seemed pointlessly cruel of Billy Buel to call attention to that poignant contrast.

But he was saying: "And now look at Nell and you'll see what I see, or else I'm half blind!"

For Nell, beside the bed, had turned and was looking down into the face of the prostrated woman with an expression of the most perfect sympathy; and, so doing, her face was turned to the crowd, now edging into the room again, in exactly the same profile that the photograph on the wall above them showed. And then the full meaning of Billy Buel rushed over every man and woman there.

It was the same profile. Seeing them in full face, there were vital differences apparent between Margery's youth and that of Nell; but the profile struck out the difference and left from brow to chin and throat the identical pure and steady line. And, unconscious of the rest of the room in her rapt attention to the sick woman, Nell seemed to be instructed by a spirit at this moment to take the broad hat from her head. And

the result was a gasp that ran around the circle in the chamber. Now that the hat was gone, there remained no chance for doubt, it seemed. It was not only the same face, it was the modeling of the head and the posture of it that were the same, and by a freak of chance each of them wore the same type of hairdress. It was drawn low across the forehead, and the shiny masses were coiled at the base of the neck.

There was a moan from Lew Camp. The next moment he had sprung to the side of Nell, and, taking her by the shoulders, he turned her toward the wall, pointing with a trembling arm.

"Look, Nell," he whispered, "and Heaven give you the power to see what all the rest of us see! There's Margery when she was a girl just after she was married—there's Margery, and that's your mother, girl!"

It seemed to Billy, and it seemed to the rest, that the recognition must be instant, but Nell remained for a long time staring and staring and staring. The only way in which they could tell that she was more and more deeply moved was the manner in which her hands closed tighter and tighter over the big, brown hands of Lew Camp, until at length she slipped to her knees and they saw her hands glide under the head of the woman on the bed.

Then: "She's going to wake up? Tell me that she's going to wake up!"

There was a stir and a movement from the older woman, while every man and woman in that room leaned forward, breathlessly intent.

"Who?" she whispered faintly. "Who's calling? Lew?"

"It's Nell," answered the girl. "And my eyes have seen the truth at last. Oh, my dear, my dear!"

Billy Buel whirled on the crowd, and his voice was a snarling threat.

"Get out!" he commanded harshly. "Get out! We ain't needed!"

And they turned without a word,

each with a shining face, and sifted through the doorway with careful and noiseless steps, leaving the three huddling close together in the far corner of the room.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

HAL MOORE COMES.

**L**OOK to Buel!" said William sharply as they stood, wondering, bewildered, bright of eye, in the hall beyond.

For Billy Buel, his work ended, was leaning against the wall with a face deadly white. The pain of his wound, the weakness, the effort of the ride, had drained almost the last remnant of his strength; and one thin mark of red passed down the side of his face where the bandage had slipped a little and a corner of the wound had opened.

"Look to Billy Buel!"

There were others nearer to him, but Slow Joe Walker came to life and cuffed his way to the place, sending men reeling right and left. So he split a way to the side of Billy and scooped up the latter as though he were a child.

"And now what?" he rumbled to Will.

"Take him downstairs and put him on a couch. He ain't in a bad way. But he's near fainting from being so tired. Nobody but a crazy man like him would be riding so quick after being near shot to death!"

With Walker leading the procession and the others trailing behind, William pressed to the side of his brother Arthur.

"And now," he said, "have you changed your mind? Is Buel worth his salt? Was I a fool to pick him for a champion? Has he done so bad? Here we've been fighting for nine years. Have we done as much in the nine years as he's done inside of a day?"

"The day ain't ended, and neither is this visit of Nell's," said Arthur Camp gravely. "You was always an optimist, Will. But here Buel's stepped out and



taken Nell away from her home after the peace come on the valley. Who knows what trouble'll come out of this? What if the Benchleys have found out already that she's gone? What if they've started out, every man of 'em, to take her back from us?"

"Started out to take her back?" and Will grinned. "Not unless they've changed their color, and the leopard'll change his spots quicker! No, Art, the Benchleys won't never see the day when they'll come out to tackle us! Sneaking behind trees like Indians—that's more their style!"

"But by the peace, Will, we've guaranteed to give up all claim on Nell."

"Give up all claim? Sure we do! What do claims amount to so long as Nell's found out the truth about her parentage?"

"The Benchleys'll never let her come near Margery again."

"Won't they? They won't be able to help themselves, Art. She's found her mother, Art, and you can lay to it that they don't build stone walls thick enough to keep 'em apart. No, sir, kin calls to kin tolerable strong! And they can't keep them two women apart!"

"But how long will it be before the fighting starts again?"

"What fighting?" queried Will. "Ain't the fighting over, Art? Ain't that what to-night has brought us? They'll be no more fighting, Art."

But Art Camp shook his head.

"I seen Buck Martin when he looked at Nell; and I seen Joe Walker when he looked at Nell. It's been a long time since they laid eyes on her, and she's a-blossomed like a flower, Will."

"She sure has," agreed the craftiest of the Camp clan.

"And Martin and Slow Joe had fire in their eyes. Don't ever think that they'll let her stay peaceable with the Benchleys. No, sir, they'll be up and after her, and that'll mean fighting, and fighting'll mean that we've got to back

up friends like Martin and Walker, and backing them up'll bring on the whole feud again."

He sighed and went on:

"I don't see no way out. Maybe it's a good thing to have Nell here. The Lord knows it sure pleases me to know that she's my niece, and to have her know it. But when I seen her to-day in her own house by the bed of Billy, where he was sleeping, I sure said to myself that if our young men ever seen her as close as that they'd be trouble popping till one of 'em had her for his own wife! And even then maybe the killings would keep right on! I tell you what, Will, a pretty woman is bad enough to make trouble, but a beautiful woman like Nell is worse'n the lower regions turned loose in the world! You can lay to that. It's gospel."

"Maybe," said the practical William, "but I ain't looking that far ahead. All I see is that Gloster Valley is at peace to-night and that in spite of the fact that we've lost Nell in name we've really won her in spirit. And that's what counts, particular with women. What the law says to 'em don't count, but what their hearts say to 'em means everything!"

He had hardly finished when the knocker on the big front door set up a lively clanging that sounded and resounded through the lower rooms of the house. Some of the crowd which had followed big Walker and his burden into the lower hall turned aside, and the door was opened to an impetuous figure who pushed straight through to the foot of the stairs and then cast a wild glance around him.

Dust of hard riding was on his face and his clothes, and the fire of his haste shone in his eyes.

"Look," said Art Camp gloomily to his cunning brother, "after all you've said, there stands a Benchley. And he's come here all alone on the trail of Nell, it looks like!"

In fact, at that moment Hal Moore caught sight of Art Camp coming down the stairs, and he raised toward him a hand which was half a threat and half an appeal.

"Camp!" he shouted. "I've come here on a trail all by myself. I went for two hosses that I'd tied in the woods near our place, and I found the hosses had gone—strayed off, I thought. So I took another hoss and followed as fast as I could, ranging around through the woods, till finally I got an idea that maybe they hadn't strayed at all—they'd been ridden! And they was only one place they could of been ridden to. So I headed straight here, went outside, and there I found the two hosses standing, and on the ground I found a handkerchief that every Benchley knows belongs to Nell."

His voice rose and became shrill with rage.

"You've planted your hired man, your Billy Buel, to steal her, but, Camp, you've got to give her up! You've had a pretty fair name for an honest man, Camp, and now I say you got to give her up, or you'll be thought no more of in Gloster Valley than a skunk!"

"He's right," said Art sadly. "Send for Nell, one of you. I didn't do no planning; it all come out of Buel's head, Moore. And what he does is enough to save the life of Lew's wife. Do you grudge her that much—just one chance to see her daughter?"

"Her daughter nothing!" exclaimed the fiery youth. "The fight to-day proved whose daughter she was!"

"It proved nothing," said a fierce, low voice.

Buck Martin was coming swiftly toward Hal Moore.

"It proved nothing!" said a vastly larger voice, whose great volume, indeed, filled the entire hall to quivering; and Slow Joe Walker was seen striding in the same direction.

Hal Moore had his share of courage.

The one cowardly act of his life, perhaps, had been that of the day; but he lost color when he saw these two formidable fighting men approach. Not that he exactly feared them, but there was something in the combination of two such mighty men, famous for their skill with all weapons, that made them seem invincible. Even Ames Benchley might well take thought before he faced either of these.

"It proved nothing!" said Walker again, arriving first by virtue of his superior length of leg and steam-roller straightness of direction. And folding his arms lightly, he glowered down from his immense height upon Hal Moore.

"And I say it proved everything and finished everything!" insisted Moore.

"Go upstairs, son, and take a look at her in the arms of her mother. Nope, you can't turn a man into a snake, and you can't turn a Camp into a Benchley without being found out pretty soon. Nell has found out, and the whole world'll find out pronto!"

Hal Moore had paled at this news.

"Some more of the Camp tricks!" he cried fiercely, and with an oath on his lips he glowered angrily back on the darkening faces of the men about him.

Ordinarily it would have been far above the reach of his courage to dare such a thing, but now he was fighting desperately for something which he had felt to be almost in his grip—a priceless treasure—now swept away.

"Them words are big words to come out of a small man's head," said the giant, sneering, "but words that ain't backed up don't mean a pile."

Battle madness swept over Hal Moore. He was swaying and trembling.

"I'll back 'em," he said, "against you or against any two like you. And I mean it, Walker."

"Step outside with me," said the giant with evil meaning. "They's a tolerable bright moon out there waiting for us. And——"

"I have the first call," said Buck Martin fiercely, breaking in upon them. "I called him first. And he's mine, Walker."

"You be hanged, you and your first calls," said the giant hotly. "He's all mapped out for me, and I'm going to have the job!"

"I'll take you both, one after another," said the Benchley adherent dauntlessly. "I'll take you, both of you, and you can throw a coin to see who's first."

"Wait!" said a feeble voice far down the hall. "I guess they won't be any need to throw coins!"

All heads turned, and they beheld Billy Buel rising from the couch where he had been placed, saw him brush aside the hands which attempted to restrain him, and now he was staggering straight down the hall and toward them.

"He's gone crazy," said William. "He can't hardly hold up his head, but he wants to fight."

"They's all gone crazy," said Art sadly. "It's the girl, Will, just as I said. Look at young Moore. Think he'd ordinarily have the heart to stand up for one second to gents like Martin and Walker? Why, Ames Benchley himself would have to think once or twice before he took on Walker. And there's that little game-chick trying to get himself killed because he thinks that fighting is the way to get on in the eyes of Nell. But they mustn't be any fighting. Break 'em up, will you?"

Broad-shouldered William sped instantly to the heart of the scene and pushed between Walker and Moore.

"Walker," he said, "you sure are big enough to have more sense. The war's ended. No more shooting scrapes. You'd ought to know that, Moore, if you got a grain of brains. Hold up your hosses right where you are before you get hurt and get hurt bad. You ain't made for gun fighting in the same class with Walker. I know you, Hal.

I know you're a fine hand with a knife, but this ain't Mexico, and this ain't a knife-work crowd. Guns are the things, and if you stand up to Walker with guns you know you're no better'n dead. It ain't a question of backing down, it's a question of common sense. I say they's going to be no fighting to-night, and I mean it."

"What you mean," said the feeble voice of Billy Buel, "is interesting, all right, but it ain't a bit important. I got something to say about whether or nor they's to be a fight to-night, and I'm right here to talk out loud. Stand aside, gents, because I sure mean business."

And business, unquestionably, he did mean. He was quite white with exhaustion. Always slender, he seemed positively fragile now from his pain and exertion. But determination stamped in the set of his mouth and the frown which shadowed his eyes. He came slowly, with a fumbling and uncertain step, and his actual physical strength was plainly at low ebb. Yet men gave way before him. The glamour of achievement was about him. He had done what no other of the Camp adherents had dared—he had met Ames Benchley alone and face to face, and, though he had lost, yet rumor was already telling how he had blown the hat of Benchley from the latter's head. Chance, it seemed, had beaten him rather than lack of skill, lack of speed fully as even in his weakness he seemed fully as formidable as any man in the big hall.

Straight to Hal Moore he made hesitant and lurching way and paused close to the champion of the Benchleys.

The latter gave back a pace, his face working. The first of his fighting fury had passed, and, looking in Buel's face, what he saw was not the wounded man before him, but the man seen in the twilight glade when Billy's gun had come into his hand like a sudden magic, and when only the superior speed of powder and lead had saved the life of Ames



Benchley. Now Billy Buel was weak, but it required no great strength to draw a gun and fire it.

"If they's to be trouble," said Hal Moore, "can't the Camps find a sound gent to put up against me? I don't want to do a murder on a gent that's been beat once already to-day and sure needs a bed and a long sleep!"

"They'll be no fighting at all," insisted the large voice of Art Camp. "Buel, go back where you were. Moore, you came here for a thing that's due you and the rest of the Benchleys. Nell don't belong to us by right of the fight to-day. I'll send for her and let her go along with you. Hey, up there, call Nell!"

There was a dull growl from the young men among the Camps, and then the sharp, light voice of Billy Buel cut in above the murmur.

"Hey, you up there, stay where you are!"

"What right have you to give orders in this house, young man?" asked Camp.

"By the right of the strength that I've paid down," said Billy grimly. "But they's more reasons. Nell goes back to the Benchleys, but she don't go with this skunk. I wouldn't trust him around the corner with her. She goes back with him that brought her—meaning me!"

"He won't fight a cripple," said Art Camp. "And even if he would I wouldn't let you fight. You're about played out, Buel!"

There was a sort of moan of rage from Billy, and his face flushed dully with his anger.

"Don't talk about what you'll let me do, Camp, and what you won't let me do. Hear me talk—gents—I'll do what I please. That's my style, and I ain't yet found gents big enough in Gloster Valley to keep me from it!"

It was a braggart speech, but plainly Billy Buel was not in his sound senses. There was fever in his cheek; there was

fever in his eyes; and the voice in which he spoke shook and trembled up the scale with his excitement.

"And as for Moore, I'll give him cause to fight me!"

"He ain't coward enough to do that, Billy!"

"Wait," said Billy Buel, and he drew a long step nearer Hal Moore.

"Moore," he said, "are you ready?"

"This is a good bluff that you're putting up," said Hal Moore with simulated scorn, "but you know well enough that I can't fight with a gent that's been already knocked out. That's why you talk so big."

Billy Buel showed his teeth as he smiled.

"Moore," he said, "I know everything!"

Those who were watching attentively declared afterward that Hal Moore shook under the impact of the words as though he had been struck in the face with a heavy fist.

"You know what?" he whispered.

"Everything," said Billy, "and the mark of the bullet is across the head, and not from front to back!"

What that meant was a mystery to those who stood about, but the effect upon Hal Moore was even more marked than that of Billy's preceding speech.

"Curse you," he said at length. "I'd like to have one minute with you!"

"You can have ten times that long, but for our sort of work it won't need more'n a split part of a second to tell the tale. But have as long as you want, partner!"

"Are you going to let a cripple take this fight with him that's insulted us all?" asked Buck Martin of Art Camp.

But the older man was studying the two enemies from under dark brows.

"Shut up," he said. "Leave Billy Buel alone. He's strong enough to pull a gun, and as long as he's strong enough to do that I figure that he ain't going to shame us none!"

Hal Moore was reasoning in the same manner. And, against such magic speed in gun play as he had seen Billy Buel show in the twilight of that same day, he knew perfectly well that his own skill was thrown away. And he fenced eagerly for a loophole of escape and finally found one. There was one sphere in which he was unequaled, and that was in knife work, and he knew that the ordinary cow-puncher knew nothing at all about that vicious science.

"If you're dead set on a fight, Buel," he said at length, "I'm sure you're a man. I see you wear a knife. Pull it out, and we'll see who's the best man!"

It brought a dead hush over the crowd and then a cry of "Shame!" The wizardry of Hal Moore with cold steel was well known. He could throw a heavy hunting knife with near as much accuracy as a good shot showed with a revolver; and the effects were terrible. He had been seen to sink the blade half-way to the hilt in strong wood. What would the result be if the edge struck flesh of man?

Billy Buel studied his adversary. He knew well enough that the latter had chosen a sure means of victory. He knew, even if he were an expert with a knife, that in his weakened condition he could not move about with sufficient agility to match his adversary. And yet, the longer he stared at Hal Moore, the more passionately he became determined that he must fight the man. There was a veritable ache in his bones that led him on.

"Moore," he said suddenly, "maybe you guess that I ain't any expert with a knife, and maybe you can see that I ain't quite the man I ordinarily am, but I'll tell you how I'll fight you with knives.

"Let 'em put out every light and close every shutter. Let 'em get up on the stairs and lock the doors and windows of this room where you and I will stay. Then we'll walk out into the darkness

till we find each other, and we'll fight till one of us dies. That makes it pretty much chance, and the lucky man wins, if you want to put it that way! Are you game, Moore?"

The horror of the thing made Hal Moore blink, and then, remembering that he was sound and strong and the other was injured, he nodded.

"I'll take that fight that way," he said, "and Heaven help you, Buel."

"Amen," said Billy Buel. "Did you hear, Camp?"

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### THE FIGHT IN THE DARK.

THERE had been rough fights in Gloster Valley, and there had been horrible frays hand-to-hand, with knife and club and even hands and teeth, but those had been the results of long battles. This was to be a cold-headed horror, which made all the difference in the world. Art Camp gaped and then shook his head. But William came to him and took him to one side.

"Let the fight go on," he said. "I've just had a new idea, Art. This great Billy himself is kind of interested in Nell. And if I'm right, that means he'll stay on in the valley of his own accord. And so long as he's here we'll have trouble. Maybe it means the end of Billy here to-night. Better have it that way. And they's another thing. He talks as though he had something he knew private about Hal Moore—something important. I seen Moore's face all wrinkle up when Buel spoke to him. Well, maybe this fight'll bring it out. I say let 'em go at each other!"

"And Buel near dead already? You're sure a cold fish, Will!"

"Sure I am. But, whether you want to or not, d'you think you can keep Billy Buel from doing what he wants to do?"

The chief of the clan looked down to his hired man, and one glance convinced him.

"If Buel dies," he said with a gathering excitement, "I'll sure have the dream of it to my deathday. But he's asked for it, and I'll let him have it!"

In fact, the fighting lust had seized the whole assemblage. They were fighting men of the most brutal description. They had been reared for nine years so as to be hardened to the thought of killing in every form, and here was a new method to try on their professional palates. By mutual assent the few women withdrew hastily. The men began to take the places which Billy had suggested for them on the staircase.

"Gents," said Art Camp, swept away with the excitement, "I'm going to give Buel his way. Stay up here, all of you, and don't set foot in the hall except me and Will. We'll put out the lights and close the shutters, and then we're coming back here with the last lamp. The minute that's put out, it's the signal to begin. Heaven help him that loses."

The instructions were obeyed at once. He and his brother went the rounds of the shutters and closed them securely to keep out the moonshine. The lamps and lanterns were put out, and then they returned, carrying only the one last lamp, and climbed to their places on the stairs.

Looking down the staircase and up it, there was a glimpse of dark, savage faces of the onlookers, and Slow Joe Walker murmured: "He has all the luck! He has all the luck! Why ain't I down there?"

And in the center of the room, each man with the sleeve of his right arm rolled up, stood Buel and Hal Moore facing each other, but at a significant distance. And in the right hand of each man the light gathered and dripped along the blades of heavy hunting knives, razor-edged and needle-pointed. A thrust would drive that blade home to the hilt; a slash might sever a throat clear across.

In the postures of the two their minds could be read. In the face of Hal Moore there was savage and hungry eagerness as of one perfectly confident in success; and in the face of Billy Buel was a sort of disdainful calm, as though he despised the brutal type of battle which he had himself suggested.

"Ready!" boomed the voice of Art Camp, and his breath the next instant extinguished the light.

Blinding and utter darkness rolled across the eyes of the watchers at first. Then, straining their ears through the silence, and straining their eyes through the dimness, they made out vague noises and vaguer lights.

The wind had risen somewhat, and from the shutters along the walls it raised a continual, soft jargon of stirring hinges, very rusty. The breeze in the forest beyond made a sound like the rushing of water, infinitely soft, infinitely distant, but a cool sound of peace. And for light there was the haze of moonshine which filtered through the shutters and made about each window square a dull ghost of an illumination extending not more than a few inches into the pitchy blackness of the central room. Indeed, there was just enough light to make that blackness horrible and thick; and there was just enough of whispering sound to make the silence deadly.

But from the men who must be somewhere on the floor of the room, stalking and listening and stalking again, and striving to look through the blackness with the power of listening, there was no faintest sound.

And up and down the stairway rose a sound of heavy breathing where the watchers leaned against the balustrade, and now and again there was the mutter of a curse as the strain of waiting grew too intense for human nerves to endure.

But what of the two who stood in the black room?



To Billy Buel, as the battle fever ebbed in him with the extinguishing of the lights, it seemed that his last fight had come. His strength of body was not a third of what it normally was. And in his hand, even had the light of day been there, was a weapon with which he was distinctly unfamiliar. Like all frontiersmen, he had played with a hunting knife now and again, but he had never made the close study with the art required. Hal Moore, if he became tolerably sure of the location of his foe, could let drive with the heavy knife from a distance, and, having buried it in the body of the foe, he could keep away and wait for Buel to die. But Billy Buel could do nothing but come to close quarters—and coming to close quarters meant the almost absolute certainty of both giving and receiving stabs.

Thinking it over quietly, he regretted with all his heart the wild challenge which he had given, but, now that the challenge had been issued, there was nothing for it but to stay with the game.

In the meantime the darkness was stiflingly thick. If he extended his own knife a short distance before him, he lost all sight of it. His hand, held an inch or so from his face, was in indistinguishable and ghostly blur. How, then, could the best of hunters hunt? And Billy was far from a great hunter.

One thing at least was certain. While he was standing in the open floor, danger threatened him from all sides. By the wall there would be danger only from the front.

With that in mind, he dropped lightly to his toes and one hand, feeling his way with the hand on the floor, and keeping his weight well back on his toes, so as to be able to spring up or to the side as need arose. And in this fashion he crept softly, softly, toward the wall, with the hunting knife poised in his right hand and ready for instant use.

One thought came to him during that

progress: He had been carrying the weapon in the time-honored fashion in which painters have shown dagger-wielders. But with the blade projecting down and the top of the hilt caught at the root of thumb and forefinger, it would require two motions to deliver a blow, an upward lift to acquire a sufficient distance and then the down stroke. Moreover, the range of the blow would be strictly limited to the length of his arm. But if he carried the knife with his thumb pointing down the hilt—in other words, if he carried it as though it were a small sword—he could thrust out with the smallest loss of time. Also, he would have the blade in position for slashing in any direction.

In that fashion, then, he immediately gripped the knife and continued on his journey.

At first he had striven to an aching weariness to pierce the darkness with his eyes, but the result of all his straining had simply been that a red blur grew up across his field of vision, with illusory points of light glancing in it. The eye, apparently, was helpless. He must depend upon the ears unaided.

For that purpose he fixed his glance downward toward the floor, and, abandoning all effort to penetrate the gloom with his sight, he felt his way along through the power of touch and the energy of sharply attuned ears. Even should a contact be made with the enemy, it would be better to fight blindly.

And still there was no noise except that maddening and soft chuckling sound as the wind worked the shutters back and forth ever so gently.

Then suddenly there was a sound of feet landing with a jar on the floor, and the light swish of an arm driven with all the speed of which a man was capable through the air.

Billy Buel gathered himself, tense. It was very plain. Hal Moore had been roaming the room ceaselessly, straining

his eyes, hungry to get at his foe, and confident in his ability with a knife, until at length that constant straining of the vision through the darkness had made phantoms rise before him. And at length he had leaped foolishly at what seemed to him a shadow among shadows.

So much was certain, and Billy made up his mind on the instant. Gathering himself on his crouched legs, with part of his weight supported by the finger tips of his left hand, he leaped toward that place near by where he had heard the sound. His body he drove forward as close to the floor as possible—the knife in a space as high as possible—trusting that when Moore found his own weapon leaving nothing but thin air he would remain an instant numb with the surprise and the shock of disappointment.

At any rate Billy leaped low and struck high and in a circle. And in the very center of his swing the knife drove through something soft, and the hilt jarred heavily home. He had indeed found his target.

And as the sharp, short yell of Hal Moore sounded, Billy shrank back, tugging at the handle of the knife. He could not move it. His ebbing strength, sufficient for the blow, was quite too small to enable him to withdraw the blade. His fingers slipped from the handle, and Billy, disarmed and helpless, cast himself face down, hoping to avoid the return blow.

His plan worked even better than he could have hoped. The answer of the pain-maddened Moore was a rush. A foot struck Billy heavily in the side, and Hal Moore crashed over him and against the wall.

Billy started to his feet and fled to a far corner of the room. He was quite helpless now. He could have found a chair and used it as an effective club, but the rule of the fighting was with knives, and, having been disarmed of the chosen

weapon, he could not in honor take up a substitute.

Crouched against the wall, he heard the deep-throated murmur of horror from those who waited on the stairs the outcome of this grisly battle. And then came the cursing of Hal Moore. He was stumbling here and there across the floor of the room, begging Billy to stand out and fight. Pain and the danger of the wound no doubt were maddening him. And from the sound of his coming Billy drifted here and there—cautiously.

What had happened? Had he wounded Moore dangerously, or had it been only a glancing thrust and a surface scratch? He had not the slightest idea where his knife had found lodgment. It might well be that it had been the veriest scratch, and now Moore, a weapon in each hand, was roving like a wolf through the darkness, sure to find his foe before long and end the battle at his own cruel leisure.

He had hardly reached the thought when a long and shrill-drawn cry sounded from the far side of the room. "Help! I'm done. For Heaven's sake bring a light! I'm dying! Bring a light! I'm through!"

It seemed that half a dozen hands were ready with lamps and matches, and Billy, drawing himself up stiff beside the wall, saw a sudden flare of light.

What it showed was Hal Moore in the very center of the room. There was a knife in each hand, and across his chest and body was a big and growing spot of crimson. He took a step—there was a trace of moisture where his foot left the floor. Plainly he had been badly hurt high on the chest.

He cast out his armed hands toward the light and began to run to them as though the darkness had been a horror and a trap to him. But his wavering course led him close and closer to Billy Buel, standing motionless in the growing lamplight—and in the very act of

passing the wounded man swerved and leaped with a curse at Buel.

There was no escape then for Billy Buel. His own wound, his own weakness, the fatigue of the ride, the terrible nervous strain of the fight, had depleted the last of his strength. He was numbed with weariness, and all he could do was see the blow coming and wait for the end. But as Hal Moore loomed large before him, with uplifted knife, there was the explosion of a revolver from the staircase, and Hal Moore slumped heavily forward upon his face at the very feet of Billy.

And Billy Buel, turning to the right, saw William Camp quietly putting up his revolver.

After that there was a moment when his mind was almost overwhelmed in a maze of shadows; and when the shadows broke up and the light entered his eyes again he found that he was still standing in the same spot, but many stern-faced men had gathered about him. They had turned Hal Moore upon his back, and they were staring down into the ashen, tense face of the dying man.

"You got about three minutes to live," William was saying. "Which is a long time for a skunk like you to stay in the world. But before you kick out, if they's anything you want we ain't going to have it said that the Camps let even a dog die without doing what they could for it, so speak up!"

Hal Moore closed his eyes.

As for Billy, he felt beneath his arms the hands of Slow Joe Walker and Buck Martin, and he heard their voices, made gentle, at his ears: "You better come along, partner. You're about played out. And you've sure done enough since you hit Gloster Valley to-day to tire out ten men. Thank Heaven, you've come through this O. K.!"

"I'll stay here—a minute longer," insisted Billy. "He may say something that I want to hear!"

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE PASSING OF HAL MOORE.

**I**N fact, at that moment the eyes of Moore opened again, and he murmured: "They's one thing you can do for me, boys. Send for Nell—pronto!"

"Bring her down here to this shambles?" said Arthur Camp. "Never!"

"Send for her," said Billy suddenly. "After all, he's dying for her, in a way!"

"And you talk up for him?" asked Art Camp, raising his head in wonder. "Well, Buel, what you say to-night is law. You've earned the right to it. William, will you bring down Nell?"

He went at once, running, and the dying man turned his eyes with a great effort to the face of Billy Buel.

"Thanks," he said and closed his eyes again.

There was something terrible about that expression of gratification from the slain to the slayer.

After that there was not a sound. The wounded man did not speak; old Judge Camp was busily working to stanch the wounds—an impossible task. And so there sounded the heavy pounding of William's returning feet, and the light tapping of Nell's heels as she ran down the stairs.

Straight through the group she went, the men giving way in awed silence at her coming. And then they thrilled to her little choked cry of horror and pain.

"Hal, Hal! They've trapped you and murdered you!"

And there she was on her knees beside him, and gathering his head in her arms.

"Hark to me," said the dying man very slowly and yet very distinctly. He looked up to her face with a peculiarly happy smile, and yet there was something sadder than sorrow in it. "I've got what was coming to me. I've earned it twice over, and all on this day. But



it was for your sake, Nell, that I went bad, and for my sake listen to what I say!"

"As if it were Bible talk, Hal," said the girl earnestly.

"Devil talk is what it'll sound like, I'm afraid. But here's the truth: Ames didn't drop Billy. I went out. Alice got me to go and promised me to get me in strong with you if I dropped Billy. And I waited there by the side of the hollow. When it come to the gun play Billy had Ames beat a mile. His play was like lightning. I got in my shot just in time—and I wish to Heaven that I'd killed him. That would've ended everything at once. But it was only a grazing wound——"

His voice was drowned in a deep murmur of rage and satisfaction mingled; and every head turned for one glance at Billy Buel. Then they looked back to the white, lovely face of the girl, and the white, dying face of the man whose head she was supporting.

"If they'll look under the bandages they'll see the mark of the bullet is *across* his head. Ames couldn't've fired in from in front the way they was standing. But here's what I got to say most of all, Nell—and will you promise me something?"

"Say what you want, Hal, and Heaven forgive you for what you've done!"

"If you forgive me, I'll take my chances with Heaven. But here's what I mean to say: Nell, Billy Buel won you for the Camps to-day. Stay with 'em. A lie don't finally do no good to him that tells it. The lie of that fight ain't done any good for the Benchleys to-day. It has near ruined Ames. He ain't crooked. He didn't want to take the credit of dropping Buel, but it was a pretty big temptation, the idea of ending the war and keeping you for the Benchleys all in one act. So that's why he didn't confess.

"But as long as you stay with the

Benchleys the Camps will keep on murdering. And as long as you stay with the Camps the Benchleys can do nothing. They ain't strong enough in numbers to come out and attack. They got to stay at home and wait. Nell, keep quiet here. They've won you—let 'em keep you. Otherwise the war'll go on. My brother'll go down. Oliver Lord will go down. Nell, this has been the only day in my life that I've done sneaking things. Let me wind it up by one good thing and know that I've kept my brother and my friends safe from out of this war. Will you promise?"

"I give you my hand," said Nell faintly. "And it isn't the matter of the fighting that makes up my mind, Hal. It's because I've seen the truth!"

The dying man closed his eyes, but he opened them almost at once.

"Nell!" he whispered.

She leaned forward suddenly and kissed his lips; and when she raised her head a smile appeared on his face, wavered, and went out. Hal Moore was dead.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

"LIKE A KING."

IT was a bright twilight on a day not many weeks after this. Billy Buel sat the saddle on his bay mare, Lou, in front of the house of the Camps, and Arthur Camp and his two brothers stood beside the horse.

There were no other farewells to make, for the remainder of the Camps were at the dinner table within the house. Only these three had been whispered out by Billy Buel.

"You having come here to get Nell for us," said William Camp, "you've sure wound up your work in good style, Billy, and here's the money we agreed on, and a bit more beside. But it ain't with money that we're paying you. It's with a heap of thanks, too. And in the days ahead if you ever find that you need a place to lay up and rest and do

nothing but eat and sleep and ride where you please and be king of the land, come to Gloster Valley. I think the Benchleys won't raise their heads after this. You've brought me peace, and some day I hope you'll come back and enjoy it with us."

But Billy Buel, opening the heavy little canvas bag, took forth only a small handful of the golden coins.

"I come for money," he said, "but I've got more than money can give me out of Gloster Valley. I'll take this for traveling on. But I don't want the rest. I'll tell you why—it's too much like blood money."

There was an exclamation from Arthur Camp, but William raised his hand for silence.

"Let him have his way," he said. "They's one man in the world we can afford to owe something to, and that's Billy Buel. But why are you clearing away so quick, lad? Are you tired of Gloster Valley now that peace is here?"

"I dunno," said Billy, pushing back his sombrero with its flashing load of gold braid. "I dunno. But it seems like they's a road off yonder in the mountains somewhere that I'd like to ride along."

"And that girl you spoke of, most like, at the end of your trail, Billy?"

"Ah, maybe that, maybe that," said Billy joylessly. "Good luck to Gloster Valley."

"And good luck to you, Billy! And come again!"

He waved his hand, spoke softly to the mare, and was gone, a flash of light among the trees and out of sight around the curve of the road.

But he had scarcely made that curve when he was stopped by a figure which ran out from among the trees with raised hand. With an exclamation Billy drew up his horse before Nell Camp.

She was dressed as he had first seen her and as he would ever remember her

—in a blue blouse, a touch of yellow flowers at her waist, and her hair coiled low at the base of her neck. For a moment he sat in the saddle staring down at her.

"So you knew?" said Billy Buel.

"I knew," said the girl sadly. "I knew days and days ago, and I've been waiting for it to happen. But why, Billy?"

"Because," he said, smiling in his quiet way, which was more with the eyes than the lips, "I'm pretty much afraid to stay, Nell."

She considered that statement for a long and thoughtful moment, and then, raising her eyes again, she flushed deeply.

"But why?" she murmured again very softly.

"Because," explained Billy, "I'm a wandering man, Nell. I got to follow the road. And if I stay here long in Gloster Valley I'd be apt to get anchored."

"Anchored?"

He leaned a little from the saddle.

"They's a tolerable bad fever in Gloster Valley," he said slowly. "Most gents catch it after a time. I've been exposed to it for quite a spell, and I'd better go on before I come down bad with it—which I'm not far away from it now, Nell!"

"And—and you're coming back, Billy?"

"I don't know."

"Billy!"

Instead of answering, he brought Lou deftly a step forward by the sway of his body, and leaning from the saddle he swung Nell lightly from the ground. She felt his lips pressed to hers, found herself swung back to the ground again, and then she was staring after the figure of a wild-riding horseman growing dim and dimmer behind a cloud of dust. And so he wound into the trees and disappeared.

He toiled on until he had reached

the summit of the tall range beyond. And there he halted for the night. He found a natural clearing. And through the sparse pines on the side he could still look down on the hollow of the valley he had just left—a hollow which was now rapidly pouring full of the dusk of the night.

He started a fire, but he had no heart either to cook or to eat. He watched the flame tossing, he listened to its fluttering. Then a wind began to rise and sing among the trees. It was a pleasant night enough, but Billy had never been so dolorous. He had left something

behind him in the valley—part of his body—part of his soul.

His head had fallen wearily back on his shoulders, and he was looking straight up to the stars, when he heard a sharp snapping of a twig behind him. He looked around upon no other than Nell herself.

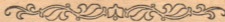
There was no escort with her. She was surrounded by the night alone, save that behind her the head of her horse was lifting with pricked ears. And Billy rose like a man in a dream and went haltingly toward her with his arms outstretched.

THE END.



### EXILED INDIAN PRINCESS IS BACK

**A**FTER a short period of exile, News Gayfish, flapper princess of the Black River Indians, is back with her people in Hatfield, Wisconsin. News was banished from the paternal roof some months ago because she bobbed her tresses like the truly modern flapper. In doing so she violated a tradition of a thousand years' standing. When News left her home, she journeyed to Nebraska where she owned a tract of land, taking with her her 18-months-old son. Not long after her departure untold ill luck descended upon the tribe, and many were afflicted with influenza. These things the chieftains tried to bear bravely, but when Ingratu, a huge hoot owl regarded as the worst of bad omens by the Indians, arrived and hooted mournfully for days at a time, it was too much. Councils of the wise men were held, and they decided that all their misfortunes were due to their having exiled the pretty princess. Dan Gayfish, her husband, was ordered to bring her home, and upon her arrival a great feast was held.



### SQUAW HAS FIERCE BATTLE WITH WOLF

**H**UNTERS from the region around Beaver Creek, Minnesota, have reported the story of an encounter with a timber wolf, in which an Indian squaw risked her life in order to save her four-year-old child. The squaw is the sister of Frank Baker, an Indian guide, who is well known in this vicinity.

Baker, his sister, and her two children live in a small hut near Beaver Creek. One of the youngsters was playing near the house with the family dog, a large animal weighing 120 pounds, when the wolf made his appearance near by. The mother, attracted by the child's screams, seized a .38-caliber revolver and went forth to rescue the child. Meanwhile, the dog and the wolf had engaged in a fight, of which the wolf was having the better, until the squaw emptied the contents of her revolver into the wolf. She had to wait her chance in order not to wound the dog, and her well-aimed shots were just in time to save the animal from being torn to shreds. At the time of the encounter with the wolf, the squaw was at home alone, her brother having left early in the morning on a hunting expedition.



# "Curly" Gets Back on the Soil

by  
Emerson Hough

Author of

"The Landscape Company, Limited," "A Little Old Bear," etc.



WHEN I met Curly I hardly knew him, for he was sporting a hard hat, a suit of store clothes, and a cigar. His grin remained unchanged.

"Don't git scared, friend," said he. "Don't step on the reins or run away. It's me, all right. How is my clothes? Say, I'd do about any place, huh?"

"You might in some places, Curly," I admitted. "Where did you get the wealth?"

"It ain't wealth. It's what I had left."

We went into the hotel and hauled chairs close to the gas-pipe rail that runs just back of the window, whence we could look out upon the street of the Western city.

"Some change, eh?" said Curly, nodding at the passing throngs. "Progress? Why, that's what ails me. I shore allowed I was one o' them Napoleons. But I did have real money for a few brief moments.

"How come me to have it? Way everything else happens—by accident. I lost it by accident, too.

"Few months ago, you see, I gits lit up down at Meteetse, an' sits in a game with Emmett Dewees an' others. When I come to, the next mornin', I found I was the owner of 'leven hundred acres

of land—nice land, with no water on it, just greasewood, an' sagebrush an' dust—a few snakes, maybe, but nothin' else. I must ha' put up real chips against that kind of a bet, too.

"Well, seein' I had this land, I rid out to look it over, plumb sorrowful at my habits, for I didn't know but that I might git in another game an' win more of it some time. Blame me, if it wasn't all greasewood an' sagebrush. You kin take off the sagebrush an' raise things, if you kin git water, but if you take off the greasewood, whether or not you git water it don't make no difference. It's nothin' but soup when it rains, an' rock when it don't.

"But you take these people who are comin' out West to git back to the soil, and most o' them'd rather have greasewood land than sagebrush, because it's natural fer them to hone fer things that looks green an' tender. I have knew of cases where they got greasewood.

"In the old times on the range, as you know, cowmen was always fair in the count. If you sold a man five or six hundred head, it was usual to put in, say, fifty head over count fer good measure, just to show the game was square. The man who'd 'a' run in dogies on a three-year-old sale when the buyer wasn't aroun' wouldn't 'a' been called white. Things is different now.

Every fellow has to take his own chances, whether it's in cows, or sheep, or land, seems like.

"Anyhow, now here I was, not none too flush, fer I lost my job drivin' stage when the season closed. Bills run up at the store, too. Seems like every time I looked aroun' the place they was more babies there. I couldn't keep track of all o' them. O' course, in any reasonable way o' figgerin', babies ought to be branded, same as calves, then you could tell which was yourn. But my wife never would listen to that. She said she could tell 'em easy enough; I don't know how.

"As I was sayin', here I am, standin' with my hands in my pockets, out in the middle of this thousan' acres or so of greasewood, thinkin' how I'd been soaked in a poker game with friends. All at once a buggy drives up on the Meteetse trail.

"Can you tell me who owns this land, my friend?" says the man who's drivin' it.

"Well, sir," says I, 'as near as I kin figger it, it's on me. But I was wall-eyed at the time or they couldn't 'a' done it.'

"What do you mean?" says he. 'Didn't you git a abstract o' title?'

"What's that?" says I.

"Why, deeds—papers—proofs that the title is clear, y' know.'

"I stood an' looked at him. Ain't no orthodox cowman, or sheepman either, that's goin' to bother about title when he wants land, o' course. 'I wouldn't need one,' says I to him at last. 'They ain't more'n two or three trades between me an' the Almighty right here. Uncle Sam worked off this land on the railroad, an' the district passenger agent worked it off on me. Seems to me the transfer like enough stops right there.'

"What would you call land like this worth, my friend?" says he.

"Do you mean what it's worth or what it brings?" says I.

"That depends," says he.

"I should say it did," says I. 'Well, maybe it might bring eight dollars an acre.' - I didn't know then that land had sold fer thirty dollars an acre anywheres in the world. 'Nice greasewood land like this,' says I, 'all green an' level, why, if I was pushed right hard I might take eight dollars an acre fer it.' I expected to see him fall dead.

"Well, sir, he did fall out'n the buggy, he was in such a hurry, but when he come up from the summerset he had four hundred-dollar bills in one hand, an' a piece o' paper an' a indelible pencil in the other, an' says he, 'I'll take it,' spitting the alkali dust right out'n his mouth.

"Why so sudden, friend?" says I, 'an', tell me, what was you drinkin' in Meteetse last night, anyhow?'

"Sign right here," says he. 'I'll take the whole track. How many acres did you say it was?'

"I didn't say," says I. 'O' course, I could sell you the whole valley, an' I don't know as anybody'd care at that, but, as near as I can figger, the papers Emmett Dewees put up ag'inst my stack o' blues called fer about 'leven hundred an' sixty acres. Fine greasewood lay-out, ain't it?'

"You mean sagebrush," says he.

"Do I?" says I. 'Well, let it go at that. But, seein' I have some conscience left, I'd like to ask you, friend, before I separate you from that real money, whether you're color blind, an' whether you are o' sound an' disposin' mind?'

"Well, he allows he's sound o' mind an' limb an' not born yestiddy, but he says he's got to git back to town that afternoon, to ketch a train back, where he's got a colony o' 'back-to-the-soil' folks cached somewheres. Seein' me kind o' sorry to take his money, he hauls out two hundred dollars more an' puts that into my hand, too.

"Sir Algernon, what is a industrial coefficient? But, o' course, you don't

know—it's somethin' I found in a correspondence school once. Anyhow, I reckon that's me, all right. I'd proved by many years o' experiment that a feller can't git rich punchin' cows at forty-five a month, or even shearin' sheep at so much a head, or drivin' stage in the three months' season. But now here I stand out in the middle o' my poker winnin', not just knowin' which way I'm going to jump next, an' here comes a party an' pushes long, yellow money into all my hands, expressin' worry fer fear he won't catch his train.

"Well, sir," says I, lookin' at the money, 'the custom o' the country, my friend—'

"Oh, well, I know it," says he, grin-nin', 'but I didn't know's you'd count 'em. Take another hundred on count, then. Man, you won't leave me enough to pay my hotel bill an' ticket back home.'

"Just to put him out o' his misery, I taken his money, an' I goes over an' rests the paper on top o' the buggy wheel, an' I signs where he tells me to write at, I don't know what I signed, an' I never seen him from that day to this, an' don't know who he was, neither, but ever sence that time somebody sends me about four hundred dollars every month in the mail. Folks tells me that men have been seen grubbin' grease-wood on simerler tracks o' land, an' one tenderfoot even got so far along as to plant alfalfa once. I ain't really to blame fer that, an' I ain't really to blame fer bein' a land agent an' colonizer, neither. It was agin' my will.

"Well, my unknown benefactor he climbs back in his buggy an' hits the trail fer Cody. Feelin' right good over his sudden trade that lets me out on the poker winnin's, I climbs on top o' Pinto an' hits him a time or two with my hat on the hip, to git him to help me rejoice. Old Pinto he ain't never forgot how to pitch, so me an' him has it fer

two minutes all by ourselves out in the open. I got so interested I let go o' some o' them hundred-dollar bills, an' the wind blew 'em off, but I didn't care, fer I had plenty left. Then, after Pinto an' me had come to some sort o' understandin', I rid off to my place on Dry Creek. I sort o' saunters in to where the little woman is, an' I lays the rest o' these yeller bills down on the top o' the table where she's rollin' dough.

"Curly," says she.

"What, ma'am?" says I. You know, she was a school-teacher once. You kin never be sure of what one o' them will do to you.

"Curly," says she, 'you've done somethin' awful.'

"I know it," says I, 'but it wasn't my fault—I just had to take the money.'

"They'll git you, shore," says she. Then she taken a look to see if I was totin' any gun, which I wasn't, o' course.

"Oh, you think I held up the stage," says I, laughin' at her. 'No, I done worse'n that—they ain't no money in the Meteetse stage, an' here was a feller that had real money on him.' Then I moves one o' the loaves o' dough to hol' down the yeller money on the table, an' I sets down on the aide o' it, an' told the little woman how the whole thing happened. She was pale, an' her eyes were bigger'n a pair o' irrigated onions.

"Curly," says she at last, "kin we have a picket fence, an' some wire to keep the hens out'n the garden, an' a new dress for Arabella an' the other twin?"

"All them things," says I, 'an' yet more an' then some. Trouble with you is,' says I, lookin' severe, 'you ain't never realized what a man you've hooked up with all these years. Why, *money!*' says I—'this here makin' money is the easiest game I ever set in. I'm goin' to be a business man. Moreover, I'm goin' to be a great an' public-spirited business man. I'm goin' to help the



colonists git back to the soil, which is the salvation o' our nation.'

"Well, that's how come all these clothes, an' that's how we happened to move up here this spring. We done right well. That don't mean that I'm going to spend my whole life here, fer the fact is, I think me an' the folks'll go back to the short grass before long. Arabella's got herself engaged to a brakeman, an' the other twin is keepin' company with a feller that drives a wagon fer a store. That may be lookin' up in the world, but, on the whole, I reckon we'll go back to Dry Creek."

Curly paused in his narrative, and, after a minute or so of silence, I said to him:

"I infer, Curly, that business isn't quite as good as it used to be. Has anything got into the works of the boom?"

"Booms never bust fer some folks," he rejoined, "but fer cow-punchers with red hair there ain't no boom but what gits busted some time, usually sooner. No use tryin' to keep up a boom fer me—it's too expensive.

"I didn't tell you how I lost my money after I made it, did I? I can't call it nothing but a accident, me meetin' that feller down on the flat an' him puttin' money into my hand that way. But they was a heap o' things like worse accidents happened to me after that.

"One mornin' when I was comin' up from Meteetse, it was so hot an' dry a grasshopper couldn't fly without carryin' a oil can. But when I passed by that piece of greasewood land which I had sold, blamed if there wasn't a man tryin' to plow that ground! He'd made two or three furrers already. I seen he'd built himself some sort of little shack, an' had a pole shanty fer his team. He had a pair of State's horses that wasn't used to workin' this high up, an' they was puffin' an' blowin' and their tongues hangin' out. Well, sir,

his tongue was hangin' out, too. He was a black-haired rooster, kind o' thick-set, an' his eyebrows run up into his hair—looked somethin' like a Injun, but he wasn't, because he couldn't talk Crow or Shoshone or Blackfoot—I tried him on all them. Anyhow, he makes me some curious, because I could see he was tryin' to work the land I had owned fer a few brief moments.

"'Good mornin', friend,' says I, ridin' up to where he was. 'Fine weather, ain't it?'

"'Chess,' says he, an' he smiles about eight inches wide, showin' right white teeth. He taken off his hat, an' he tried to look right pleased, but, built the way he was, he couldn't.

"'Are you goin' to try to farm this land?' says I, an' says he:

"'Chess.'

"'Well, I hope you git rich at it,' says I, reachin' fer my tobacco.

"'Chess,' says he.

"'Who sold it to you, my friend?' says I. 'Was he a feller looked like a Presbyterian elder, in a hurry to git out o' the country?'

"'Chess,' was all he said then.

"'Well, I tell you, neighbor,' says I, 'that feller's locoed, an' I'm lookin' fer him to give back his money. But if he sold you this land, an' you ever give him any money for it, why, you're a whole lot worse'n he was himself, now, ain't you, on the level?'

"'Chess,' says he, takin' up his reins. I dunno whether he understood me or not, but that was the answer.

"'Well, I rid on off to town, thinkin' what awful people there was in the world. I couldn't figger it out in my mind how anybuddy was goin' to catch even in this here land trade, at all. I was still a-wonderin' that way when I come across ol' Bige Williams, the feller that runs the loan office over the bank.

"'Says he to me: 'Good mornin', Curly. I heard you was thinkin' of

movin' up to Billings, an' that you made some money in land sales.'

"'I made a little money,' says I, 'but I'm thinkin' of movin' back from Billings. I don't like to drink **that** Yellowstone River water, fer it makes me so I can't tell the truth without too much effort.'

"'But you've been doin' pretty well, Curly?' says he.

"'Well,' says I, 'once in a while I make a trade, an' they give me what they call a commission. I done sold considerable land against my will, an' I may sell more, if all this land holds out, an' all them folks from the East, where they ain't no land, keeps on comin' out here.'

"'Is that so?' says he. 'Well, now, I'm right glad. I'm glad you're right in line with modern progress, Curly.'

"'Bige,' says I to him—fer I was feelin' right well that mornin', the day bein' so fine an' the air so easy to breathe—I ain't in line with progress at all—I'm so far ahead of it that you can't see its dust a-comin'. Why, I got ideas, I have! I go down as far east as some railroad town an' meet these pilgrims comin' in, an' I hand 'em my card, an' they give me all the money they got. Time the train gits to Billings, I got 'em all feedin' from my hand. They wire back home from Billings—o' course, to git more money, but that's fer me, an' not fer any o' them other land agents that don't git up in the mornin'. I got a office up there, Bige,' says I. 'They ain't nobody in town got longer alfalfa roots or taller oats than I have—never mind where I got 'em. I'm a busines man. Why, *progress*,' says I—'I'm so far ahead o' progress that I have to eat alone all the time, me.'

"'You don't say, Curly,' says he. 'Well, now, tell me, what do you do with all your surplus?'

"'What's that?' says I.

"'Why, any money you have over

your office an' household expenses—cash you don't need in your work.'

"'Well,' says I, 'I don't usually have very much trouble about any surplushes in my business. More ways than one o' cuttin' that down, you know. They's several games in Billings if you feel too rich, an' every once in a while you meet a friend who'll take a loan, if you insist—why, there're lots o' people, lots o' ways o' getting shut of all worry about too much surplush.'

"'You'd ought to've saved your money, Curly,' says he. 'There ain't no better friend than money,' says he, benevolent. 'Better save your cash.'

"'I know that, Bige,' says I, 'but I just run along the best I know how. But supposin' you was me, an' you had 'leven hundred dollars real money a feller had give you in a land trade against your will—what'd you do?'

"'I seen his eye kind o' spark up then. 'Well, Curly,' says he, 'light down, an' let's go over to the Silver Dollar fer a little drink. We kin discuss several things, an' I'm willin' to help you the best I can in my humble way,' says he.

"'Now, in the old times, if a man taken a drink with you, everything's all right. That meant he wouldn't shoot you the next time he seen you. It's different nowadays. Still, Bige had never asked me to take a drink with him before—an', come to think of it, I dunno as he ever asked anybody to ever take a drink with him before. Well, he buys one, anyhow—only one. I reckon he's a little forgetful. Anyways, we had several. In other ways he wasn't so forgetful.

"'Curly,' says he, 'the interest on money is the key to success. Make money work fer you when you're asleep, when you're in church, or in the theayter. When you git plenty o' money workin' fer you, you don't have to work none yourself. Which way,' says he, 'has got everything else in the whole world skinned both ways o' the deck.'

"That sounds good," says I, "but how much money has a feller got to have to do that a way?"

"Well, he's got to git a start first," says he, "an', o' course, he's got to be sure about gittin' his principal back in any investment."

"What's that?" says I.

"Principal, Curly," says he, "is what you lend a man on his note. The interest is what he pays you fer lendin' it to him."

"Has it got so these days," says I, "that a feller has to pay you fer lendin' him a little money now an' then? Us boys never used to do that a way on the range."

"Oh, that's friendship, Curly," says he. "I'm talkin' of business, an' you say you're a business man nowadays. In business when you lend a man money you got to git interest fer it, an' you got to git your money back when it's due."

"When does it git due?" says I to him.

"That depends on the length o' the note. Sometimes the mortgage runs one year, sometimes three, or five. I have knowed 'em to run even a good deal longer'n that!"

"So've I, Bige," says I. "My ol' man put a mortgage on his ranch in eighteen-sixty-two, time o' the war, an' last I heard of it it was runnin' yet. They shore can run if you give 'em a chance."

"Well, that was a case of bad judgment on your father's part," says he. "Or, rather, of the man who loaned the money to him."

"Shore it was," I says. "How'd he know pap was goin' to git killed in one o' General Price's fights up in Missouri? Now, if I could find that man to-day, or know who he was, I might take this 'leven hundred dollars an' pay off pap's mortgage, though he shore has been dead a long time."

"Don't do that, Curly," says he hasty. "I kin show you something better. Now

you said you had about 'leven hundred dollars, I believe."

"Yes," says I, "she's in Bill Parson's bank, down below us here."

"An' say you wanted to invest this surplus in a mortgage?"

"I'm scared o' them," says I. "Look what it done to my pap."

"Tut, tut, Curly!" says he. "That was one end o' the mortgage. You git the other end."

"Well," says I, "I'm mostly afraid o' things that changes ends on me that a way."

"Why, Curly," says he, "you don't understand. You take security fer your money on land—an' what's better security than the ground we stand on? That's solid!"

"It shore is out here in a dry year," says I. "But what kind o' security did the feller have that lent pap that money in eighteen-sixty-two?"

"Never mind about that," says he. "That's a different proposition. But now suppose you loaned a thousand dollars an' took a feller's note, an' he just paid you sixty dollars every year just fer fun, like. That'd be pretty fine, wouldn't it, huh?"

"No, it wouldn't," says I. "End o' the year he'd have my thousand dollars an' I'd have his sixty, if I hadn't spent it. Besides, that much wouldn't buy a cow horse these times, let alone a saddle."

"That's all you can git fer money these days, Curly," says he. "O' course, down at Fort Benton, forty years ago, money brought five per cent a month. But these days, Curly," says he, "you don't want to try to git too much fer your money. That makes the security bad. You come down with me to the bank, Curly," says he.

"So we went down to the bank, an' ol' Bige he got the man behind the winder to pile up sixty dollars in front o' me on the table. Say, it looked big! You see, a cow-puncher is like a Injun—he



can't count over ten, an' you got to show him money right there in front o' him. Bige knowed that.

"Say, do I git all that money fer just lettin' a feller have a thousand dollars fer one year?" asks I to him. 'If so, this here may be a good thing. I reckon I'll buy you one more drink, Bige,' says I, 'an' maybe you can show me what that mortgage looks like.'

"Well,' he says, 'I just happen to have one in my pocket right now—you see, I act as agent fer the life-insurance company back East that lends money on lands. I bought this here then, seein' it was such a good thing. Look a-*here*. It's secured on the southwest quarter o' the northeast half o' the northwest quarter o' the south half o' section twenty-nine, township forty-three, range eighty-five west o' the thirty-first principal meridian—all tillable land an' clear of encumbrance.'

"That's all right,' says I, 'but is it clear of sagebrush?'

"I dunno how about that, but the land shorely is there. This here money was loaned through me fer improvement purposes by the Massachusetts Life Insurance Society to Malakoff Karageorgeovitch Jeronopolous. She runs at eight per cent, but o' course, I want two per cent off'n that fer my commission.'

"Well, I 'lowed he ought to have something fer doin' business, same as me—special with a man wearin' a name like that.

"She runs fer one year more,' says he. 'In two years from a year ago you take down a hundred an' twenty dollars—just twice the pile you seen over there—an' you git your thousand dollars back, too. O' course, if there should be another war or anything, you'd git the land, but you wouldn't be payin' anywhere near what it's worth. You can't lose, nohow. Make it a even 'leven hundred, an' I'll throw in this little mortgage, too, for a hundred. Keep

that up, Curly,' says he, 'an' pretty soon you'll be a rich man.'

"I begun to think there was something in this, because there was a hundred an' twenty dollars I'd be gettin' fer just lettin' a feller have a thousand dollars or so which I didn't want to carry around in my clothes nohow, with so many games open as there is. Besides, Bill Parsons, the bank man, may run away.

"So I git them papers, do I, an' all that money? It looks to me like I'd have to go against this just once, Bige,' says I.

"All right, Curly,' says he. 'In that case I'll just indorse these notes over to you without recourse.'

"Will you?' says I. An' he says he would. So we shook hands an' had another drink—on me, an' then I goes over to the bank winder an' gits my money out an' gives it to him, an' he gives me them papers. Right soon after that he had to go to his office on other business, so he shakes hands an' says good-by. Time he come to leave I begun to feel kind o' cold on my back, way a feller always does, they tell me, when he makes his first investment, but the feller in the bank told me it was too late then, so I stood pat.

"One time, not long after that, I was tellin' Willy Anderson, up to Cody, about my investment, an' Willy he asks me to see my papers.

"Why, look here, Curly,' says he, 'there's two papers. What made you lend money on a chattel mortgage? Here's your security. One thousand on this land, an' one hundred on this here span o' horses. An' the notes are indorsed without recourse. Say, Curly, you ought to have a guardian.'

"Not me,' says I. 'I had one once, when my pap didn't come back from the war, an' they hung him down in Texas along o' his blotchin' brands on my maw's cow.'

"But look a-*here*,' says he, 'there ain't no comeback on this. It's all up

to you, every station. This feller, Bige Williams, he's like enough taken a shave out o' the interest to you, an' out'n the principal on them other fellers.'

"Where does that leave me?" asks I.

"Well, I don't know. Let's look it up—you don't mean to tell me that you haven't examined this land before you loaned money on it?"

"O' course I didn't," says I. 'How'd I know where it was? It don't mention no landmark that I know anything about. Whole lot o' figgers don't mean nothin' to me.'

"Willy, he looked at the papers fer a while, an' finally he taken me over to a big map that hung on the wall in a office not far away. He begins to look over that map, an' says he, 'Curly, it seems to me like maybe you have saw that land an' didn't know it—near as I can tell, it lies about three mile north-west o' Meteetse.'

"Why, that's right in the grease-wood belt," says I.

"Can't help that—this line on the map shows right where the trail crosses that there land—trail between Dry Creek an' Meteetse, right here."

"Well, now," says I, 'blamed if that don't look sort o' bad to me. But what difference does it make if the feller pays me back all my money an' the interest on it? I certainly do hope he'll pay the interest, anyhow, because I done spent that, bein' so shore about it.'

"Well, Curly," says he, 'when you make another investment, you git dad or me to look at it fer you first. I ain't so old, but I know enough not to trust Bige Williams any too far.'

"Ner me," says I, 'ner any other man that don't buy his share o' the drinks. But what's the use frettin' over a little thing like 'leven hundred dollars or so? The thing ain't due yet, nohow. I'll take a run down there some time an' look at that land. In a general way, I'm about half scared, but I'm a-goin' to stand pat till the worst has come.'

"Well, I got to thinkin' of other things, an' was right busy, so I didn't recollect this mortgage till about three month after it come due—an' no one hadn't paid me any 'leven hundred dollars, ner no interest, neither, though I'd spent the interest, like I said.

"Well, sir, I taken that old map along with me, an' I put it down before the nearest rancher to that place an' asked him what was the number o' his corner. Rancher's name was Bill Andrews. He studies over that map an' figgers it out which way this place is from him, an' says he, 'Curly, near's I can tell, this land that you got the mortgage on is about the middle o' that greasewood flat down toward Meteetse.'

"But it's shore good fer 'leven hundred dollars an' interest," says I—"I know that, fer I seen it sell fer that much, an' the feller was glad to buy it, too."

"Curly," says he, 'that was what is technical called a miracle. Them things don't happen often. The feller that got 'leven hundred dollars fer that land ought to 'a' left the country, an' never have came back.'

"How about the feller that paid him that money?" says I. 'I reckon he was crazier than anybody else.'

"Then I thinks o' this innercent third party that says 'Chess,' an' right then I really didn't know where I was at. I suspected him o' being M. K. Jeronopolous, an', if so, how could he be innercent?"

"But look here Bill," says I, 'supposin' the land ain't any good—I got a mortgage on a span o' horses, an' you know that horses is as 'good as cash.'

"Shore, says Bill. 'But it seems to me that any man that's had as much to do with horses as you have ought to know that there ain't nothin' that can git any further off in two years than a span o' horses. Ask o' the wynds,' says he, 'where that span o' horses may be by now, them havin' such a good start.'

"'Chess' says I.

"Well, I ride on down to that place, an' follered out the map an' the trail, an' found what the land was my mortgage an' interest was on. An', blame me, if it wasn't the same piece o' land I'd won off'n Emmett Dewees playin' poker, an' sold to the feller in the buggy! Near's I could figger, the feller in the buggy had sold it to this Injun I saw plowin', M. K. Geronimo, an' he'd mortgaged it, through Bige Williams, to that insurance company back East, an' that company had held Bige up fer that mortgage, an' Bige had held me up fer it. Hadn't nobody had any real money in the whole game exceptin' me—once. An' me, why, I had furnished money an' a span o' horses to the only third party in this game, so's he could git away as far as possible after learnin' what greasewood land really is. I sets onto old Pinto then an' looks at them notes where Bige had wrote '*without recourse*' on them. Then I seen that I was the feller left holdin' the bag while the others was all out whistlin' up the snipe.

"I seen where the feller's house had the roof, kinda fallin' in, an' where he burned the poles that held up his barn roof. There was a place where he'd plowed up quite a few, looked like a sort o' earthquake. Course there wasn't no water there to drink or to put on the ground. There wasn't no man ner no horses here, an' hadn't been since the last snow. First I thought Geronimo might o' rode off a few hundred miles to git a drink o' water an' hadn't had time to git back. But, finally, I concluded he had skipped because he had learned thorough what greasewood land is.

"'In which case,' I asks out loud, 'one Curly would seem to be holdin' the bag, what?'

"An' to this I says, 'Chess!'

"'Wait a minute, Curly,' says I to myself. 'It makes me kinda dizzy, but

let's git this thing straightened out. Now I reckon the A'mighty made this land, in the first place, when He was sore about something, so He give it to the Injuns first, then General Miles taken it away from the Injuns an' turns it in to Uncle Sam, a' Uncle Sam unloads it on the railroad, an' they hand it to Emmett Dewees, an' Emmett Dewees he unloads it on me in a poker game, an' I sell it to this crazy feller in the buggy, an' he sells it to Bill Chess, an' Bill Chess he mortgages it to a insurance company that ain't seen it, at eight per cent, an' the insurance company comes on its agent, Bige Williams—because he's the man that really made the mortgage in the first place—because Mister Chess can't pay no interest on this kind o' land—and then Bige he unloads it onto me without no recourse, exceptin' on the land! I reckon that's what they call a chain o' title.'

"'Now I never did want that land, an' I didn't blame old Bill Ches Geronimo fer leavin' it; but when I see how Bige had tried to make me take back this land that I had sold, why I was sore.

"'In this case,' says I to myself, 'there don't seem to be no recourse but to ride to Cody an' to shoot Bige.' So I allowed I'd do that the next day, an', bein' right close to Metetse then, I just rid on down there to see the boys that same evenin'.

"'Of course, Sir Algernon," said Curly, at this point of his somewhat involved narrative, "you think I belong to the great North American sucker class, huh? You got another guess comin', like I'm goin' to show you now. You git me in any game I'm acquainted with, an' I'm willin' to pass the buck with anybody else.

"'I didn't see old Bill Chess in Metetse, but I seen about everybody else, an' all the boys was glad to have me back, because I'd been up to Billings or somewhere else fer quite a while. There was considerable excitement in town,



an' I seen before long it was because my old friend, Emmett Dewees, he was there too.

"Well, when it comes dark in a town like Meteetse, the first thing people do is to start a little game. We taken a little table by the bar back o' the hotel, an' so we set down to play a few cards—me, an' old Doc Henderson, an' the postmaster, an' the storekeeper across the street, an' Emmett Dewees—same fellers that set in the game time Emmett soaked me fer that land. Emmett he laughed at me, but I told him that was all right, that I was linin' my pocket an' had got back down to the soil—which I shore had.

"Well, we played along fer quite a while, an' I was settin' in rather hard luck. I'd taken quite a roll along with me, too, but by an' by, the limit comin' off like, I not only lose most all my pile, but I didn't have no coin to buy no more blue chips. I sets back in my chair feelin' in my pocket fer some tobacco, an', feelin' some papers in there, I pulls 'em out to git at my tobacco. Blamed if there wasn't my mortgages! Then I had a idea.

"'Emmett,' says I, 'you're always talkin' about takin' the limit off'n a game an' bein' plumb sporty. Me, I find this here game a leetle slow. I like the hand I've got pretty well, an', bein' I did not git a remittance from home which was expected, I'll just put up these here mortgage papers against 'leven hundred dollars' worth o' blue chips o' red an' white—these papers sayin' I got you beat right here, Mister Dewees,' says I.

"'Does you mean that fer collateral, Curly?' says he.

"'I dunno what that is,' says I, 'but what I mean is, these papers buys chips, an' that ends it. The deal is without recourse. If you win it, you take it. If I win, I take your money. I leave it to you, as land agent o' your railroad, if a mortgage on good, hard ground, cov-

erin' only thirty per cent of its actual value, ain't pretty near as good as chips in a poker game?'

"Well, Emmett, in them circumstances, he was afraid to do different, so he says, 'I got you. I hate to break up the game.'

"'She goes as she lays, then?' asks I.

"'She goes as she lays. How many cards, fellers?' Emmett he was dealin', too.

"All the other fellers sighs discouraged an' lays down their hands, because the ante was too high fer them. I calls fer one card—an', between you an' me. I didn't get it. 'Emmett,' says I, when he taken two cards an' pushed in a little on the side, 'I raise you back one span of work horses west o' the first principal meridian.' Emmett he pushes them in an' adds a few.

"'Now, Emmett,' says I, 'I raise you one set o' harness fer the said two horses west o' the east half o' the southeast quarter.'

"'Anything else?' says Emmett.

"'No,' I answered, 'that's enough. What you got?'

"Well, we throwed our cards down on the table, an' everybody looks to see what we got. What I have is one jack an' four scatterin'. What Emmett has is a house full of tens.

"'That looks good to me, Emmett,' says I cheerful. 'Fact is, it looks better'n anything I almost ever did see. They're yours,' says I, an' I pushes all them mortgages an' things over to his side o' the table.

"Emmett he taken one look at 'em, an' he sets back in his chair, an' he sort o' moans.

"'Curly,' says he. 'I didn't think it of you. If I'd 'a' knowed you was bluffin', I would shore drawed something worse.'

"Then Emmett he smiled kinda pale, an' says he, 'Come on' Curly, let's play some more.'

"'No,' says I, firm, 'this here game is without recourse. We're all about

where we started, near's I can figger, an' I done you a great benefit by losin' this here land back to you, Emmett,' says I. 'You're all the time sayin' the plow is greater'n the six-shooter, an' if you'll go up here just west o' the thirty-first principal meridian an' examine right close on this here land, I think you'll find a plow stuck in the ground so far that old Bill Chess couldn't git it out when he had to leave. Them words, Emmett,' says I, 'is intended fer to help you git back to the soil.'

"That's how come I didn't kill Bige Williams," continued Curly. "Time I rode up to Cody next day, sun was shinin' again, an' I was feelin' right fine, an' I concluded I wouldn't only just shoot Bige in the laig an' hurt him a leetle bit. But they told me Bige heard I was in that part o' the country, an' he'd packed up an' gone back East. The bank got all his alfalfa roots an' tall oats to put in the bank windows.

"Well, sir, I didn't tell the little woman about these investments o' mine, bein' so busy about other things, but

one time, just the other day, I taken her over to the office an' showed her on the map where we had once owned the southeast quarter o' the northwest quarter o' the northwest half o' the thirty-first principal meridian, an' says I, 'I not only bought that land right cheap, but I sold it at a good price, an' then I bought a mortgage back on it. After that, by great skill an' good judgment on my part, me holdin' one jack an' a few deuces,' says I, 'I lost that land all back to Emmett Dewees, the feller that stuck me fer it first.'

"Little woman she stood an' looked at me fer a while—an' she knows more about land an' mortgages an' interest than I do, a heap—an' she asks me a few questions about where that land was at.

"'Ain't it funny,' says she at last, 'how good God is to cow-punchers!'

"Huh!" concluded Curly, "way it looks to me is, ain't it funny how little credit—in his own family—a feller gits fer bein' a good business man? That was shore good poker I played, if I do say it."

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### ALASKA WILL SUPPLY PAPER

A STATEMENT made a short time ago by Secretary Wallace of the department of agriculture brought to public attention some interesting facts about the possibility that Alaska will, in the very near future, supply from 30 to 50 per cent of the news print used in the United States. Negotiations already under way are expected to initiate the establishment of this important industry in southern Alaska. A number of responsible concerns, so reports indicate, are to sign contracts for the purchase of pulpwood from Alaskan National Forests, and for the allocation of water-power sites. For some time past the Forest Service has been collecting the information essential to the practical development of the Tongass National Forest, where the vast timber resources are situated, and the work is practically completed.

As a first step toward the establishment of the paper industry in Alaska the Tongass Forest has been tentatively divided into fourteen zones, each embracing sufficient timber to furnish a large paper mill with a permanent supply of raw material. Each zone has been so planned as to include water-power sites sufficient to meet requirements of manufacture. In securing water-power data, the Federal Power Commission has been cooperating with the Forest Service, providing, in addition, reliable information regarding water-power sites heretofore unknown. One of the sites recently discovered is one which will permit the development of from 22,000 to 24,000 horse power at very low cost.

# De Fresh Keed

by  
*Howard E. Morgan*



**D**EES keed too fresh. Some tam I tak heem on my knee an' spank heem so an' so an' so. All tam he say to me 'Hola Frogs!' 'Frogs' to me, Pierre Grasset! I tak freshness out of heem!"

Pierre was indignant—on the verge of violent anger, in fact. His little black eyes flashed. His red mustache bristled. And when Pierre's eyes flashed and his mustache bristled, those who knew him were not apt to start an argument. Hence, beyond a stifled titter here and there, uniform silence followed his words, betokening at least outward agreement with the burly Frenchman's sentiments.

"Big Fred," the river boss, was more or less in accord. At best the kid was a troublemaker and didn't seem quite to fit in anywhere with the rest of the outfit, but he did not want to see this petty quarrel develop into a feud. The kid toted a gun, knew how to use it; Pierre was the best lumberman from the St. Maurice to the Grand Lac, and Big Fred couldn't afford to lose him.

"The Kid's all right, Frenchy. Little green an' young an' sassy, but he'll come around. He's kinda shaky yet—outa his line ridin' logs. An' he don't mean nothin' callin' you 'Frogs.' He's only a kid."

"I ain't so sure about that virtue stuff," Gene Burke's forghorn voice boomed through the smoke-laden room. "I'm tellin' you, that girl-faced kid with the fancy clothes and the patent-leather boots is a bad hombre. If he ain't, what's he doin' up here ridin' logs when his job is punchin' cattle? He's no-account, plumb no-account, mind what I tell you. An' more, he's yellow. Out on the logs he's scared stiff. Nerves is all shot. An' you know as well as me a man with nerves like his'n on the outside can't never ride logs. If I was boss o' this outfit I'd ship him back to Texas where he come from."

And the irate Pierre put in: "Eet is so. On de logs I see heem all tam scared—what you call—yellow. Voila! An' de fresh joke, all tam joke. Some day maybe when hee's beeg I wring de neck like de ptarmigan, but now he ees de keed, an' Pierre ees beeg an' strong—so—I tak heem on my knee an'—"

The innocent subject of these captious, after-supper comments had ridden up to the Roberval Camp two weeks since on a mangy Indian pony, and had offered his services. Being chronically short of help, Big Fred had seized upon the wiry youngster as a gift from above. But the first day on the river had proven conclusively that the kid never would



make a lumberjack. In the first place he refused to wear the spiked shoes of the riverman and stuck to ridiculous, high-heeled, patent-leather boots. In the second place his caustic, if original, brand of humor, particularly alighting upon the hot-headed Pierre, bade fair to end in a tragedy; and finally the undoubted fact that the kid developed "nerves" the instant he left terra firma, had come to light.

Accordingly Big Fred shifted the recruit, red corduroy shirt, high-heeled boots and all, to Burke, at the mill; but Burke for some unaccountable reason had taken an arbitrary dislike to the youngster on sight and would have none of him. And so in desperation Big Fred turned him over to the cook. Here he worked like a slave fourteen hours a day, cutting wood, carting water, but cheerfully, uncomplainingly. The least that could be said in praise of him was that he was willing to work.

Came an impatient voice from without: "One o' you half-baked lizards open the door. Here's your humble servant with his arms full o' the verdant oak wherewithal t' toast your mangy hides."

A grinning lumberjack unbolted the door.

Accompanied by a gust of sleet-laden wind, the kid strode into the room, his arms piled high with wood for the fire.

While he dexterously rolled a cigarette the laughing blue eyes keenly inspected the group about the stove. The Frenchman's spiked boots claimed the only vacant chair. Without at first recognizing the occupant whose upper body fell within the shadow formed by the green lamp shade, the kid reached the back of the chair and pulled it tentatively toward the stove, boots and all.

Big Fred shifted uneasily. The kid was dog tired, hence in one of his most devil-may-care moods. Pierre was ugly. The stage was set for trouble. Well, the kid needed a lesson; perhaps it would be as well here and now—

"Why, Froggie! Hidin' out on me, was you? Didn't see you at all first off. How's all the little tadpoles?" And as Pierre glowered: "How come you signed up for two chairs? Don't be a hawg, big fella."

A complete and ominous silence ensued, broken only by the intermittent snoring of the cook asleep on a blanket in a far corner of the room. Big Fred puffed hard on his short, black pipe and slid his belt around surreptitiously. The Frenchman showed his white teeth in what might have passed for a smile, but made no sign to indicate that he had heard, and did not remove his feet. The subtle menace in this almost palpable stillness found the youngster's alert consciousness, and, although the beardless lips still outwardly smiled, the laughter faded in the keen gray eyes, giving place to a certain hardness not altogether devoid of deviltry, bespeaking the utmost willingness to meet these men of the North more than half way.

And so with a quick jerk he pulled the chair from under the Frenchman's feet, and with the same motion he kicked out the dangerously tilted chair on which he was sitting. Pierre sprawled backward to the floor, thumping his head on several rough-hewn logs on the way down. Immediately pandemonium broke loose. All disinterested parties scuttled for the bunks lining the four walls of the room, some thoughtfully dragging their chairs with them, others fighting among themselves for the right of way.

With a howl of pain and rage the Frenchman sprang to his feet with remarkable agility for such a considerable bulk and rushed headlong at his grinning opponent, arms outstretched like a gorilla. The kid stood very still in the center of the floor, his hand resting lightly on the butt of a gun in his belt; then, apparently deciding that the exigencies of the case did not demand the use of this formidable weapon, he stepped aside quickly, and Pierre's long

arms pawed frantically in the air. Again the youngster stood tantalizingly in the center of the room, but this time the Frenchman stopped in his mad rush well short of his mark and struck out mightily in the general direction of a red corduroy shirt and a pair of pale gray eyes that mocked him.

But the youngster slid under the hairy fist, sprang in swiftly, and delivered a smashing blow under the ear with all the strength in his wiry young body. It seemed that Pierre suddenly straightened out in midair; his entire six feet of wriggling bone and muscle struck the board floor at the same instant with a resounding crash that rattled the dingy pictures on the walls and set the stove to clattering.

Pierre lay very still for a time, then slowly sat upright and blinked uncertainly at the green light which swayed and flickered unaccountably before his eyes. The kid lounged against the wall, grinning sociably, thumbs locked in his belt.

Through the dim-lighted room there drifted an atmosphere of uneasiness, a strained tenseness engendered by the totally unexpected outcome of the fight. The red-headed cook still snored lustily. Otherwise, all was silent; the many pairs of eyes flitted inquiringly from one to the other of the central figures in the little drama. Sympathy had shifted somewhat to the kid. He carried a gun but had not used it, and they thought the better of him for it. Pierre had been beaten in a fair fight. The question in their minds was—had he had enough? Pierre loved a fight but was not a killer. True, he had never before been beaten to their knowledge; then again he held an unusual antipathy toward the kid.

But Pierre had had enough, temporarily at least. He clambered to his feet and stood tottering, glaring belligerently but waveringly about the room; then with a shrug he turned toward the door. Partway there he faced the kid:

"Remembair, young fellow, don' call me 'Frogs.' Makes de madness in de haid, an' Pierre is bad wen he is mad. Some tam maybe wen you are beeg we have de real fight"—he tapped the knife handle at his belt meaningly—"but now, to-morrow maybe, I tak you on de knee an' spank you. Voila! De fresh keed—all tam fresh!"

"Why, Froggie, you——"

But Pierre had left hurriedly, and the slam of the heavy door cut short the kid's reply.

Sunup the next morning found the youngster on his way to the lower camp, carrying a letter from Big Fred to Campbell, the river boss at Little Eddy. The kid didn't know it, but this letter contained much that concerned himself. In it Big Fred had imparted the whole story to Campbell and in conclusion begged that he give the bearer a job.

Although the early-morning air was nipping cold and the shaggy pony was still half asleep, the kid was in fine fettle and whistled merrily as he followed the twisting trail down into the Moose-wall Valley. He laughed when an icy spray from the great log chute far overhead struck them and spurred the drowsy pony into a momentary canter.

That chute interested him. He knew that it had been constructed at great expense to carry the logs overland from Roberval to Little Eddy, thus avoiding the Kluchuk Falls and the many miles of crooked, slow-moving water between the two camps. The chute was over a mile in length, perhaps a rod in width and during the eight hours of each working day it was flooded with four feet or more of rushing water which hurled the great logs at express-train speed over hill and dale, finally depositing them at the big mill at Little Eddy.

Rumor had it that daring rivermen had ridden this chute on single logs; the kid shuddered at the mere thought. This particular sort of adventure did not ap-

peal to him. Water was all very well to bathe in, even desirable as a thirst- quencher at times; but there was an indefinable something or other about this log-riding game that unnerved him, rendered him panicky, and filled him with the wild, unreasoning urge of an un- broken colt to flee madly—where, it mattered not. But he was new to it all; perhaps, in time, he would learn.

At Roberval all was excitement. Morning discovered the river choked with numberless small but intricate jams evidently caused by a parent jam up- river somewhere between Roberval and "Thirty Mile," the nearest camp. Under the direction of Big Fred, the creak- ing log piles gave way one by one to the skillful maneuvering of the "jacks," the "fags" being shifted into the race lead- ing to Burke's Mill, and the perfect logs shot into the chute destined for Camp- bell's Mill and Little Eddy.

But the big jam still held, and with the clearing up of the home channels the river boss dispatched a few picked men upriver under the direction of Pierre.

And, as is often the case, the big jam was found to be a relatively simple affair; well before lunch hour the huge pile of logs had broken away and passed serenely on down the river.

But Pierre still tarried. The river was beautiful this morning. He hated to leave it. As far as the eye could reach the lazy stream crawled like a great blue serpent through the yellow marshes. On either side, rolling, pine- clad ridges, prehistoric shores of the one-time mighty river, stretched up to meet the foothills of the snow-clad peaks. Everything was radiant with the first delicate touch of spring. The odor of new green things was in the air. The midday sun warmed him. Pierre raised on his toes and inhaled deeply; his black eyes gleamed appreciatively, his red mustache bristled, then drooped deject-

edly; for now he must get to work—take the long tramp back to camp through the dank swamps—and he detested walk- ing. Two huge logs, driven by an un- seen eddy, swept close inshore. On the spur of the moment he jumped, cleared the intervening ten feet of open water, and landed gracefully on the nearest log. He would ride the logs to camp. Skillfully pushing here and pulling there, he soon made his way to mid- river and, drawing the big logs close to- gether with his jack, sprawled out flat on his back and closed his eyes in per- fect contentment.

The shriek of the noonday whistle at the mill roused him at last, and he raised lazily on an elbow.

A mile downstream was the camp, the yellow beach filled with scurrying fig- ures bound for the mess hall. Straight ahead, but far, very far away it seemed, yawned the entrance to the chute. He noticed abstractedly that no one had been left to pick and choose such logs as might automatically drift into the chute during lunch hour, but then the few logs that were running naturally slipped into the quiet waters of the little bay and would be taken care of after- ward. He might still enjoy the im- promptu sun bath for another hour.

The warm sun soon claimed complete mastery of his drowsy senses, and he slept.

He roused suddenly, an inchoate fear, a vague premonition of danger, invading his inner consciousness. He was definitely aware that he was moving at great speed. One of the logs broke away. He crouched on the remaining log, every muscle tense, every nerve alert. He saw at a glance—the impos- sible had happened. Due to the unusual weight, the two great logs had avoided the quiet waters, had held to the main channel, and even now were rushing madly through the raceway toward the mouth of the chute. He called hoarsely, but he knew that no one would hear, that



the roaring millrace would drown his voice.

Pierre was a brave man as men go, and he possessed all the native shrewdness peculiar to his race; also, he was a born riverman. No more expert log rider than he could be found on the entire Roberval, yet his heart faltered at the immensity, the palpable impossibility, of the task before him.

He had never ridden the chute. Others had done it—foolhardy, half-drunken Indians—in the summer when there were no logs. But now he knew the possibility—yes, the practical certainty—of finding great logs piled crosswise of the chute and, at the end, two hundred yards' drop at a forty-five-degree slope into the milling, log-strewn whirlpool at Little Eddy.

With a violent snap-the-whip motion his log entered the chute, whirled and spun about under his flying feet, then with skillful maneuvering straightened out and rushed madly away. For a time every faculty at his command was called upon to maintain control of his ungovernable steed. On account of the weight his log gathered momentum as it went and bumped solidly into other logs; knocking them this way and that, and only the most judicious use of the spiked pole kept him from riding up on these slower logs. Finally the way seemed clear for some distance ahead. Mist-blurred tree tops overhung the chute. Denuded branches clung about his knees and sought to trip him. Icy sprays drenched him. He was chilled to the bone.

A sudden dip. The great log seemed to jump from under him like a frightened horse. And there, before his watering eyes, at the bottom of the dip where the chute led into a long, level stretch, was a log, crosswise, resting on the board sidewalls far above the water line. The Frenchman felt his way cautiously along his log until he balanced on the foremost tip. He crouched low,

holding the spiked pole horizontally before him like a skijor, and with a muttered prayer he jumped.

He landed fairly in the center of his big log. It dipped with his weight, rasped along the bottom, careened suddenly to the side, shot into the air, then again settled into the main channel. Only the man's wonderful agility had kept him from being dashed to his death. But no time was to be allowed to rest his straining body, to quiet his pounding heart.

He stood erect suddenly, his weather-beaten cheeks chalk-colored, eyes staring with a horror-stricken intensity. Just below in a cup-shaped depression a veritable mass of logs, piled high one upon the other, crossed and recrossed the narrow chute. He must jump them or be dashed to pieces. There was no alternative. Luck had been with him so far. Cautiously he made his way forward, crouching low, and sprang into the air, pushing backward gingerly but strongly as he jumped. One spiked heel caught the topmost log. In sudden panic he pulled free, sprawled forward into the rushing water, missed the tail end of his log by inches, caught wildly at the rough bark as it drew away, and clung desperately. Half drowned, with finger nails bruised and bleeding, the man finally pulled himself upon the log and lay gasping in the stinging spray.

With a wet sleeve he brushed the water from his eyes and clambered upright, balancing with difficulty, for he had lost his pole. Came a rapid access of speed, and he knew that he had reached the end of his journey—that last, almost perpendicular, drop. With the unknowing courage of a doomed man he stood erect, cupped his hands, and called again and again. Well he knew that it was lunch hour, that there should be no one about; and even if there were, what could they do?

But it seemed that his call was answered. He cleared his eyes, and between the intermittent sheets of flying

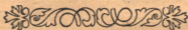
spray he saw the log-littered beach, a group of men gesticulating excitedly, and, in the midst of this group, a red-shirted figure, with shiny black boots and broad-brimmed hat. This strange figure motioned the rest back from the water's edge while he deftly twirled a tenuous, snakelike rope above his head. And then came the hideous sensation of falling—falling—of dropping rapidly into moisture-laden space; then came a strange, hissing sound, and a burning, implacable band that caught him about the body, that cut deep into his arms above the elbows, that seared his back and chest like a red-hot iron—that jerked him bodily from the hurtling log and dragged his resistless body through the muddy water to the shore.

Willing hands lifted the Frenchman and lay him on the sand. Others gathered about the kid, wrung his hand, and slapped him on the back, for it was the youngster's keen ears that had heard Pierre's frantic call, his ready wit that

had immediately grasped the situation, and his undoubted nerve that had enabled him skillfully to rope the flying figure at precisely the right moment, thence dragging the doomed lumberman to safety. Far up on the whirling log pile the Frenchman's great log lay, split neatly in two from the tremendous impact.

Pierre opened his eyes and clung greedily to the silver flask which a brown, girlish hand held to his lips. He stared unbelievably. But yes, it was the kid. "Certainment, de fresh keed!" How did he get here? It mattered not. The Frenchman's little black eyes flashed. The red mustache bristled. But the blue lips negotiated a smile, and a hairy hand sought the slim one. "How come, Froggie?" and the brown hand attempted to pull away quickly in mock alarm.

"It's all right, keed. Don' be 'fraid. Pierre wouldn't spank. Maybe he ees de man, after all. Voila! Eet ees so!"



### RECENT DISCOVERY OF PREHISTORIC TREES

THE story of some prehistoric trees which were unearthed a short time ago in Washington, D. C., is told in a statement issued recently by the United States Geological Survey: One of the representatives from the Survey Department made an examination of the site upon which the trees were discovered when some excavating was being done for the foundation of an hotel now under construction. When the excavation had reached a depth of 25 feet below street level, a layer of black swamp muck was disclosed, in which were embedded large quantities of wood, tree trunks, and stumps. Much of the wood was well preserved and showed clearly the woody structure and external markings of the bark. In matter of size some of the stumps were nine and ten feet in diameter, and many of them gave indications of being cypress.

It is claimed by geologists that ages ago this part of the Atlantic coastal plain was from time to time covered by the sea, into which streams swept vast quantities of mud, gravel, and boulders, covering large areas with thick deposits. It is thought that when the region finally emerged from the sea the Potomac River cut its valley in these deposits which were carried about here and there by the smaller streams as well. The large boulders are said to be derived from the granite on which the gravel lies, but some of the smaller pebbles come from parts of the Potomac basin beyond the Blue Ridge, while others are from veins of quartz in the granite of the Piedmont Plateau. Estimates place the age of the trees at from 20,000 to 30,000 years, or during the period known as the Great Ice Age.

# The Old Ranch House

By James Edward Hungerford

THIS ol' ranch house is sagging some;  
It shore don't look like Kingdom Come.  
Th' sun an' wind an' sleet an' rain  
Has beat agin' it, might an' main,  
Fer forty year er better now,  
It looks like sin, but, anyhow,  
I wouldn't swap it fer a pile,  
Er no fine mansion built fer style.

Its rafters they is made o' oak,  
That's seasoned some with fireplace smoke;  
Its floors are full o' knots an' holes,  
Th' boards hand hewn from spruce-tree boles;  
It's walls are logs, with mud fer chink;  
A sorry place, most folks'd think,  
T' love in, fer a rancher rich,  
What's got heap herds an' land an' sich.

Well, mebbe so, but jest th' same,  
There's somethin' 'bout it hard t' name,  
That jest won't let me tear it down,  
An' build a fancy house in town;  
It might be foolishness, I 'low,  
An' sentiment, but, pard, somehow,  
I'd ruther live in this ol' shack  
Than all yore brownstone bric-a-brac!

I reckon yuh don't understand  
How we come here an' cleared th' land,  
An' built this house, when me an' ma  
Was young folks, fresh from Arkansas,  
Who settled here, when things was wild  
An' woolly, son, an' plumb hard b'iled;  
An' here our kids was born y' see—  
It's shore been home, sweet home, t' me!





**H**ELLO, there, boys of The Round-up! I've been reading the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for close on to two years now, and I've noticed from time to time that people who read the good old book criticize some of the stories. In regard to the story, 'Into the Unknown,' while it was a very interesting story according to my estimation, it had a rather bad ending. Tell that man Sanderson, who wrote the story, that if he don't write a sequel to said story I'll sure go gunning for him. No, it sure wouldn't do to leave poor Mike Gordon in that cave with the 'divuls,' et cetera.

"I like the Peg Leg Garfield stories and the Flapjack Meehan stories especially well. George Owen Baxter's stories are also very interesting.

"I sure do hope for some more stories about Clarence Burden and his pals.

BERT WATSON, JR.

"Pasadena, California."

We'll get after Sanderson about that. Speakin' of George Owen Baxter, his second book is out. The first one was "Iron Dust," published under the title "Free Range Lanning." The second one is "Donnegan," which ran

under that title as a serial in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. Chelsea House, New York, publishes both, and if any of you want copies they will be glad to supply you with them, provided your local dealer is unable to do so.

Pardon us. Here's a lady, and we told that Bert Watson, Jr., to go and speak out of turn. It wasn't his fault; it was ours. This, folks, is Lolita L. W. Flockhart, of Somerville, New Jersey:

"DEAR EDITOR: Since reading 'The Greatest Tracker,' by J. Thompson Kescel, in a recent number of your magazine, I have been haunted by it. It is not only interesting as a story, but the psychology is wonderful. It is like an allegory.

"I write this as a sort of apology, because I always thought that the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE would contain only lurid stories. I never looked into one until this number fell into my hands. I liked other stories in it, too.

"I shall often pick up the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and shall look especially for the name of J. Thompson Kescel."

Glad you liked Kesce's story. Remember how we told you last meetin' evenin' 'at Kesce is teetotally blind. But he is the most popular man in his section, particularly among the young folks, and a boy who surely looked at him with kindly regard brought him down to see us not long ago.

Brother E. B., of Cassel, California, bein' modest, don't want to have his name spoken right out loud, but he has some real good information about Injuns.

"DEAR EDITOR: I picked up an old issue and read 'Painted Ponies,' a good yarn, by John H. Hamlin. He speaks of the 'Pitt River Indians.' There are no such things. They are the Pit Indians—so called from their habit of digging pits about four feet deep, circular in shape, and building a bark or skin wigwam over them to live in. They are now extinct, having been killed off by the Kolmath and Modocs. They were peaceable; the other Indians killed them for their women and boys, whom they adopted into their own tribes. Pit River was named from the Pit Indians.

"Fall River Mills is an old station on the California and Oregon road, so named from an old flour mill which is still working. A person can still pick up stone relics of these people and find the old pits with thousands of freshwater clam shells.

"I am not finding fault, but thought some one would like to know something

about the Pits, who are so often called 'Pitt Rivers.'"

Hamlin, how about this? A little explanation from you, please.

W. A. Buck, of Oakland, California, rememberin' as how we were talkin' about a fellow walkin' in a circle as bein' unable to keep straight, has got somethin' to say on the subject. He agrees with us that it is because a man's legs are not the same length. Also he suggests that perhaps this is well. Hear Brother Buck:

"Subject—walking in a circle. We will all do it unless we have a fixed point ahead—or, better, two of them in line. The cause is a slightly shorter step with left or right, as the case may be.

"I once knew a lead chainman who in a chain length in prairie country would be off six feet to the left, although on account of much kidding he tried very hard to correct this fault. I have made several circles of several miles in circumference, and I thought I was wise. Why is this so? Let us say that the Creator in his wisdom so made man that, should he wander too far from his cave, in the olden days, all he had to do was to keep going to get home again. Perhaps to his pleasure—yes, who can tell?—maybe to his grief. The Creator was strong on circles, involving spheres, et cetera.

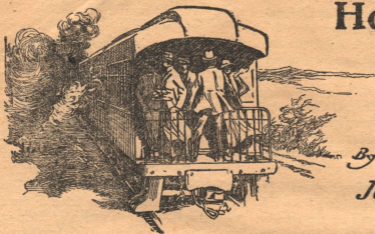
"Aloha, luck to yourself and the WESTERN STORY."

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### "MILE IN THE CLEAR" BRIDGE FOR GOLDEN GATE

A BRIDGE costing \$20,000,000, spanning the Golden Gate, San Francisco's famed harbor, is the latest improvement planned for the city. This structure is the most spectacular bridge ever devised by man. The main span would be almost a mile in length, supported at either end by towers exceeding in height the Eiffel Tower of Paris. If the "dream" is realized, not only will congestion in the harbor be relieved, but a vast area, now practically isolated, will be brought into direct contact with San Francisco. Northern counties of the State will be united with the Santa Clara Valley, and a new route up and down the coast opened.

# Where To Go and How To Get There



By

*John North*

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

## IN THE MONTANA OIL FIELDS

**T**HE magnet that attracts the seeker for wealth nowadays is no longer the prospect of a rich strike of gold. The fortunes made out of oil, make those built from gold seem trivial by comparison. Oil is the twentieth century bonanza. The man who can strike oil, is much better off than the one who strikes gold.

This newest phase of mineral development has had its effect in building the wealth of Montana, but as yet the revenue derived from oil wells is not comparable to that from other sources such as the copper, silver, and zinc mining, the live-stock industry, or agricultural pursuits. Furthermore, it seems to be an open question whether Montana will eventually develop into a great oil-producing region. Oil—as nearly every one knows—is a mighty uncertain quantity. Now you see it, now you don't. Fortunes have been made in oil. Likewise, fortunes have been lost. Dabbling in oil speculation is a risky game for

any one who does not know the ropes thoroughly.

The first intimation of the existence of oil in Montana came in August, 1864, when an army wagon crossing the Bozeman cut-off on a spur of the Prior Mountains stopped to repair a wheel. The driver went hunting for water and found a pool, from the surface of which he skimmed off enough oil to fill his axle-grease can. This find occurred in the vicinity of what is now the Soap Creek oil field, the largest producing field in the State.

It was fifty-five years before anything momentous was done to commercialize Montana oil. In November, 1919, the Van Duzen Oil Company found oil in commercially profitable quantities at a depth of 1,175 feet in the Devil's Basin, twenty miles north of Roundup. This discovery was followed by the Frantz Corporation drilling in the Mosby Dome, on the Cat Creek anticline, encountering oil flowing at the rate of



fifty barrels a day, and containing a high percentage of gasoline. In June, 1921, the Western States Oil and Land Company, drilling in Soap Creek, came across a 3,200-barrel well.

During the past year, 1922, there has been a great deal of activity in oil operations. One of the most important scenes of drilling is in the Kevin-Sunburst field. Any one who wants to see oil fields in process of exploitation would probably have his desire for knowledge thoroughly gratified by a visit to this region. Sunburst is a small town—little more than a village—on the Great Northern Railway which has been boosted and brought into the limelight because of the oil drilling in the adjacent territory.

Would I advise my readers to prospect for oil in Montana? I would not, unless they are experts at the game. Would I advise them to invest in Montana oil? Generally speaking, emphatically not. The risk—especially for the novice—is much too great.

#### A LUMBER CENTER

DEAR MR. NORTH: Would Astoria, Oregon, be a good place from which to start out in order to see something of the big lumbering activities of Oregon? And what, in your opinion, would be my chances for finding employment there? J. J. POWERS.  
Kalamazoo, Mich.

Yes, you have chosen a good jumping-off place for the big timber. Astoria is a natural shipping center and distributing point for the 60,000,000,000 feet of timber in the adjacent territory. A number of lumber companies have camps in the forests of Clatsop County, and there are numerous saw mills, where you might try your luck at job hunting. I cannot attempt to prophesy how you will fare. So much depends on

your ability and experience and the impression you make on the foreman; also, on whether he happens to have any vacancy. However, in the process of visiting these camps, you will see so much of the woodsman's life and of the forests that, even if you are unsuccessful in your quest of employment, the adventure cannot be considered unprofitable or a waste of time. We cannot measure the value of all our efforts by the dollars-and-cents standard, although a great many persons seem to think habitually in such terms. By all means start from Astoria and try your luck!

#### THE CANADIAN FORESTRY ASSOCIATION

DEAR MR. NORTH: I understand that the Canadian government has some association to preserve the forest resources of the Dominion. Can you tell me anything about this organization and its purposes?

WOODS LOVER.

Boston, Mass.

The organization to which you refer is, no doubt, the Canadian Forestry Association, with headquarters in the Jackson Building, Ottawa, Canada. This society has for its purposes the conservation and development of Canada's forest resources. It furthers its aims by educational campaigns, in cooperation with the government and the railways, to impress on the minds of settlers and others in forested regions the importance of such details as adequate fire-protection methods, the avoidance of forest fires and their cost, the advantage of prairie shelter belts of trees, the necessity of cutting judiciously, and of reforestation. It issues a great deal of informative literature along these lines and conducts research work. You can obtain further particulars by writing to the above address.





Miss Louise Rice, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rice will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

**W**HAT is a piñon nut, anyway? Is it a pomegranate? If so, we have the surprise of our lives, for we have eaten many a pomegranate, which—according to the nomenclature of the fruiterers who sold them—are a fruit, very juicy and full of small seeds? We'd like to have this burning question thoroughly thrashed out among The Gang. Here are two contributions to the discussion.

DEAR MISS RICE: I am answering a question that was asked in The Hollow Tree some time ago. Piñon is a Spanish name for the pomegranate, as I understand the matter. The pomegranates are sent East to the factories, where they make preserves and pickles of them. They make fine preserves. You in the East may eat piñon or pomegranate preserve under a different name. It seems that a good many products of the West get rechristened when they travel so far. Out here we say "prairie dog," but in the books that are written about the West they make us say "gophers." That is real funny. Any of The Gang that write after the winter is over should address me at my summer home, address of which I give. There is plenty of wild turkey and deer and fine trout and bass fishing. Yours truly,

ELMER N. PUCKETT.

Idabel, Okla.

DEAR MISS RICE: In a recent issue Brother Batten of New Mexico wanted to know about the piñon nut. I wouldn't know a pomegranate if I was to see one, but the piñon nut is sold in the markets in Denver at about thirty cents a pound, and lots of people think that they are good eating. In this country they are not much in use, but every fall there are a few shipped out of here to the North and East. For myself, I think that they are pretty poor grazing. My wife says that the pomegranates are the same thing. She was raised in the panhandle of Texas and is a real bronc rider, so that if any of the girls of The Gang would like to write to her they can reach her at this address.

Hoping to hear from some of the brothers myself in the near future, I am, fraternally yours,

LEONARD A. PERDEW.

711 North Sixth Street, Grand Junction, Colo.

Well, which it it, or—ain't it? Let's have some opinion of experts  
Here's a pal wanted.

DEAR MISS RICE: Eventually—why not now? That is what every one ought to ask themselves about becoming a member of The Gang. So here I am, anyway.

I am planning to take a trip to California and perhaps to Oregon and Washington, if my money holds out, and I would like to hear from some Gang sister who has the same idea. I am twenty-six and a stenog-

rapher—can read my own notes occasionally!—and live in the town that I shall use for my pen name. Please send me all particulars when you write, sisters, and I will reply in the same way. I do hope that I can find a sister to travel with.

"FORT WAYNE."

We will take particular pains to forward this mail promptly, as the time is short in which to make all the arrangements.

DEAR MISS RICE AND GANG: Who among The Gang cares to correspond with a widow with her share of the world's responsibility and work, one who will appreciate good fellowship from those, like herself, who are lovers of the out-of-doors and of purebred cattle, horses, and hogs? Would be glad to hear from those who have had their struggle, too, and are making at least a minimum of success.

MRS. B.

Box 4, North Little Rock, Ark.

So many of The Gang have written in that they would like to have companionship that we are putting in the following letter so that they and this sister may find each other.

DEAR MISS RICE: I wonder if the ol' owl will let me say what I want to to those gathered around The Tree. I shall try, anyway.

I want a home, one where there is a father and mother and perhaps some children. I will give all my services to such a home, but I will give more. I will give all the love and loyalty that a real child would give. I have been alone so long. I am at present working in a furniture company, cutting out covers for stuffed furniture. There is a good deal of fun goes on, but it is not my kind of fun, and so I keep to myself. I feel that this is not the kind of life that I want, and I am willing to pay with all that I have to offer if I can find that life. I am seventeen and have blue eyes and red hair. I am a real outdoor girl, but I have no chance now to show it. If anybody will write to me about this I will write to them as long as they like until they get to know me and feel that we could be of use to each other.

Thank you, Miss Rice, and The Gang. Please write about this, if there are any that feel like doing so.

GLADYS HAYES.

100 South Fifth Street, Clinton, Iowa.

Sister Gladys, please let us know how you come out about this.

DEAR HOLLOW TREE: I live on a small ranch in western Washington and often get lonely, although I am married. I am only nineteen and feel that I am still a girl. I would like to hear from other girls near my age, especially those who live on cattle ranches. I live where there are many logging camps, and as I have six brothers in that business am sure that I can answer any questions about it or about this part of the country. There is plenty of game here, and I am pretty good with a gun, so that I have outdoor sport. I often go trapping with my younger brothers.

Hoping that some of The Gang will write me soon, I am, fraternally yours,

MRS. GLEN E. BECKWITH.

Route A, Box 150, Elma, Wash.

DEAR MISS RICE: I have been reading the W. S. M. for quite a while, and the only reason I can give is that I like it. I think that your department is one of the most interesting of any that I ever saw. It is the friendly air of this bunch of yours, and the freedom from affectation and snobbery, that appeal to me. Keeping faith with friendship is the most important thing in the world. I have been a lone wolf the greater part of my life because I found few men that could really be trusted. And another thing I will say is that I would trust a woman in preference to most men!

I have done most things that men in the West have done—nothing heroic. Would be glad to hear from any one I could assist in any way. Would also like to hear from Charlie or Fred or Hugh of the McKittrick Ranch, Bakersfield, California. Also Curly Hughes of the same ranch. Will answer all correspondents to the best of my ability.

WESTON.

This is a real old-timer, and we feel sure that many of you will enjoy hearing from him. Address him in care of The Tree.

DEAR MISS RICE: I am twenty years old and a Kentuckian by birth, but for the last four years I have been mining; have been in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia, as well as my native State. It is a pretty rough State, too. They say that we have nation-wide prohibition, but to be here you wouldn't think it, for there is plenty of "moonshine." I have some very interesting pictures taken in the Cumberland and the Blue Ridge Mountains, that I would like to exchange for some of the West. I would like to hear from any of The Gang.

Cromona, Ky.

ROY LEACH.



DEAR MISS RICE: I was born and raised in the country, but am now in a city, as you see. Am a mechanic by trade, nineteen years of age, and would like to hear from the fellows anywhere. I will be glad to give any information about this part of the country that I can.

H. B. PENN, JR.

1352 Camp Street, New Orleans, La.

DEAR MISS RICE AND GANG: Will you let a half-breed Apache Indian join the ol' Holla Tree Gang? I like hunting, fishing, and camping, as I think that all my people do, and I am not really interested in much of anything else; but boys who will write to me about those things will find that I am glad to answer, and that I will write as long as they will.

EUGENE JORDAN.

406 Neal Street, Nashville, Tenn.

Indeed we will, Eugene. There are a lot more Indians in The Gang, and we are sure that you will hear from some of them. And, by the way, Sister Agnes James, of the Flathead nation,

how are you? Drop a line in the ol' holla once in a while. Right out West, now—

DEAR MISS RICE: I want to be a Gangster, too. At present I am working for the Modoc Lumber Company, as long fine skinner on freighters for logging camps, around in the Klamath Falls country. There is nothing but miles and miles of forest, and it's a hundred miles from nowhere. There is deer, bear, and other game here, beside Indians, lonely range riders, and Rocky Mountain goats.

I must stop writing, as it will soon be time to throw the currycomb at the leaders, the brush at the wheelers, and play horse with the collars. As for me, I am white after I take a bath, five feet eight when I stand up, and weigh about one hundred and thirty-five pounds. So long, folks!

J. F. A.

Oregon.

Brothers, your letters for this gangster will be forwarded.

IN  
NEXT  
WEEK'S  
ISSUE:



Opening Installment of

## The Bandit of the Black Hills

What's left for a fighter to do among lawful men, after he's been in jail? Why, fight! "The Duke" does—with a vengeance.

By GEORGE OWEN BAXTER

## Gold King Turns His Back

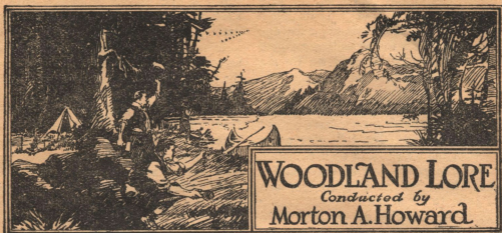
When a horse has tact as well as speed, trust him to do the right thing.

By JOHN FREDERICK

AND OTHER STORIES



ORDER  
YOUR  
COPY  
IN  
ADVANCE



This department is for the benefit of those of our readers who are interested in camping, hiking, and holidaying in the outdoors. Mr. Morton A. Howard, the practical woodsman who conducts it, will answer queries pertaining to all phases of life in the open, if you will inclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your request for information. This service is free.

Mr. Howard will be greatly pleased to hear from woodsmen, and will include in his articles any tales of interesting woods experiences or accounts of new woodcraft he receives.

### USE OF THE COMPASS

ONE of the young lads who occasionally write to me about his experiences in the out-of-doors is just now very much disturbed because some one told him that the compass does not point to the true north at all. He has never used the instrument through real need, but only for hikes along well-known highways, and he fears that if he tried to rely on the compass in the real woods he would be wholly lost; he says he is told that there are very complicated mathematical operations needed if one is to read the compass rightly, and that he does not believe that he could be brought to understand this.

As for not being able to understand the variations of the needle from the true north, any one can learn how; but as a matter of fact I have seen many and many a woodsman who had used a compass all his life, in all parts of the country, and who had not so much as

ever heard of the variations of the needle. I came pretty near to having my head punched with vigor and suddenness once because I insisted on proving such variation to a man in the Maine woods.

The needle of the compass points to what is called "the magnetic north," which is far south of the real north pole. There are places on the surface of the earth where the needle does point to the true north. These are where what is called "the agonic line" meanders around in big loops and curves. So far as I can make out, nobody has the slightest idea what this line is doing or what it means. It is not stationery, either; it has an "annual change" which is a slow crawling westward of the whole works.

The only persons who have to bother with all this are surveyors and the like. If my young inquirer wants to be a surveyor he will learn all about the

agonic line in the course of his professional training, but for us plain woodsmen the thing does not exist any more than it did to the belligerent gent who wanted to knock me down for the mere suggestion that the compass was not right to a hair.

The point is that what the needle shows as the north we we have agreed to call north, and that following out a northern line which is the approximation of the true one is just as practical for us as if we had an instrument which did point to the actual pole.

However, any one who is anxious to get a squint at the true north may do so in several very simple ways. One is with a watch. The watch should be keeping correct time for that part of the country. Lay the watch down level, so that the hour hand points to the sun, which must not be near the zenith, of course. Halfway between the hour hand and twelve o'clock will be due—and accurately—south, and the north is, of course, directly opposite. South of the equator, this point would be due and accurately north.

Another way: Make the sort of thing that you often see on old-fashioned wells—a long, straight stick put between crossed sticks and weighted so that the greater part of it will slant upward. Fasten a string to the tip of this stick, and to the end of the string put a stone or anything heavy that will hold it straight and still.

An hour before noon drive a peg in the ground just below the stone. Tie a string to the peg, tie a pointed little stick to the string, and draw a segment of the arc of a circle from the peg to where the tip of the shadow of the pole rests on the ground. An hour after noon, as the shadow of the tip of the pole approaches to the side, again describe the arc and put a peg on the shadow, as you did on the shadow on the other side. Now draw a line from each "shadow peg," as we may call

them, to the other. Midway between them will be true north and not "magnetic" north.

Every one who has ever looked up at the night sky knows the Dipper in the constellation of the Great Bear. Its stars never set, but revolve around the North Star. The stars forming the front of the Dipper bowl point right toward a very bright and conspicuous star. It cannot be missed; it is Polaris, the North Star. However, the North Star points due and correctly north only when the double star in the handle of the Dipper is either directly above or below it. At any time, though, the northerly indication is sufficient for a man to guide his way roughly at night.

For all practical purposes the compass is a reliable instrument, but the use of it is often very unreliable.

Some of the nature stories tell how the hero took a squint at his compass in the morning and again at noon and arrived where he was going the same night. Anybody who wants to try that may do so, but I'll keep the thing in my hand, and, while I may not stop for more than a second every ten minutes, I will note that I am not bearing off too much from my course.

When I am in timber and pretty doubtful of what my feet are doing by way of shearing off from the right line, I will stop every twenty minutes, stand still until the needle has stopped, lay it on a level place, and take a good look.

In using a compass be careful that you do not have something on your person that will deflect it. Your gun or ax or your belt buckle may disturb it. A jackknife may make it a wild thing without reason. To test this, look at it when you have just taken it from your pocket, then lay it on the ground and look at it from a distance.

Be very sure that your compass is not bedeviled by some mechanical attraction before you get out into the woods. If it is in your grip and you



get in an electric car, it may be affected, or if you go through any machine shops while you have it on you.

Always clamp the needle when the instrument is not in active use.

In your tramps through familiar country, practice the art of making a map, as you go, by aid of the compass. Is the old bridge near the turnpike E and W or N and S? Can you show on the map the actual turns of the road that passes over it and every mile indicate the real direction in which the compass points? Can you draw the map to scale? That is, suppose we say that an inch indicates a mile. Can you draw the outline of any mile in its right figure within the inch? Try this over and over until you are sure that you can produce an accurate map, and you will be training yourself for that day in the woods when you will be going over new ground, where it is vitally important that you keep a good map of where you pass.

If it is possible for you to get up on some high point and look over country with which you are familiar, do so and then try to make such a map that it could be understood, and in which the points of the compass would be accurately indicated.

When you get out in the big woods, later, and climb a tree to see where you are going, you will be able to take a bearing that will bring you out. Never let any one tell you that it is foolish to keep a little notebook on even your short hikes. Once in a while there will be a woodsman, born and bred, who can do without the notebook. He can climb a hill, look over a landscape, estimate the distance to the next ridge within half a mile, keep the direction in his eye by the way the light falls on his face through the woods, and do this

nearly always with success; but even men who have made a profession of guiding often get lost in strange country without the compass, and most of them will make a rough map on a piece of paper when in doubt.

In this, as in all other matters, it is the novice who is jauntily indifferent to detail, and airily certain of himself.

When traveling where you must use the compass, do not allow your thoughts to stray to other affairs than those in hand. When you are on city streets you may speculate about Einstein's theory or your finances or whether your wife loves you, but in the woods you have to keep all your faculties focused on what your feet and hands are doing and what your eyes are seeing. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that the real woods and following a trail are so restful to the fevered city dweller; they take away the possibility of those anxious and brooding thoughts that are so unnecessarily active in the minds of those who walk where attention to the active life of the senses is limited to a look up and down the street before crossing it.

In the woods you must try to keep steadily in view the direction in which you are going. If some obstacle makes you swerve away from it, you must sharpen your wits, fix your attention on what you are doing, then consult the compass and get right back into line.

If you cross a stream, observe by the compass the real way that it flows, and you will not be confused by getting onto the branch of the same stream later and thinking that you have already crossed it.

If the compass is unmagnetized, unclamp it and lay it near a strong motor or generator. When it stops quivering, clamp it again and leave it there for an hour. It will be well magnetized.



# MISSING

This department, conducted in duplicate in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be best, if possible, to give us any change in your address in the notice.

Now, readers—help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

**WARNING.**—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," or letters, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

**KIDMAN, MRS. D.**, whose maiden name was Rosina Isabella Waters, and her son, **BERTIE EDWARD KIDMAN**. They were last heard of at De Winton, Alberta, in March, 1922, and it is thought that they went to Toronto. The boy is nearly five years old. Any information that will help to find them will be sincerely appreciated by E. K., care of this magazine.

**PLYLE, MRS. RUTH**, whose maiden name was Dayhoff. When her son was twelve years old she placed him in the Colorado State Home for dependent children, on South Washington Avenue, Denver. He has not been seen since December 23, 1914. She is now about thirty-eight years old, five feet eight inches tall, with very light-brown hair and blue eyes. Her son is now in the army and would be very happy to get any news of his mother. Theodore Pyle, care of this magazine.

**RAY VIVIAN**, who was married to Frank Lopez, and whose husband was born in Los Angeles on February 6, 1917. Her husband would like to correspond with her, and to know that she and the baby are all right and happy. Any information about them will be gratefully received by Frank Lopez, care of this magazine.

**SMITH, ANGELINE THOMAS**, who is supposed to have married George Lemar about 1885-86, and was last heard of at Poochubetas, Arkansas, about 1910. Also **MONROE BRYANT**, last heard of at Clover Bend, Arkansas, in 1896. **A. W. AUSTIN** and **MARTIN BRANNON**, last heard of at Fortia, Arkansas, in 1896. Information of these persons will be gratefully appreciated by E. T., care of this magazine.

**MILLER, MR.**, who was a foreman in a publishing house in 1904-5, in New York City. He had two daughters, one named Freddie, and one son. They lived somewhere around Eighth or Third Avenue, above One Hundred and Twentieth Street. Any information will be gratefully appreciated by Arthur Hoctor, 299 West One Hundred and Thirty-seventh Street, New York City, care of Brower.

**LUELLA, ERNEST and RUTH.**—Please write to me in my own name at Couch Hotel, Couch and Third Streets, Portland, Oregon.

**McMANAMAN.**—Your little daughter Alhina, who is now eleven years old, would like to hear from you. She is at the same place in Edmonton, Canada. Please write her a letter addressed to L. D., care of this magazine.

**KINSEY, SHERMAN H.**, who is believed to be somewhere in the Western States, is asked to write to his nephew, H. M. Waters, 709 East Market Street, Lima, Ohio, and to Sergeant Ray Waters, Company C, Third U. S. Engineers, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

**LANGSTROTH, DOROTHY.**—When last heard of she was living on East Fifty-fourth Street, New York City. Any information regarding her present whereabouts will be gratefully received by W. F. Moreland, care of this magazine.

**MEYERS, ALBERT.**—He is about twenty-three years of age, five feet four inches in height, has only one arm, the right one having been amputated at the elbow, and there are three fingers missing on the other hand. In 1920-21, it is thought that he was employed in Philadelphia as a bookkeeper or timekeeper. He often spent the summer months along the North Jersey coast. A former pal, who is now in a position to help him, would be glad to find him, and will gratefully appreciate any helpful information. Y. A. H., care of this magazine.

**LEROUX.**—I was born in 1886, and left my home in Chicago in 1905, and have never seen or heard from my folks since that time, and have lost all track of them. My father's name is Andrew LeRoux, my mother's name is Agnie, my two sisters are Irene and Mildred, and my two brothers are William and Albert. When last seen they were living at 8745 Wentworth Avenue, Chicago. Information that will help me to communicate with my family will be gratefully appreciated. Andrew LeRoux, care of this magazine.

**KETTLER, HANS.**—He left San Luis Obispo, California, about 1914, for Alberta, Canada. He was a blacksmith by trade. His two boys, Hans and Adolf, would be very glad to hear from him, and any information that would help to find him would be gladly received by his brother-in-law, W. Bahrt, 1008½ Main Street, Dallas, Texas.

**NOTICE.**—About thirty-odd years ago a very small girl was stolen from her parents. She has a birthmark on the right side of her chest, about midway between her shoulder and the breast, which is a small, red, projecting spot, and there is also a mole behind the left ear. She is anxious to find her parents and will be deeply grateful for any information that may help her in her search. L. J., care of this magazine.

**BURGESS, DEAN.**—He came from Belfast or Dublin, Ireland, and was a veteran of the Civil War, and was last heard of in Claremore, Oklahoma, between 1890-1902. His wife was of English or Spanish descent, and her maiden name was Fletcher. She died when her only child was about three years of age, and he was then adopted by a family named Burgess, of Claremore, and was given their name. He thinks that his father and other relatives were led to believe that he was dead, also that his father had a brother, William Burgess, who lived in Milwaukee. Any information concerning them would be most gratefully received, as he is very anxious to find his own people. Glenn Burgess, care of this magazine.

**WARNER.**—Information is wanted regarding the whereabouts of the relatives of Albert Ormond Warner, who died on January 19, 1922. There are two brothers, Frank and William, who were in Montana when last heard from, an uncle, and an aunt named Belle. His parents are dead. Any information that will help to find these relatives will be gratefully appreciated by his widow, Mrs. Eva Warner, 437 Lawrence Street, Eugene, Oregon.

**ZIMMERMAN, FLORENCE ETHEL.**—She left La Grande, Oregon, on October 4, 1918. She is twenty-seven years old, five feet one inch in height, of fair complexion, with brown hair and eyes. It was heard that she had been left a widow with two children. Her mother would be very happy to hear from her, and would gratefully appreciate any information as to her exact whereabouts. Mrs. Florence S. Zimmerman, Box 21, Tangent, Oregon.

**SHACKLETON, ALFRED.**—He formerly lived in Chicago, in California, and on a ranch in the West. He is asked to write to his sister-in-law in care of this magazine. Any one who can give news of him will do a great favor by writing to H.

**HOWARD.**—When I was a little over two years old I was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Dumton, of Liberty, Maine, through an advertisement and was brought to them from Providence, Rhode Island, by a woman who gave the name of Mason. She said my people were on the stage, and that she had cared for me, but that they did not want to pay for me any longer, and wanted to find a home for me. When I was between four and five years old my foster parents went to Los Angeles. When I was twelve years old the adoption papers were shown to me, and my foster mother promised to tell me more when I was older. She died when I was about fourteen and I never could find the papers of adoption. My foster father would not kind to me and denied that I had been adopted. I was in an orphan home for a while, and in various places. According to figures given to me I was born in September 11, 1891, and my given name was John and Elizabeth Howard. If any one can help me to find my people or to know something of them I shall be deeply grateful, and shall appreciate any correspondence. Mrs. Grace Gower, care of this magazine.

**WIRGES, HERMAN.**—He was last heard from at Sacramento, California, about 1900. He prospectored in Washington, Idaho, and Nevada, in the vicinity of the Snake River complex, five feet eight inches tall. His brother is anxious to learn his present whereabouts and will be grateful for any information. John P. Wirges, Longmont, Colorado.

**WOOD, ROY.**—He was born in Cartersville, Georgia, and was last heard of in Saratoga, Wyoming. He is about twenty-eight years old. His father is worrying about him and fears that something has happened to him. Any information that will help to know where he is will be gratefully received by his old friend, Bradley S. Satterfield, 311 Hemp-hill Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia.

**ALBERT.**—Please send your address to me, Nellie B.

**STONER, WILLIAM**, who was in the marines a few years ago and whose home at that time was in Indiana, is asked to write as soon as he can, to his sister, Mrs. Clifford B. Brown, Service School Detachment, Camp Meade, Maryland.

**GIACOMA, JOHN**, private, first class, Company G, 29d Engineers, Italian by birth, above five feet four inches in height, with blue eyes, dark-brown hair, and ruddy complexion. Missing from his home in Globe, Arizona. Information as to his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated. Please write to Buddy, care of this magazine.

**ELEASON, OLE CONRAD**.—He was last heard from in Hammond, Louisiana, where he had a fruit farm about twenty-five years ago. It is thought that he may have been in the Spanish-American War and got killed. His sister would be glad to hear from anyone who has known him, or who can tell her what has become of him. It would make her very happy to know that he is alive, and to hear from him. Mrs. J. Elde, Route 1, Box 65, Cass Lake, Minnesota.

**COOK, BEN**.—He left home four years ago and was last heard of in Denver. He is sixty-two years of age, of large build, and medium complexion. Any information as to his whereabouts will be gratefully received by his daughter, Mrs. Carl Bivens, Crook, Colorado.

**PARTRIZ, ELMER**, or **FRED S. WERNER**, of the 8th French Motor Corps. Important news. Write at once to Lee Ingle, care of this magazine.

**HADLEY, H. K.**, formerly from California. Discharged first lieutenant, Company A, 78th Infantry. Information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his old company clerk, F. E. Campbell, Lock Box 363, Iron Mountain, Michigan.

**HANEY, MRS. MAUD**, who was last heard of four years ago, when she was living in Los Angeles. Information as to her present address will be appreciated by her sister-in-law, Mrs. Sara Haney, care of this magazine.

**BLAND, WILLIAM**.—He is about forty-five years old, with brown eyes and black hair mixed with gray. His mother is very anxious to hear from him. The last news of him came from Pueblo, Colorado. Any one who knows where he is now will do a great favor by writing to Mrs. M. N. Bland, Box 215, Quinton, Oklahoma.

**ROBERT, N. P.**—Son, anxious to know how you are and to send you the news. Please write to the boss' wife and to Susie.

**ROSE, or SWAN, THOMAS HEZEKIAH**.—He was adopted by a family named Swan, who moved from North Carolina to Arkansas about forty years ago. His sister would be very happy to hear from him, and will gladly receive any helpful information. Mrs. Nancy C. Dellinger, Trammel, Virginia.

**SMITH, AMOS**.—He was on the ship "Harford" in Charleston, South Carolina, first-class machinist, in 1918, and was last seen in Brooklyn, New York, in 1919, when he was discharged from the navy and said he was going to Florida to farm. If he is in a hospital and may not recover, is very anxious to hear from him. He begs him to forgive everything and to write as soon as he sees this. Norman, care of this magazine.

**GRAY, DEXTER**, sometimes known as Jack O'Hern, who left Louisville, Kentucky, in November, 1921, for California, to be married. Letters mailed to him have been returned. His mother is quite ill with worry, and begs him to write or come home at once. He is twenty-one years old, five feet ten inches tall and of ruddy complexion. Any information will be gratefully appreciated. Mrs. D. W. O'Hern, care of this magazine.

**BLECK, ADOLPH**.—He is thirty years old with dark-brown hair, blue eyes, rather heavy-set, and has slightly crippled fingers. He has been missing since June 4, 1922. His mother is in ill health and is worrying about him. Any one who knows him, or has information about him, will do a great favor by writing to his sister, Mrs. Frank H. Krause, 1372 Spencer Street, Appleton, Wisconsin.

**KANE, CHARLES E.**—He is twenty-one years old, with brown hair and eyes, and was last heard from in Fairmont, West Virginia, in the spring of 1921. He worked for a time for the B. & O. Railroad, and later for a painter do a great favor by writing to Emery J. Kane, Cooperstown, and paper hanger. Any one who can give news of him will New York.

**HARMS, CHARLES F.**—Please write and let us know where you are. Any one who knows his address is asked to communicate with Pop Davis, care of this magazine.

**WATSON, JOHN HARVEY**.—He is twenty-six years old, five feet ten inches tall, with straight black hair, dark-blue eyes, and is cripple in his right leg and foot. He walks on his toes. He left Huntington, Missouri, in 1921, and has not been heard of since. His mother would be very thankful for any information as to what has happened to him, to keep him away from her so long. Mrs. G. E. Watson, 802 North Seventh Street, Columbia, Missouri.

**HOCKENBROCK, DANIEL**.—He was last heard from in 1921, at Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His son would like to hear from him, and hopes he will see this and write as soon as possible. Philip Hockenbrock, care of this magazine.

**HERRING, JOE and CHARLES**.—Their home state is Alabama, and they were last heard of about five years ago in Baltimore, Maryland. Their father is a Baptist minister. Information as to their whereabouts will be appreciated by Claude Brown, 618 East Main Street, Eldorado, Arkansas.

**MIKE or MACK**.—Mother is not well. Please write and send her your address. She has something she wants to tell you. I am home again. Everything is O. K. Send letters in care of Garage, P.

**ADAMS, JOHN**.—Please write to your old friend at Winamac, Indiana. M. L. H.

**McPHERSON, NORMAN**.—Everything is O. K. with us. There is nothing for you to fear. Am writing General Delivery, Fort Worth, Texas. Please write at once to your wife, Vivian McPherson, Box 99, Angusville, Manitoba, Canada.

**WILLIAMS, GEORGE**, who worked for the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad Company in 1917, and lived in Milwaukee on Cold Spring Avenue. A friend would like to hear from him, or from any one who can give news of him. G. E. W., care of this magazine.

**HAYNE, THOMAS SEXTON**, the son of Thomas S. and Eliza Brown Hayne, and born in Hazelhurst, Mississippi. He is about thirty-four years old, and has several designs tattooed on his arms. Any information that will help to find him will be most gratefully appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Lily Belle Harley, 815 Broadway Building, Portland, Oregon.

**WINTERS, EARL**.—He was last heard of in Nevada a few months ago. Any one who knows his whereabouts please write to Ralph Brown, 738 Hoyt Street, Portland, Oregon.

**SKILES, JAMES ROBERT**.—He was last heard of in Missouri twenty-eight years ago. He is seventy-three years old, about five feet six inches tall, and has brown hair and eyes. Also **GEORGE SKILES**, who was last heard of in Nebraska about thirty-seven years ago. He is about sixty years old, five feet eight inches tall, and had light-brown hair and blue eyes. Information about these men is anxiously sought by a near relative, who will greatly appreciate any assistance in finding them. Mrs. Alice McAdams, care of this magazine.

**EDWIN**.—Everything is O. K. I will do just as you say. Let me know where to meet you. Lovingly, Mother.

**NOTICE**.—Any of the boys from the Big Five Boarding House, who still owe board money, may pay the same by money order to Zuch, Negley, Ohio. It is known that you boys are honest and the money is much needed right now.

**BAILEY, ARTHUR**.—He disappeared from his home near Durling, West Virginia, about 1904-5, and has not been heard from since. His old schoolmate and friend would like to hear from him, or from anyone who can give news of him. He is now about forty-one years of age. Joseph C. Finch, Box 1612, Eldorado, Arkansas.

**FALIDE, HANS A.**—He was in B Company, 315th Engineers, A. E. F., and was last heard from in Lieser, Germany, in January, 1919. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a kindness by writing to John B. Petersen, 2629 Yale Avenue, North, Seattle, Washington.

**HOOVER**.—My father died when I was small, leaving me and four other children for our mother to support. I was adopted in Douglas, Butler County, Kansas, and my name was changed from Sarah Hoover to Ardine Cook. My other children were: Loretta, Willie, Annie, and Janie. I don't know whether they were adopted, or what became of them. When I last heard of them, about forty years ago, they were still in Douglas. Any information that would help me to find my long-lost family would be most gratefully appreciated. Mrs. A. C., care of this magazine.

**HUBARTT, or BAXTER, CORA A.**—She was last heard of at Indianapolis, Indiana, and after leaving there married Frank Baxter. Her brothers were William T. and Otto, and her sisters were Loretta, Leonia, and Mary. Also **FRANK EMEY**, who was an heir of a contractor of Free Methodists at Orleans, Nebraska, about twenty-two years ago. His wife's name was Nora. They had four children. Information of these persons will be gladly received by a relative, E. N. H., care of this magazine.

**BILL and ROSS**.—Please write to Jack where you last heard from him. J. B. M.

**ROSE E.**—Everybody well, including dad. If lonesome come to sister. The past will be forgotten and everything will be forgiven. Ida Alpert.

**DUDE**.—Please write. I have some real good news for you. It will make me very happy to hear from you. F. T., Camp Logan Drug Store, Route 4, Houston, Texas.

**KETTLE, JOHN**, who was connected for some years with the Manhattan Storage Company, asks his two daughters to communicate with him at Buttery Farm, Marquette, New York, care of Clay.



**TAYLOR, JOHN.**—He left England when he was nineteen years old, about forty years ago. His sister, Amelia Shelton, last heard from him thirty-seven years ago, when he was somewhere in Illinois. His niece, Amelia's eldest daughter, would appreciate any information about him, and will gladly receive any helpful correspondence. His brother Matilda died twenty years ago in England. Polly Davis, and his two brothers, Trias and Bill, are still in England. Please write to Ethel Engelbert, 11 East Seventh Street, Portland, Oregon.

**HALL, GEORGE,** also known as Prize, twenty-eight to thirty years of age, hair turning gray, left arm amputated. Also **GEORGE MONCRIFF,** formerly of Dearborn, Manitoba, died twenty years ago in a ranch in Montana. These two are asked to write to their friend, R. E. Penfold, care of this magazine.

**SCHAEZTLE, CARL E.**—He was last heard of in May, 1922, in Brooklyn, New York. A friend would be glad to hear from him. R. R. H., care of this magazine.

**KUBIK, or KERN, CHARLES J.**—He was last heard from in the West. He is about thirty-four years old, short and stocky, with brown hair and rather small light-blue eyes. He has three fingers disfigured on the right hand. His left hand is fourteen years old. He is in the Northampton Hospital, and is asking for him continually. Any one who can give information that will help to find him will do a very great favor by writing to his father, Mrs. Anna E. Chandler, 91 Old Bridge Street, West Springfield, Massachusetts.

**WASHBURN, MRS. GERTIE.**—She was last heard of in Moose Jaw, Canada. Any one who knows where she is, or can give any news of her, will do a great favor by writing to her daughter, Violet Washburn, care of this magazine.

**TRIPLETT, FORBES B.** who was last seen in Philadelphia, and who left home in search of work. His wife is still worrying about him, and begs him to write to her. Any one who knows where he is, please write to Mrs. P. R. Triplett, 329 Vine Street, Hammonton, New Jersey.

**STEWART, JAY.**—Please write. Same town and same address. Am waiting anxiously to hear from you. L. H.

**SCOTT, CHRISTOPHER.**—He is about twenty-four years old, fair, with blue eyes and light-brown hair. He was last heard from December 10, 1918, when he was a day clerk at the Hotel Astor, New York City. Information as to his whereabouts will be gratefully appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Esther Sowards, 405 Camp Street, Huntington, West Virginia.

**MAY.**—Mother is very ill. Come home at once. She wants to see you. S. Pike.

**BARKDOLL, HAROLD.**—He was last seen in Wenatchee, Washington, in September, 1918. He is about nineteen years old, five feet ten inches tall, with light hair and blue eyes. He, or any one who knows where he is, will do a favor by writing to Box 184, Mansfield, Washington.

**EVERETT.**—There is a little, curly-haired girl named Eleanor, who wants her daddy to come home. Her mamma and baby sister want him, too. Daddy, please come. Rhes.

**JACKSON, SUMNER H.** who was last heard of in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1921. Information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by R. Woods, care of this magazine.

**PUFFER, ELLSWORTH,** who was last heard of at Battle Creek, Michigan, nine years ago. His only sister would be grateful for any information about him. **HAROLD BERRY,** who was last heard of seven years ago at St. Maries, Idaho, and is now fifteen years old, is asked to let his mother know where he is. Any one who can give information that will help to communicate with these persons will do a great favor by writing to H. A. G., care of this magazine.

**McDUGALL, RODERICK (BUD).**—He has red hair, blue eyes, is short, and has been gone since 1915. Any one who knows his whereabouts, or who can give any news of him, will do a favor by writing to his sister, who will be most grateful for any assistance in finding her brother. Mrs. Pearl Lawson, Box 354, Freewater, Oregon.

**AXTON, MRS. MAUDE,** who left her home in Prescott, Arizona, on October 5, 1920, and was last heard of a month later, when she was leaving Tucson, that State, and has never been heard of since. Her five children would be grateful for any information that would help them to find their mother. R. L. A., care of this magazine.

**GORDON, KATE.**—My mother died when I was a small child and my father put me and my two brothers, John and Robert, in the New York Juvenile Asylum, but he did not put my sister Katie there, and I have never seen her since. I am now forty-five years old, and think she is a few years older. I am sure I will see this and write to me, or if any one who has known her could give me news of her I would appreciate their kindness. Was adopted, and my name is now Joseph G. Marston. Please write in care of this magazine.

**BARNETT, SAM.**—He left Hamilton County, Texas, twenty-five years ago, and went to New Mexico, and later to Bisbee, Arizona. He is now forty-nine years old, of medium height, with light-brown hair and blue eyes. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by M. E. B., care of this magazine.

**SLEEPER, SARAH and JIM.**—The last time I heard of them was when their aunt, Mrs. Wood, sent for them when they were living with my mother, Mrs. Sue Early, in the Creek Nation, about thirty-five years ago. Any information that would help to find them will be gratefully received. Mrs. Maud Early Venable, Drumright, Oklahoma.

**SMITH, MARY TRYAN J.**—She was last heard of in Salt Lake City. She left her daughter in Vernal, Utah, in February, 1899, and her son in Salem, Utah, with his grandmother. She is now about fifty-one years of age, and had dark auburn hair and fair complexion. Any one who can give news of her will do a great favor by notifying her daughter Mamie, Mrs. Mary Morland, Troutdale, Oregon.

**HOGAN, MARIE,** who was in the hospital in New Orleans between December, 1919, and February, 1920. A very dear friend would like to know her whereabouts and will appreciate any helpful information. Earl, care of this magazine.

**ARCHIE.**—Please write and let me know where you are. Your sister Margaret, 1528 Fourteenth Street, Bedford, Indiana.

**BITTS, MRS. LEON.**—She was born in Horton, Kansas, and is now twenty-four years of age. Her maiden name was Anderson, and she was last heard of at St. Joseph, Missouri. Her mother is very anxious to hear from her and begs her to write. She will appreciate any information as to her present address. Mrs. T. W. Bennett, 5012 North Thirtieth Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

**COFFER, HERBERT.**—He is about six feet tall, of slim build, with dark hair and eyes, and was last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri, in October, 1922. His mother will be very grateful for any information that will help her to know where he is, as she would be very happy to communicate with him. Mrs. Ida Coffey, 329 East Rock Street, Aurora, Missouri.

**MOSS, WILLIAM.**—He left Fort Worth, Texas, in 1917, and was last heard of in Decatur, Illinois. There is important news awaiting him regarding some property in Canada, and it is urged that he would be grateful, as much as possible. E. A. Moss, Box 155, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

**MITCHELL, R. P., and HARRELL HOWIT** are asked to write to their friend, Dewey J. Stanford, 512 West Jackson Street, Hugo, Oklahoma.

**YOUNG, LAFE.**—He is elderly, with dark hair turning gray, gray eyes, and is about five feet nine inches tall. It is thought he may be in California. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a favor by writing to L. B. in care of this magazine.

**CUMMINGS, IKE,** and his wife, who lived in Joplin, Missouri, thirty-nine years ago. A friend would be glad to hear from them or from any one who knows their whereabouts. R. B. E., care of this magazine.

**BEEBE, LEONARD H.**—His brother would like very much to hear from him, and will gratefully appreciate any information as to his present whereabouts. Lawrence E. Beebe, P. O. Box 591, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

**ARPON, DIONISIO A.**—He enlisted in the navy in 1908, at Cavite, Philippine Islands, and it was heard that he was on the U. S. S. "Pungtung" and returned to the United States. Any one who knows about him, or can give his present address, will do a favor by writing to his brother, Constantino Arpon, 712 West Temple Street, Los Angeles, California.

**MARTIN, HARRY KENNETH.**—Write to your mother at once, or come yourself. She is seriously ill and nothing will save her but to get news of you. Don't fail to let her know where you are, and if possible come to her. L.

**CAMPBELL, WILTON A.**—He was last heard of at Phoenix, Arizona, in June, 1922. He is nineteen years old, tall, and fair. His mother is very anxious to hear from him, as his oldest boy died recently, leaving her lonely and alone, heartbroken. Any information that will help to find this young man will be gratefully received. Mrs. Juanita Campbell, 42 Clark Block, Billings, Montana.

**WHITE, WILLIAM, JAMES, and JOHN,** natives of Paterson, New Jersey. Their father, William, was a painter. There is a legacy waiting for each one, and they are asked to communicate with their uncle without delay. Hallett B. White, 469 South Tenth Street, Newark, New Jersey.

**ATTENTION.**—Members of Company B, Eighth Infantry, between November, 1909, and September, 1912, please write to your old buddy, Wilbur H. Murrell, 3623 Riverside Drive, Cleveland, Ohio.