EVERY WEEK FEB. 13, 1926

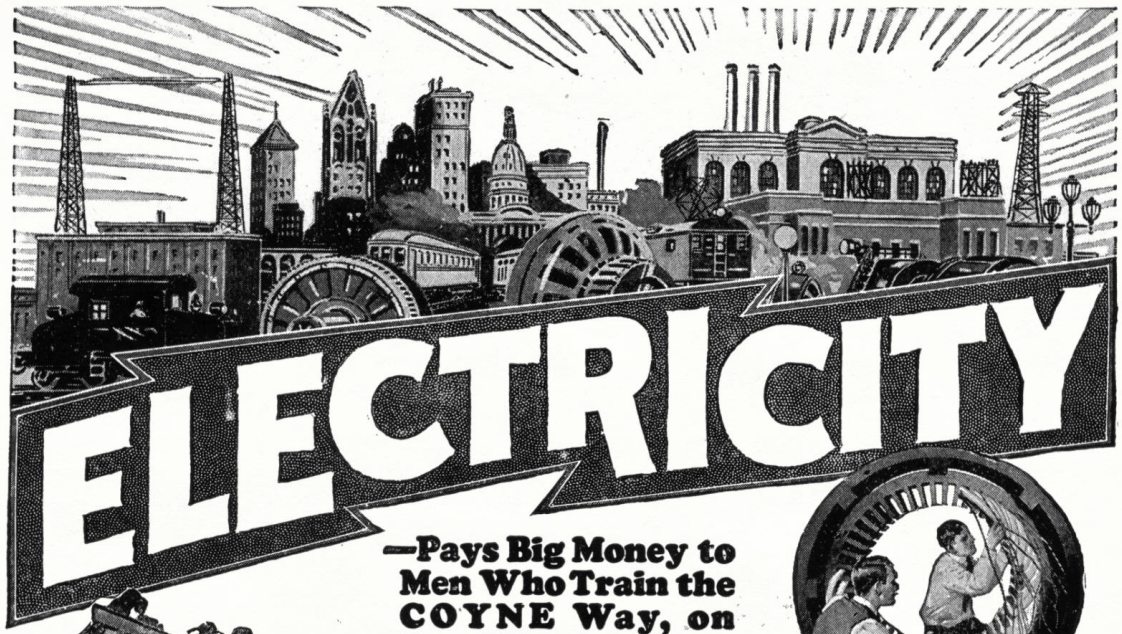
# Western Story Magazine

REGISTERED U.S. PAT. OFF.

15 CTS. STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

BIG, CLEAN STORIES OF OUTDOOR LIFE

*It stands to reason: There is no substitute for personal, practical training*

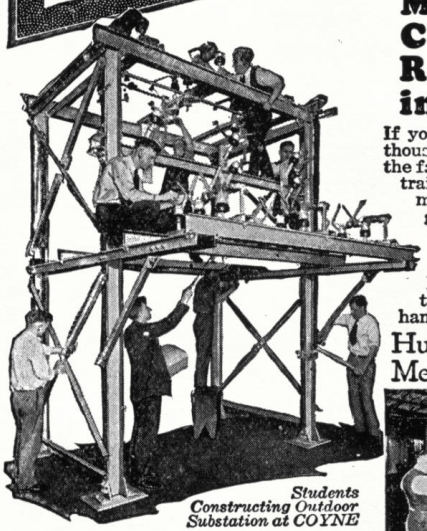


# ELECTRICITY

## —Pays Big Money to Men Who Train the COYNE Way, on Real Equipment, in Great Shops!

If you are going to train for one of the thousands of BIG-PAY opportunities in the fascinating Electrical Field, why not train on real, gigantic electrical equipment such as you will find in the great Shops of COYNE at Chicago, the electrical center of the world? COYNE training is thorough but easy to understand, because EXPERT instructors guide you at every turn, as you work with your own hands on big, modern apparatus.

*Student Winding Stator at COYNE*

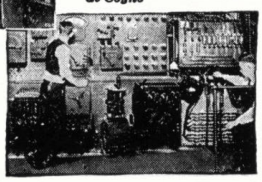


*Students Constructing Outdoor Substation at COYNE*

## Hundreds of COYNE-Trained Men Earn $60 to $200 a Week

*Students producing "artificial lightning" on Telsa coil in great shops of Coyne*

*Students operating large switchboard at Coyne*



## COMPLETE ELECTRICAL TRAINING

### In 12 Happy Weeks at Coyne

H. C. LEWIS
President, Coyne Electrical School

My newly enlarged Electrical Course is the result of 27 years of experience, solving the needs of young men and of the Electrical Field. COYNE has been teaching Electricity in a PRACTICAL way since 1899.

My course is thorough, easy to master, and fits men for BIG Electrical jobs, the HIGH-SALARIED *thrilling* jobs.

## Earn While You Learn at COYNE

My well-organized EMPLOYMENT DEPARTMENT helps you to get a job to earn part or all of your expenses while training at COYNE and assists you to a good job on graduation. Furthermore, it stands by you THROUGH LIFE without a penny of extra cost to you.

**Big Special Offer If You Act NOW!**
**I'll include with my course, without extra charge, my big Extra Courses in Radio Electricity and Auto, Truck and Tractor Electricity.**

## We Teach Electricity and Nothing Else

COYNE teaches only ONE thing—ELECTRICITY. We are SPECIALISTS. Our interests are not divided, nor is Electricity a sideline or merely an "additional" subject with us.

### You Can Start Any Day of the Year at COYNE —No Classes or Seasons

## SEND COUPON NOW

**H. C. LEWIS, President**
**COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL**
**1300-10 W. Harrison St.,**
**Dept. 1542, Chicago, Illinois**

Dear H. C.—You can just bet I want one of those big, handsome FREE 12x15 books, with 151 actual photographs printed in two colors. Send it quick, before the supply is exhausted. Be sure to tell me all about *Special Courses without extra cost.*

*Name* .....

*Address* .....

I want to send you a copy of my big, attractive Electrical Book. It is 12 x 15 in size and contains 151 photos of electrical scenes. Tells about dynamos, radios, autos, airplanes, farm lighting and power, etc. *Absolutely FREE, Remember.*

# COYNE
## ELECTRICAL SCHOOL

**H. C. LEWIS, President** **Established 1899**
**1300-10 W. Harrison St., Dept. 1542, Chicago**

*Not a Correspondence Course*
*All Practical, Personal Training*

## *You Don't Need Advanced Education or Experience*

Don't worry if you lack advanced education, knowledge of higher mathematics, or experience. My course is a *practical*, LEARN-BY-DOING Course. Every COYNE student receives INDIVIDUAL and PERSONAL instruction, on COMPLETE electrical apparatus, under EXPERT INSTRUCTORS, in the COYNE Shops at Chicago.

Men who never before had the slightest knowledge of ELECTRICITY have become REAL ELECTRICAL EXPERTS and stepped into BIG PAY JOBS because of our advanced simplified, practical, methods of training.

# Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

**Vol. LVIII** **Contents for February 13, 1926** **No. 4**

ONE NOVEL



TWO SERIALS



FIVE SHORT STORIES



TWO ARTICLES



MISCELLANEOUS



DEPARTMENTS



Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary.  Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $7.50. Foreign, $8.50.



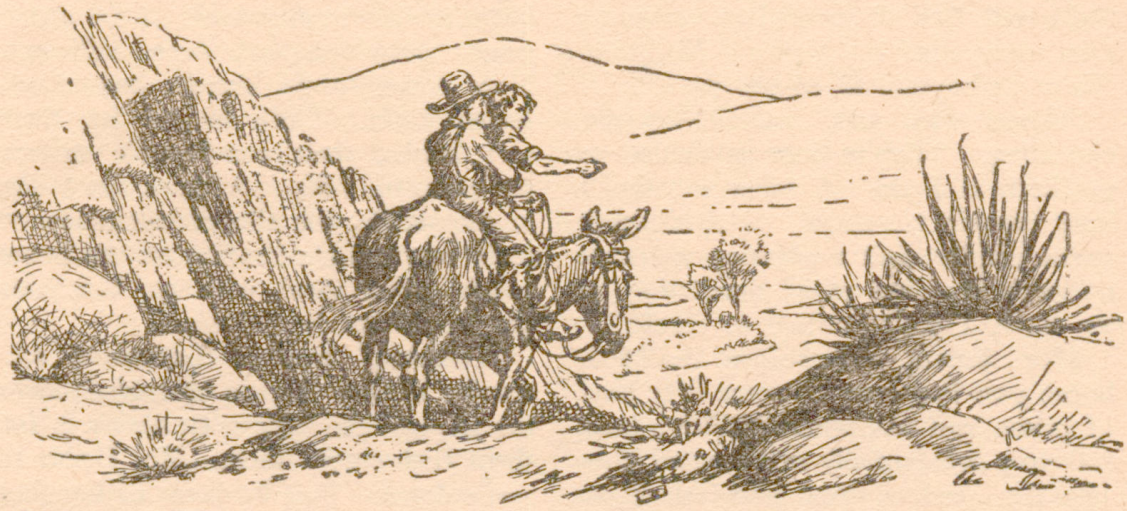
**Address all communications to the Street & Smith Corporation**

***YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $6.00*** ***SINGLE COPIES, 15 CENTS***

# Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LVIII FEBRUARY 13, 1926 No. 4

# The Fence Across the Canyon

## (A Windy De Long Story)


**By Robert Ormond Case**

*Author of "'Dynamite' Smith, Buckaroo," etc.*


### CHAPTER I.

"FETCH YOUR GUNS, MCQUIRK."

SUNSET was flaming in the western sky as "Lonesome" McQuirk and "Windy" DeLong surmounted the crest of the last ridge, and so came into view of their homestead. Both were travel stained and weary. Their mounts were heavy footed, with hollow flanks streaked with perspiration. Fifty miles since sunup, across the blistering Condon plains, had taken toll.

Yet Lonesome sat a little straighter in the saddle and tugged complacently at his tawny, drooping mustache, as his pale-blue eyes rested on the scene below. Through the mellow shadows that were stealing into the sheltered valley, the squat, comfortable farm buildings, the feed racks, corrals and sheds, and the saddle horses, lazily grouped near the water hole beneath the locust tree, formed a pleasing picture that was old and familiar.

"Home again, Windy," said Lonesome, his seamed and weather-beaten face wrinkling in a grin of sheer de-

delight. "The old place is still on the map, huh? Them hosses don't look like they've even moved from the water hole since we left. Ain't it funny how the old place don't change none while we're gone?"

"Yeah," returned his lean and saturnine partner with some sarcasm. His black eyes glittered, and his black mustache bristled sardonically; "and that's the same locust tree that was growing by the water hole when we left. Danged if it ain't. I expect, though, them colts has all growed up on us by this time, huh? Yessir, McQuirk. We've been gone all of ten days."

"G'wan with you," said Lonesome, chuckling. "You're just as tickled to get back as I am. A feller can live a long time in ten days. If that layout down yonder ain't a pleasing spectacle to gents that has et as much dust as we have, I ain't entitled to credit."

More than a week before, the hard-bitten pair had escorted some fifty head of prime beef to Condon. With a bank roll very substantially rejuvenated, they felt the need of rest and relaxation after the more or less strenuous routine of the home ranch. Consequently, they rode down Harney Valley way for the purpose of passing the time of day with the boys on some of the large outfits in that region.

It had proved to be a thoroughly enjoyable jaunt, harking back to early lurid days in the Southwest when the pair had written their names large on the cattle history of the Panhandle—when both were known as hard-bitten, hard-fighting products of the old school. Down Harney Valley way, where far ranges were yet unfenced, they had given way to nomadic instincts of old. From Burns, south and east to the Roaring Springs Country, where optimistic dry-land farmers had not yet left their scars on undulating miles of sage and bunch grass, they had eased their way into more than one grinning circle around the chuck-wagon fire. They had lifted up their voices with the night riders standing guard, where the uneasy herd bedded down beneath the brilliant stars.

There had been something lacking. Both knew it secretly; yet neither would admit it to the other. In those earlier years, each day had been sufficient unto itself. In the saddle they spent their waking hours; a poncho spread beneath the stars sufficed, by night; food of whatever variety and quantity the circumstances of the chuck wagon provided, had been sufficient. Now some subtle change had manifested itself. Both longed for their soft bunks, their comfortable cabins, the peaceful hills. After a hard day in the saddle, the alleged monotony of their comfortable routine on the home ranch called them with an insistence that could not be denied.

"DeLong," averred Lonesome solemnly, as their horses shambled down the slopes, "the wide-open spaces is for them that craves them. Me, I aim to settle down. This business of hanging your hat on a chaparral, and bedding down with rattlesnakes and sand fleas, may be all right for young fellers that don't know no better. But you and me is getting too old for that kind of nonsense."

"Maybe so," agreed Windy absently, his eyes glued on the green-garden patch below the cabin. "Question is, McQuirk, while we was gone, did any of that no-account stock get into my garden patch? If so, do you expect they tromped on my squash?"

Lonesome all but chuckled outright at this. The spectacle of Windy DeLong, ex-gunman, ex-partner in lurid enterprises along the Rio Grande and points north, becoming entangled in raising garden truck had been ludicrous enough. But his hard-bitten partner's further ambition to raise a prize squash, to be exhibited at the tri-county fair at

Condon, had appealed to him as the pinnacle of excruciating humor.

Despite the humorous aspects of the situation, Lonesome was forced to concede that Windy had been singularly successful. The rich, black soil of the garden patch, subirrigated from the spring, had produced quantities of garden stuffs that had added tremendously to their bill of fare throughout the summer. King of the garden patch was the squash, a bulbous vegetable of colossal proportions. Windy had watched its development with an eagle eye. He had trimmed all other buds from the enormous vine so that all its vitality was concentrated in the single offspring. The result had been a behemoth among vegetables—flawless, colossal.

"I got you figured now, Windy," said Lonesome, his blue eyes twinkling. "Down in the Roaring Springs Country, it was plain they was something on your mind. Anybody with half an eye could see you was ailing to get back. I figgered maybe you was worrying about the yearlings we left back here, or the saddle stock, maybe, or that the shack was liable to burn down while we was gone. But that was a haywire idea. Were you thinking about them trifling things? You were not. It was a heavier responsibility that was bowing you down. Yessir, I'll gamble you laid awake nights, thinking about that said squash."

"It was you that was raring to get back," retorted Windy. "Don't kid me, McQuirk. Whereas we all got our little weaknesses, you'll be stiff and saddle sore in the morning, but I'll gamble dollars to doughnuts you're figgering right now on riding out bright and early in the morning to see the schoolma'am. Now ain't you? Don't kid me, McQuirk. Another couple of days away from that redheaded gal, and you'd have been plumb loco. Yessir, you'd have been out among the pinnacles picking wild flowers and talking to yourself."

"Speaking of the squash," interposed Lonesome hurriedly, his ears burning, "there it lays, bigger and prettier than ever. Your garden is just like you left it, Windy."

Swinging down among the farm buildings, Lonesome headed directly toward the water trough. Windy pulled his horse a little to one side, leaned from his saddle to inspect the garden in passing, then halted abruptly; his burst of profanity causing Lonesome to turn in the saddle.

"Some critter's been in the garden," announced Windy vehemently. "He's et up all the string beans and most of the carrots. Yessir, and he's been chawing on them roasting ears."

"Well, I'm danged," Lonesome offered sympathetically as he climbed stiffly to the ground.

"How in blazes did he get in?" Windy leaned over the spread rail fence to peer at the tracks. "The gate's still chained, and the fence ain't down. It was a horse, all right, a small-footed maverick. It ain't one of our string. I don't recognize the tracks at all. Ain't it the bunk, McQuirk? I'll swear, it's enough to take the heart out of a man."

"It was a fuzz tail, maybe," said Lonesome. "A wild one, that come wandering through here, and the green stuff caught his eye. But don't you worry none about the beans and the carrots. They done outlived their usefulness. I'll admit it's too bad about the roasting ears, but you'd ought to be thankful the maverick ain't harmed your squash."

Windy refused to be comforted. He grumbled loud and profanely as they put away their horses and limped stiffly toward the cabin.

"I'll build that fence a couple of rails higher," he vowed. "If that don't keep the maverick out, I'll build it so high a wildcat would wear out his nails

climbing over it. It's bad enough to have the rest of our truck eaten up, but I ain't going to take no chances with the squash."

Lonesome paid little heed to his partner's complaint. The joy of busying himself about the familiar premises filled him with content. When the supper dishes had been washed, he seated himself heavily on the edge of his bunk and yawned luxuriously.

"I aim to go to bed," he announced. "My shoulder blades are plumb paralyzed from sleeping on rocks and such. I aim to sleep till noon to-morrow."

It was shortly after sunrise the following morning that Lonesome, drunk with sleep, was aware of unusual activity in and about the cabin. He had a vague remembrance of Windy stealing softly forth and closing the door behind him. There had followed a considerable commotion outside, interspersed with unmistakable profanity. Vaguely, he wondered why his partner should be stirring abroad so early in the morning, and with such energy. He was jerked into instant wakefulness by a wild yell from Windy.

"McQuirk"—his partner's voice expressed both fear and rage—"fetch your guns! Come a-runnin'!"

## CHAPTER II.

### O'HARA SPRINGS.

AS Lonesome leaped to the floor, he whipped his guns from the two holsters suspended from a peg on the wall above the bed. He did not pause to speculate on the cause of the uproar. He knew Windy of old. Fear was not in his partner; yet his appeal for help had been both fearful and enraged, proof enough that a crisis was impending.

Three swift strides carried him to the door which was slightly ajar. He kicked this open and leaped forth upon the lower step, unwavering guns before him, his square jaw set, every muscle in his body tensed for instant action.

The brilliance of the early morning sunlight was dazzling. Through narrowed lids, he cast a lightning glance about him, striving to make an instant appraisal of whatever menace had caused his partner to call for help.

Windy was in the garden, his black mustache bristling with rage, eyes gleaming. He had made his stand astride his beloved squash. In his hand was a split portion of fence post which he held upright in a position calculated to make the bludgeon most effective as a means of offense or defense.

He paid little heed to Windy. His attention was riveted by the animal facing his partner across the wreck of garden, an animal of such proportions and characteristics, that he laid his left-hand gun softly on the step beside him, rubbed his eyes, and looked again.

It was a blue mule, tall and rangy and bony beyond belief, an unkempt and altogether disreputable animal, whose very existence seemed inexcusable. Lonesome knew little of mules, yet even his limited experience told him that here was an outstanding and colossal example of its kind. It was as high at the withers as a man of medium height, and the bony line from wither to rump was as straight as that of a lean steer on the range. His legs were long and slender, somewhat knobby of knees and fetlock, with small, dainty hoofs.

At the moment, he was standing, slightly straddled of leg, every bony line of his carriage breathing belligerence. He was not exactly facing Windy, and this fact added to his sinister appearance. Almost imperceptibly, his rear portions seemed to edge toward his adversary. His scrawny tail pressed tightly between his legs, his great ears laid back against his serpentine neck. From their bony sockets,

his heavy-lidded eyes seemed to gaze upon Windy with a kind of mournful and speculative intentness. Lonesome noted that the contour of the animal's nose was of the type known as Roman.

These details Lonesome took in at a glance. At his appearance, the hybrid had cocked a huge, inquiring ear toward him, while the other remained directed at Windy.

"Don't stand there like a dumb-bell," advised Windy vehemently. "Shoot him, McQuirk. Fill him full of lead."

Lonesome eyed his partner with some irritation, the chill morning breeze from the cañon, playing frigidly over his muscular but scantily clad person.

"What ails you, DeLong. From the way you squawked, I figgered at least a half-dozen holdup men had the drop on you. Why don't you chase that animated feed rack off the premises and call it a day?"

"Chase him off?" Windy's lean face was swollen with wrath. "I've chased him till I was blue in the face. He jumped in but the low-down polecat won't jump out again. Meanwhile, he tromps down everything in the garden. If I was to move from here, he'd tromp the squash. For the love of Pete, don't argue with me, McQuirk. Shoot the critter and give me the pleasure of burying him."

"I'll open the gate," offered Lonesome sagely. "He'd ought to take the hint, hadn't he?"

"Don't touch the gate," pleaded Windy. "He thinks that chain is a rattlesnake. Just you touch it, and he'll start going round and round again. If you ain't going to shoot him McQuirk"—his voice became wheedling—"go saddle your horse and lay your rope on this critter. Meanwhile, I'll stand guard here and see that he don't do any more damage. I figure I've got his goat. If he comes near me, I'll bean him."

"You ain't within shouting distance of that critter's goat," averred Lonesome. "Anybody with half an eye could see you was out on a limb. For two cents, I'd leave you playing 'ring-around-the-rosy' with your little playmate, but I expect I'd better help you out before I have to bury you both."

Grumbling, he returned into the cabin, replaced his guns in the holsters, and donned his clothing. In a leisurely manner, notwithstanding Windy's loud demand for speed, he saddled his horse, and returned to the garden.

"Stand out from under when I make my throw, DeLong," he advised, as he loosened his rope. "I ain't never laid a rope on a mule before. I've got a hunch it's like tangling with a wildcat. The least that can happen is that you've got to build that fence again."

"Don't give him any slack," advised Windy. "Never mind the fence."

The mule did not wait for the rope. As his rolling eye observed the loop circling slowly above Lonesome's head, he sidled toward the fence. Crouching a little, he leaped over the barrier with an ease and lightness that spoke volumes for the power of his rawhide muscles. Then he was gone, heading westward toward the ridge, his long legs covering the ground at astonishing speed.

Chuckling, Lonesome turned to Windy. That worthy had already scaled the fence and was charging toward the corral.

"Wait till I saddle my critter," he called over his shoulder. "We'll go get him, McQuirk."

"What's the idea?" demanded Lonesome as the pair spurred forth in pursuit. "Why don't you let the mangy maverick go? We ain't lost any mule."

"He'll be back again to-morrow morning," Windy pointed out. "We can't have the critter pestering us that way. We'll throw him in the corral and post a stray notice. If the owner comes to claim him, I aim to assess him

twenty-five dollars for the damage he's done. On top of that, McQuirk"—he lowered his voice impressively—"there's something mighty funny about this business."

"It's a little humorous at that," agreed Lonesome. "But nothing to get pop-eyed about. What you driving at, Windy?"

"We've been gone ten days," said Windy. "We ain't seen anybody since we came back. We don't know what's been going on. Well, sir, there's nobody running any mules within twenty miles of these parts, is there? But that mule ain't coming more than a mile or two every morning to tromp on our garden."

"Sounds reasonable. Then what?"

"Just this, and it don't look good to me, McQuirk. While we were gone, some wagon outfit has moved into our range. Some one is within a couple of miles of where we are right now. They're hiding out. Well, sir, we'd ought to give them the once over, hadn't we? If that long-eared monstrosity is any indication, they're a pretty funny layout."

"You're right at that," agreed Lonesome. "They's been some queer outfits moving up from the south lately."

"Worthless, them drifters," averred Windy. "I ain't a gent that's particular about his neighbors, you understand, but an outfit like that could hide in these draws and pinnacles for a month. Pretty soon we'd be missing calves off the range. Then some of our colts would show up missing. If they're that kind, they're always the first to squawk. The way I figure it, we'd best nail this mule. That'll fetch them, bellering their heads off about stealing a poor man's critter. But they'll beller louder than ever, before they've squared for the damage that critter's done."

"They's only one thing wrong with your idea," said Lonesome, pulling his hat lower over his eyes as he peered straight ahead. "We've been eating that maverick's dust for ten minutes, and we ain't closed in on him yet. Let's speed up a little."

They had surmounted the crest of the ridge. Somewhat to their astonishmerit, they discovered that the blue mule was already far down in the next cañon, and still maintaining his lead. They accordingly spurred their mounts to a faster pace and finally to a dead run. Their horses were powerful and rangy, built expressly for the work in hand. Thus, the gaunt mule was slowly overhauled, though he extended himself to the limit of his ungainly stride in an attempt to escape.

The cañon merged into another and deeper rift, extending north and south. Down this ancient watercourse, the blue hybrid thundered, with the whooping partners hard at his heels. Even as they reached for their ropes, their quarry turned sharply to the left, and up a draw leading toward the southwest. The crest of the slope on either side was crowned with great ledges of crumbling basalt, unscalable for man or beast. The partners looked at each other in triumph. The blue mule had turned into a blind cañon.

"He's leading us right into O'Hara's Springs," said Windy, chuckling. "Mule, you're in a jack pot."

The pair knew every foot of the country thoroughly. At the head of the blind cañon was a small spring. Located near by were the ancient buildings of an abandoned homestead. Tradition had it that a pioneer named O'Hara had here pitted his courage against the harsh environment in an endeavor to raise wheat on the dry mesas above. The dice had been loaded against him. Only the bleached and sagging buildings remained as evidence of his blasted hopes. Cattle and horses, having drunk their fill at the spring, would doze sometimes in the shadow of those ancient walls from whence the

doors had long since fallen, and where the gaping windows were overgrown with wild honeysuckle. O'Hara was gone. The marks of his passing were fading fast from the land. Only the sparkling spring remained unchanged.

"McQuirk," said Windy, "there's been a wagon outfit along here the last three-four days. Look—where the sand ain't blowed, you can see the marks plain. Now how in blazes could a wagon get in here without coming through our place? There ain't no other way to get in, unless they came up the main cañon."

"That's just what they done," agreed Lonesome, studying the tracks. "They must have turned off at the toll bridge and kept along the west side of the river. That old trail ain't been used for twenty years. It ain't even a trail any more. These hombres must be kind of careless about the roads they travel on."

"Yeah, or they ain't figuring on meeting up with anybody," Windy pointed out. "By gravy, McQuirk, there's only one set of tracks. They're still up here at O'Hara's Springs. That blue maverick done headed right back to his own outfit. Well, sir, it's pretty early in the morning for a social call, but we'd best give them the once over."

They had now slackened their speed since the need for haste had departed. Ahead of them, ranging higher up the slope, the gaunt mule had slowed to an ungainly trot. The partners paid scant attention to their late quarry. A turn in the cañon now brought the end of the fissure and O'Hara's Springs into view.

"There they are," said Windy, his black mustache bristling. "They've made camp in the old shack. They're a more shiftless outfit than I thought, McQuirk. Look at their tumble-down wagon. Where's their horses? They ain't none in sight. If that ain't a worthless outfit, I'll throw in with you."

"Windy," said Lonesome, tightening his belt in an almost unconscious gesture as he stared fixedly at the scene before them, "this ain't no kind of business to undertake on an empty stomach. We'd ought to have had breakfast before we started. It makes me feel kind of busted down and plumb discouraged just to look at that layout."

Desolation was the keynote of O'Hara's springs. The end of the cañon was like a vast ampitheater crowned with columns of solid basalt. Centuries of erosion had produced perhaps a half acre of sand, extending from the base of the slope to the boulder-strewn watercourse. From beneath the rocky ledge where flat and hillside joined, a spring boiled up, the constant seepage clothing the flat in tangled vegetation.

Beside the spring were the cabin and near ruins of the other outbuildings and corrals that O'Hara had built. From the stone chimney of the weather-beaten cabin, a wisp of blue smoke rose thin and straight in the chill air. To guard further against the cold of night, the new occupants had hung blankets over door and window. Drawn up near at hand was a light spring wagon of the prairie-schooner type, ancient and weather-beaten as the ruins themselves.

In the chill morning air, each detail stood out distinct and clear-cut. In the breathless quiet was no sound of life save the echoes of their own progress thrown back from the rocky walls. Even the thin column of smoke seemed ghostly and unreal, feeble proof that life had returned once more to a harsh environment from which other life long since had departed.

The spell was broken when they gained the flats and had covered half the distance toward the buildings. From a clump of bushes almost at their horses' feet, two boys leaped from cover and scurried toward the cabin.

They were healthy young animals, barefooted, ragged, and active as jack rabbits. Evidently, they had been observing the partners' approach from the thicket and had postponed their retreat until the last possible moment. Now they departed without ceremony, looking neither to the right nor to the left, their bare feet spurning the grass.

"Wait a second," shouted Windy, reining in his plunging horse. "Pull up, you young bull snakes. What's the gosh-awful hurry?"

"We won't hurt you boys," called Lonesome, as he gentled his snorting horse. "Don't you be afraid of us."

The fleeing youths did not slacken their pace. The shouting of the partners and the noise of the plunging horses behind them caused them to redouble their speed.

"Maw," bellowed the younger of the pair, who was in the rear. It was not wholly a call for help, but rather, was unloosed with the certainty that immediate action would be forthcoming. "Oh, Maw!"

Almost instantly, the blanket shrouding the doorway swayed as it was pushed a little to one side. Through the aperture appeared the muzzle of a rifle which peered at them steadily, as though fixed in concrete. From the gloom beyond came a sharp order in a voice that was deep but unmistakably feminine.

"Stop where you are! Put up your hands!"

The partners pulled their spirited horses to a stop. At the same moment the boys halted their headlong flight. They turned and faced their late pursuers, grinning, their hands thrust deep in the pockets of their ragged overalls.

"You'd better put 'em up," advised the older of the pair complacently. "Ma's an awful good shot. She could plug a nickel at this distance without half trying."

As the pair raised their hands, Lonesome glanced swiftly at his partner, his blue eyes twinkling. "Windy," he muttered beneath his breath, "something tells me that mangy critter of yours has led us into a wild cat's nest."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE WIDOW HOGAN.

FOR a long moment the muzzle of the rifle peered at them as though its black gimlet eye were a thing of intelligence, studying and appraising their every detail. During this inspection, the partners waited stoically enough, though beneath their unruffled exterior they were somewhat nervous. In their more or less checkered career, they had looked more than once into the business end of weapons in the hands of gentlemen whose aim was unerring and whose fingers were light on the trigger. A high-powered rifle in the hands of a woman, whose judgment and self-control were unknown quantities, was a different matter entirely.

Then the blanket was brushed aside abruptly, and the owner of the rifle stepped forth from the interior of the cabin. She was a large but well-proportioned woman, dressed in spotless but faded calico, rosy-cheeked and with black, imperious eyes. At that moment, her smooth, plump features were grim and her red lips tightly compressed, as she inspected the pair with belligerent intensity. She had lowered the rifle, but it still unmistakably had them covered. There was a capable and confident air about her that caused the partners to relax their nervous tension. Here was no amateur with firearms, no hysterical female with nervous fingers fumbling with death, but a determined woman, amply armed with a weapon whose potentialities she thoroughly understood.

At the same time, there was a strained intensity in her dark eyes that hinted of a desperation out of all proportion with the situation at hand.

"What's the idea, ma'am?" demanded Windy, an aggrieved note in his voice. "We ain't carrying any artillery. This is a fine way to say 'howdy' to neighbors, ridin' around to pass the time of day with you. I'm danged if it ain't."

The lady did not immediately reply. Some of the belligerence faded, to be replaced by a gleam of sardonic humor in her dark eyes. The boys had drawn close to her. They faced the partners nonchalantly, staring up at them with a frank curiosity. Standing thus, a marked family resemblance was evident. The youthful pair had the same dark, thick, and, in their case, bushy, hair, the same wide forehead and short uptilted nose. They were rosy-cheeked young animals of perhaps eight and ten years, their teeth were every bit as white and even as rows of corn in the milk.

"Neighbors, is it?" asked the lady. "You look harmless at that. You can put your hands in your pockets again if you want to. It's your natural pose, isn't it? Well, well, you two long-whiskered lads are neighbors of mine? It's a funny world."

It was evident that she was accustomed to speaking frankly and to the point. In her rich voice, there was more than a suggestion of a Celtic brogue.

"They were chasing Napoleon," volunteered the oldest of the boys, indicating the gaunt mule standing motionless on the hillside above, his long ears directed toward them inquisitively. "Me and Tim seen 'em. They chased him right up the cañon."

"They did, did they? Here's a fine piece of business, I'll say, snooping around before sunup, chasing our mule. Playing tag with him, I suppose? Well, don't sit there like a couple of dumbbells. What's the idea of this nonsense? You look just like a couple of lads that are just full of bright ideas. Thought he was one of your horses, perhaps?"

"Ma'am," said Windy, in a voice somewhat choked with emotion, though he strove to speak with dignity, "we ain't in the habit of battling with womenfolks. If they's anything in the shape of a man on the premises, waltz him out, and we'll give him an earful."

"You're talking to the head of the family," retorted the lady grimly, leaning the rifle against the cabin wall and folding her arms across her ample bosom. "I buried my man five years ago when Tim there was little more than a babe in arms."

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Windy somewhat abashed. "You're a widow, huh?"

"What did you think I was then, a blushing bride?" inquired the lady with some sarcasm. "But don't let that stand in your way, mister. Before I ever met Timothy Hogan, I could take my own part. Let's have that earful you mentioned a moment ago."

Windy was baffled and not a little bewildered. Accustomed to action throughout his life, though he was an expert of rare finesse in the gentle conversations that precede gun play, his experiences thus far had been confined to the world of men. He knew little of women in general, and his knowledge of the best methods of handling belligerent ladies of the type before him was absolutely nil. Moreover, the Widow Hogan was unquestionably easy to look at, and this circumstance, despite his rage, added further to his confusion. Windy, in his extremity, turned to his partner in unspoken appeal.

Lonesome had been observing the widow keenly during the interchange, watching the play of emotions over her mobile features and in her dark eyes. Several small but significant details had not escaped him. Although she had lowered the rifle after her first brief

but keen inspection, she had not taken her hand from the weapon until Windy's words had convinced her that the pair had stumbled upon her retreat by accident. At the realization that the pair had not known she was a widow, she had relaxed in relief. She had feared something else, then—but what? Why, in any event, was she here beyond the outer fringe of civilization—a lone woman with two half-grown boys, equipped only with an ancient prairie schooner that had obviously come to the end of the trail?

For these questions, Lonesome could find no answer. Nor could he explain the desperation his keen eyes saw behind the woman's belligerent and defiant manner. It was not poverty alone, he knew; starvation had not yet touched the boys or the woman herself. The trio were too healthy and well-fed. It was something beyond her present circumstances, he felt; something that lay past the hills over which she had come to this remote cañon. Even while talking to Windy, her bold glance had flitted past them with a strained and anxious gaze, as though she had acquired the habit of being perpetually and fearfully on the alert.

"We'd ought to introduce ourselves, ma'am," he said, removing his hat with a deference natural to him. "My name's McQuirk. This here is my partner, Windy DeLong."

"Windy, is it?" The widow cast a glance of thinly veiled animosity at that worthy. "Now, why did they call him Windy? It's just as plain as the nose on his face, which is considerable."

"We got a ranch over the hills a mile or two," continued Lonesome. "We never dreamt any one had moved in so close, or we wouldn't have busted in on you so sudden this morning. Of course"—his blue eyes twinkled—"if we'd have known they was a good-looking woman with a couple of such fine-looking boys, we might have been over sooner."

"Your name is McQuirk, you said? I've heard of McQuades and McQuarrys and McQualahans but never a McQuirk. It sounds like a good name at that. But none of your blarney, Mr. McQuirk. Come to think of it"—the widow examined them with new interest—"the fellow at the toll bridge below mentioned the pair of you. 'Does anybody live near O'Hara's Springs?' I asked him. 'Nobody to speak of,' he sez; 'only a couple of flea-bitten old-timers. They're pretty hard looking,' he sez, 'but harmless.'"

"Flea-bitten old-timers," murmured Windy, his mustache bristling. "McQuirk, we'd best ride around by the toll bridge, hadn't we, and see the color of this gent's eyes? Them uncalled-for remarks get me all riled up."

The widow continued calmly: "'Whereas,' he sez, 'if you was in a jack pot and needed a dozen or more fightin' wildcats to help you, you could do worse than to send for them old-timers. When it comes to action that appeals to them,' he sez, 'that pair's one large-sized crowd.'"

"I expect he ain't such a bad scout, at that," conceded Windy.

"His name is Shea," said the widow, her manner indicating that this fact ended the discussion.

"Speaking of the mule," Lonesome explained, "Windy here has raised a fine garden over to the ranch. This morning, bright and early, he finds your critter in the said garden makin' a meal off the roasting ears and carrots and such. We chased him out, and he led us in this direction as fast as he could travel. So here we are."

"Poor old Napoleon"—the widow glanced up the slope where the mule was standing, gaunt and motionless. Her rich voice was filled with affection—"he's had a hard time of it. Barney," she said sharply to the older of the

boys, "there's still some oats left in the bag. Get out the pan and give him a feed." As the boys scurried away, she turned back to the partners. "There's the finest mule that ever walked. As gentle as a kitten and with the heart of a lion."

"You mean," said Windy bitterly, "he's as gentle as a lion and has the heart of a rattlesnake. If them boys can come within forty feet of that critter, they're better mule wranglers than me and McQuirk."

"Watch them do it, then," retorted the widow with some asperity.

The boys had dragged forth a battered pan from the wagon. Into this receptacle they poured some oats from an almost empty bag. From above, the gaunt mule watched them hopefully, his great ears cocked forward.

"Oats!" cried the boys in unison. "Oats, Napoleon. Come and get it."

Immediately, the mule started down the slope at a lumbering trot, surefooted as a mountain goat, despite his apparent clumsiness. He paid no attention to the boys, all but brushing them aside in his eagerness to reach the feed pan. As the animal lowered his head the youthful pair swarmed upon him. It was evidently a race as to who would be the first to scale the bony hybrid. Barney, the older, leaped up, and secured a hand hold on the animal's withers, hooking a bare heel over the projecting ridge of backbone. From this position he strove manfully to elevate himself to the summit. But the younger Tim had a more efficient system. He threw a leg over the mule's lowered neck. The animal immediately tossed his head skyward, catapulting the youth into position on the bony midsection. After a moment of colossal struggle, the grinning and breathless pair had readjusted themselves astride the hybrid, with the triumphant Tim in front.

"Well, I'm danged." There was a grudging admiration in Windy's voice. "There's a likely pair of lads, ma'am. Me, I'd just as soon get chummy with a locoed wildcat. Them young bull snakes know a thing or two."

The widow's bitter eyes softened a little as they rested on Windy. "So you raised a garden, did you? You are more industrious than you look. It's sorry I am that Napoleon has been bothering you. The old blackguard has been on slim rations and traveling hard up to day before yesterday. He hasn't got the upper hand of his appetite yet, and no doubt your garden truck looked good to him. You should build a fence around it."

"Fence!" Windy's mustache bristled. "Ma'am, they's a split-rail fence around that garden so high they isn't a horse in these parts would tackle it. If I hadn't seen your critter jump over it, I'd have swore they was some maverick running loose that was trained to climb a ladder. Yessir, and carried his ladder with him."

"You should use barbed wire," the widow said. "Napoleon hates barbed wire worse than poison. You couldn't get him near it. But he won't trouble you much longer, Mr. DeLong. As soon as we get settled a little, me and the boys are going to throw a fence across the mouth of the cañon down there. I saw some scrub pine down in the big cañon that would make dandy fence posts, and we'll pick up some barbed wire somewhere."

The partners exchanged glances. "You aim to stay here kind of permament, ma'am?" inquired Windy.

"I do," said the widow. There was a touch of pathos in her grimness. "I couldn't go any farther if I wanted to. As long as my ammunition lasts, and food holds out, I'd like to see anybody try to move me. This is free land, isn't it?"

"Don't get me wrong, ma'am," said Windy hastily. "I was only thinking

that this was kind of a hard layout for a woman with a couple of kids. How in blazes will you make your living?"

"Don't you worry about that, mister. That's the least of my troubles. This flat here is the richest soil in the world. I can raise enough truck on it to supply myself and family. I can get me a couple of milk cows and some chickens. No, that don't worry me at all."

Lonesome had been studying the widow absently, deep in thought. Now, he awoke from his reverie and tightened the reins.

"Well, let's go, Windy. Ma'am, I've got an idea that ought to appeal to both you and Windy. We've got a couple of spools of old barbed wire over to the ranch that ain't doing us any good, so we'll just hitch up a team and pull it over here. Then you can throw that fence across the cañon in a hurry. How does that appeal to you, Windy?"

"Fine," said that worthy, glaring at his partner. "You're full of ideas, McQuirk."

"I wouldn't trouble you——" began the widow, but Lonesome stopped her with a gesture.

"Ma'am," he said, "it ain't no trouble at all. Windy here will rest a lot easier if he knows that mule is corralled. On top of that, ma'am"—his pale-blue eyes rested upon her mildly but unwinkingly—"you'd ought to have a barbed-wire fence throwed across the cañon right pronto. Nobody can sneak up on you without you knowing it. They'd have to open up the gate, and you could hear them coming."

The widow flushed and paled. Her eyes met Lonesome's squarely.

"Correct you are, Mr. McQuirk. And while we're on the subject, I can trust you boys not to spread the news that we're located here, eh?"

"Never a word," promised Lonesome. Looking back as they rode away, they saw the widow standing in the doorway of O'Hara's cabin. She was watching them go, her left hand shading her eyes, the rifle slanting from the hollow of her capable right arm.

## CHAPTER IV.

### WINDY DISCOVERS TREASURE.

AS the pair pushed homeward toward the sunrise, Windy said sarcastically, "McQuirk, you're full of great ideas. Where did you get that barbed-wire stuff? I ain't a feller that makes a habit of complaining, and they ain't a gent in seven States as generous and open-handed as Windy DeLong, but it does seem to me you are going a little too far. It's bad enough to have a troupe of orphans move in onto our range without taking them under your wing that a way."

"That ain't the half of it, Windy," said Lonesome mournfully. "I just remember I've got a little errand over on Shuttler's Flats. As soon as I get outside some ham and eggs I'd best get going. It's up to you to hook up a team and deliver that said barbed wire."

Windy sat bolt upright in the saddle. He glared at his partner, his mustache bristling. "Well, I'm danged, McQuirk. How in blazes do you get that way? It was your idea, wasn't it? You done figgered it out all by yourself. Now you've got the unlimited gall to leave me do the dirty work. Well, I'm a son of a gun!"

"It's for your own good, Windy," Lonesome pointed out. "I knew you was downright anxious to figure out some way to keep that mule out of your garden. You don't need me no further. You and the widow seem to get along fine. It's up to the pair of you to figure out your own problems. Me, I've got troubles of my own. I've got to ride around by Shuttler's Flats

and square myself with the schoolma'am. But don't you worry none, old-timer. You'll find she'll be right down agreeable when you deliver that there barbed wire. I'm an observing cuss. While we were talking, I seen her give you the up and down as much as to say, 'Well, this hombre may look like a horned toad, but he can't help his looks. He's probably a human being'. Yessir, the lady kind of cottoned to you, Windy."

"Go on with you!" exclaimed Windy. "What you trying to promote, McQuirk?" But he squirmed uneasily, and his eyes avoided his partner's.

"Windy"—Lonesome's voice was more serious in tone—"there's a point or two about this business that you'd ought to set your mighty intellect to wrestling with. Did it strike you as kind of peculiar that she'd pull a gun on us as soon as we came into sight? Did you notice the look in them black eyes of hers? Just like she was backed into a corner with them boys beside her and making her last stand? From the looks of that wagon, she come a long ways, traveling hard. I've got a hunch some mighty tough brand of grief has been hounding that woman, Windy."

"You're probably right," agreed Windy pessimistically. "Women and grief is most generally a pair." He eyed his partner keenly. "What you driving at, McQuirk? I kind of had the same hunch myself, though I've been trying to fight it off. You figure she's running away from trouble and this said trouble is only a couple of jumps behind her, huh? You figure she's lucky she's made her stand alongside a couple of soft-hearted men of action, huh? Now ain't that a sweet layout for a couple of gents that was figuring on taking things kind of peacefullike and easy? You and me is unlucky, McQuirk. When we ain't looking for trouble, it moves in and camps beside us." His voice was complaining, but his black eyes glistened at the prospect.

After the pair had breakfasted, and each had smoked a cigarette in the warm sunlight on the cabin steps, Windy yawned and rose to his feet.

"I've been figuring this out, McQuirk. I ain't the kind of a gent that does a thing by halves. Since your generous instincts has led us into promising to deliver that said barbed wire, we'll just take a shovel and a claw hammer with us and an ax. A couple of wildcats like us could throw that fence across the cañon in three-four hours. How does that appeal to you?"

"Only thing is," Lonesome pointed out, "you're figuring out grief for me. I've mentioned a half-dozen times that I've got to ride over to Shuttler's Flats pronto."

"A couple of hours won't make no difference to the schoolma'am," averred Windy. "She'll live through it if she don't see you till this afternoon."

"Tell you what I'll do," Lonesome conceded; "I'll help you swamp out the posts and set them up. That's the heftiest part of the job. Then you and the boys can string the wire."

They accordingly hitched up the harness team to the stone boat, loaded on the spools of barbed wire and the tools required for the job. Grumbling, Windy drove the team, while Lonesome followed behind on the saddle horse.

Their arrival was greeted by the boys with loud whoops of delight. When the partners unloaded their equipment at the bend of the cañon, some two hundred yards below the cabin, the bare-footed youths charged down to meet them, eager to take part in whatever activity was forthcoming. It was obvious that whatever distrust and suspicion had greeted the partners on their earlier meeting, had now, on the part of the boys at least, vanished completely.

Following the lads down the slope at a slow pace, was the Widow Hogan.

"We'll help you," announced Barney, oldest of the pair. "Let's get our axes, Tim. We'll help cut fence posts."

They accordingly dashed back toward the cabin.

"I wouldn't have troubled you so much," said the Widow Hogan in her rich voice when the partners explained what they proposed to do. "Sure, and you must think your new neighbors are a nuisance, Mr. McQuirk. But it's big-hearted gentlemen you are, the both of you."

"Give Windy the credit," said Lonesome; "it was his idea, ma'am. On top of that, he's prepared to back up his hunch by doing most of the work. I've got to get away as soon as we get the posts up. Windy," Lonesome explained, his blue eyes twinkling, "has a heart as big as a house. Yeah, I agree with you, ma'am; he don't look it."

"A man's got to protect himself," retorted Windy, glaring. "I ain't doing any missionary work, fixing you this fence. It appeals to me as the quickest way to keep that critter of yours from chawing up my garden."

To Windy's chagrin, his protestations had carried no weight with the widow. She unloosed upon him a devastating smile. Red lips parted over white, even teeth; black eyes sparkled. It was a broad and friendly smile, vivid and infectious. It was as though the woman were momentarily transformed; that an unseen hand had swept from her mobile features the grim lines that hinted of heartbreak and despair. It was the first time the partners had seen her smile. It was as if they looked upon her for the first time. A dark flush stained Windy's bony cheeks as his own glittering eyes softened a little.

"McQuirk," he said hastily before the widow could speak and add further to his confusion, "take a hold of the shovel. If you're as good at post holes as you are at more or less hefty conversation, you'd ought to have them all dug by the time I fetch the posts. I've kind of got the bulge on you at that." His mustache bristled as he pointed at the approaching boys, each of whom was armed with a short-handed ax. "With a couple of husky lads like them working with me, we're liable to have them posts here before you've had time to turn around."

"Let's go and cut some trees down. We've got our axes now," announced Barney, charging up breathlessly. "You going to take the team? Can me and Tim ride on the sled? Come on, Tim. We used to cut lots of trees down," he told Windy, "down in Jackson County."

"That's enough about Jackson County." The widow's face had become grim again. She shot a quick glance at the partners. "You boys talk too much. Now you be careful and don't cut yourselves. I have to watch them rascals pretty close, Mr. DeLong. You won't let them out of your sight, eh?"

"Not if I can keep up to them," promised Windy. "Get over, boys. Leave me get my feet on that stone boat. We'll get them over yonder," he told Lonesome, indicating a growth of scrub pine on a distant slope. "About ten ought to be a-plenty, huh?"

Lonesome cast an appraising glance at the twin slopes of the cañon, and nodded agreement. Windy shook the lines and the team moved away, the boys clinging hilariously to the stone boat over the rough going. The widow watched them go, her eyes again strained and anxious. The scrub pine on the slope was less than a half mile away and in plain view of the cañon. Yet it was almost as if she feared to allow even that short distance to intervene between herself and the boys.

"Don't you worry none about them,

ma'am," counseled Lonesome as he heaved a shovelful of loose dirt and rock from the first hole. "There ain't nothing can happen to them when Windy is there. There ain't nothing could happen to them anyway, as far as I can see," he chuckled. "It's been fifty years since they was any wild Indians loose in these parts."

"There's some men wilder than Indians," said the widow cryptically. Nevertheless, she turned away as though dismissing her worries resolutely from her mind. "You lads are doing a fine thing this day, and I appreciate it. Well, I'll be going back to the shanty, now. The work there is in getting the place fixed so a body can live in it! But I'll make a home of it yet. Along toward noon, I'll fix you lads a bite to eat. By that time, the pair of you will be as hungry as wolves. I never saw a man yet that wasn't. And as for me, if I do say it that shouldn't, I'm a good cook."

"Gosh ma'am!" Lonesome was much put out. "I'm an unlucky critter; I won't be able to wait for them victuals. But Windy will be here, provided you can get him within shouting distance of your house. He's awful shy, Windy is."

"So's Napoleon," retorted the widow, casting an affectionate glance at the gaunt mule munching in the flats. "But he forgets all about his shyness when we holler 'oats.' I'll probably have to chase your partner out of the kitchen. I've met these lean and hungry lads before."

Some moments later, having finished the first post hole, Lonesome leaned on the shovel and glanced down the cañon. Then he started and looked again. A rider had appeared suddenly around the bend, and was now pushing up the slope toward him. Looking over his shoulder, Lonesome caught a glimpse of the widow as she disappeared into the cabin without a backward glance, and closed the door. Unquestionably, the mounted man must also have seen her.

Studying the approaching rider closely, Lonesome recognized the horse, and thus fixed the identity of the rider. It was "Bull" Morgan, proprietor of large and valuable holdings along the John Day, a big, loud-voiced, blustering individual whom Lonesome held in low esteem.

He was filled with somber irritation at the evil chance that had brought Morgan to the hitherto deserted cañon. Ordinarily, no riders passed that way for months on end. He had felt certain that the widow could have remained at this spot, her presence unknown as long as her mysterious purposes required. Yet here was Morgan, grinning and curious, riding blithely into her domain. Cursing under his breath, he leaned on his shovel, glaring, as the other reined up before him.

"Howdy, McQuirk." Morgan's voice was bluff and hearty. His small keen eyes, set in his florid face, roved about the cañon. His glance inspected the cabin, the ancient prairie schooner, and returned to Lonesome. "Putting up a fence, huh?"

"What'd you think I was doing?" asked Lonesome with some truculence, "digging clams?"

"You hadn't ought to be so hard-boiled about it," said Morgan with a leer. "Staking out a little private range, huh? Who's the gal?"

It was with difficulty that Lonesome controlled his rage. His voice was harsh. "What you want, Morgan? Anything I can do for you this bright morning?"

"I rode around to see you about some yearlings," explained Morgan cheerfully. "I heard you sold out your prime stuff a few days ago, and thought maybe you was closing out entirely. When I didn't find nobody at home,

and seen the stone-boat tracks leading off in this direction, I figured you and Windy was out fixing a little fence. So I followed them out." He grinned again, meaningly. "I never dreamt you had a good-looking neighbor round at this end of the range. How long has this been going on, McQuirk?"

Lonesome's thoughts raced swiftly. Morgan was the last individual in the world he would have liked to have seen under the circumstances. The man's reputation as a gossip and busybody was proverbial. It was no use to avoid the subject, for the other's warped point of view would seize upon his very reticence as an excuse to magnify the casual circumstances as food for idle gossip. He spoke coldly and in a voice which he strove to make matter-of-fact.

"As usual, your low-down instincts have done led you astray, Morgan. She's a widow lady who moved in here a few days ago and is figuring on locating and trying to make a start. Me and Windy figured on helping her out by throwing a fence across the cañon. At the same time, that keeps her critters from getting into our garden." In spite of his resolve, he could not prevent some of his irritation from showing in his voice. "Her name is Hogan. She's got a couple of boys. The oldest is named Barney. The youngest is Tim. They're probably eight and ten years old. I didn't ask the lady how old she was. I didn't ask her whether her granddad died of rheumatism or rickets. If I had known you was coming, Morgan, I sure would have got all the details so you wouldn't have had to worry none about it."

Despite his reputation for being notoriously thick-skinned, the other had the grace to flush. Yet his meanness of spirit did not permit him openly to show his resentment. He squirmed uneasily in the saddle and tightened the reins.

"You fly off the handle so danged quick," he complained. "I was only joshing. Well, I got to go to Condon to-day. You don't want to sell your yearlings, huh?"

"I do not," said Lonesome shortly. He paced off the distance and commenced digging again, his manner showing plainly that the interview was at an end. Morgan rode away, casting a last sidelong glance at the cabin on the flats above. Lonesome worked vigorously until the rider had disappeared from view. Then he leaned on the shovel, and reached to his hip for his plug of tobacco.

"I wonder now," he soliloquized, "how I should have handled that polecat. I might have thrown a scare into him, specifying the various things me and Windy would do to him if he said a word about the widow being here. Or I could have said nothing at all, leaving him to draw his own conclusions. Either way, he'd have been all swelled up, figuring he knew a thing or two. Somebody would have dragged it out of him in no time at all. No, sir, it was just tough luck, and it couldn't be helped."

The more he considered the situation, the less he liked it. Morgan had mentioned that he was going to Condon. The metropolis of the cow country was the headquarters for the gossip of an empire of ranch and range. Shuttler's Flats, and the Jim Norton place where the schoolma'am stayed was in that area. Under the right combination of circumstances, it could easily be that in a matter of hours, the schoolma'am should receive a rumor, garbled into who knows what sinister and fantastic shape. He squirmed as he felt, in imagination, the wide blue eyes of the schoolma'am on him; heard her polite but stinging comment on the alleged interest he was taking in his new neighbor.

Having completed the row of post holes across the bed of the cañon, he cast the shovel from him and secured

his saddle horse. He mounted and rode down the cañon to meet Windy, who was returning with a load of posts. The gleeful boys were mounted on the team, while Windy walked beside the load.

"You'll have to weight 'em down with rocks on the slopes," Lonesome told his partner when they drew abreast. "It was too tough to dig. So I'm leaving you to do the dirty work, Windy. I've just naturally got to get going over to Shuttler Flats."

He had expected Windy to protest vehemently against leaving him alone to complete the task. Somewhat to his surprise, his lean and saturnine partner was in high good spirits. His black mustache was bristling with satisfaction, and his black eyes glittered.

"On your way, caballero," he said, chuckling. "I ain't the gent that stands in the way of two hungry hearts. A romantic gent like you hadn't ought to be chained to a shovel. Get going, McQuirk. While you're dancing among the Shasta daisies, and chasing butterflies among the pinnacles over to Shuttler's Flats, me and this pair of wild cats will finish that said fence."

He approached closer to Lonesome's stirrup and spoke confidentially, a kind of naïve surprise in his voice that tugged suddenly at Lonesome's heart. Windy's lean and forbidding face, deeply lined with the mark of bleak and bitter years, might have been that of an indigent but indomitable pocket hunter who suddenly has thrust his questing shovel deep into free gold. "There's the likeliest pair of young bull snakes I've ever laid eyes on. I don't mind admitting to you, McQuirk, I cotton to them hyenas. And say, they think I'm a gold-plated son of a gun on wheels. You ought to see them swallow the yarns I've been telling them—Indian fighting, and such."

"You'd ought to get along all right," agreed Lonesome, "them being good listeners that a way. You've been looking for somebody like them most of your life, ain't you?"

"No fooling," admitted Windy earnestly. "I have at that, McQuirk."

"Speaking of talking reminds me—who do you suppose rode by a while back? Bull Morgan." And he briefly told Windy the details of the encounter.

"Morgan's a polecat." In his genial mood, Windy dismissed the subject contemptuously. "Some of these days, you and me is going to have to skin that critter and hang his hide on the fence."

"I don't feel so bad about leaving you here," said Lonesome, grinning as he tightened the reins. "When you get that fence hooked up, Mis' Hogan said she was going to fix you a bite to eat."

"I ain't going to eat here," protested Windy, aghast at the thought.

The boys, hearing this, turned upon him immediately. "You said after we got the fence up, you'd tell us how to make a bow and arrow," accused Tim. "Ma's a swell cook," added Barney. "She won't let you get away without eating something."

"We'll see," muttered Windy, eying Lonesome askance. "See you later, McQuirk. Boys, get a-hold of them critters. We're going to move."

At the bend in the cañon, Lonesome looked back over his shoulder. It came to him suddenly in that brief glance that the spirit of the place had changed. Desolation was no longer the keynote of O'Hara's springs. The grim walls of the cañon were the same. The gaunt buildings were unchanged. But from the sun-drenched slopes came the shrill shouts of the boys, a symbol of life triumphant. In the weather-beaten doorway stood the Widow Hogan, broom in hand, contemplating her domain. Standing thus, the grim walls of the cañon at her back loomed like towering ramparts.

## CHAPTER V.

### A LONG TRAIL.

IT was from the boys, unexpectedly, that Windy learned fragments of the story of the Widow Hogan. The telling of it was casual enough, for to boys of eight and ten years, the major facts of life, human motives that are sinister and obscure, mean little. They react merely to their own immediate environment—but their impressions are vivid.

Barney and Tim, realizing little of the forces that had hurled them over bitter miles, thought of the events preceding their arrival in the Condon country only as a gigantic adventure. But Windy, who knew of old the heartbreak of bitter trails, was able to piece together the untold parts of the story.

It was the blue mule, Napoleon, that started the discussion. The trio had finished the task of setting up the fence posts. A sentrylike line now extended from wall to wall, the last post having been anchored firmly at the base of the far rampart. Windy discovered that he was in the shade. He thereupon cast the shovel from him and wiped the perspiration from his face.

"Boys," he said, seating himself on the loose shale, and reaching for his plug of tobacco, "let's call a halt on these proceedings. Sit down and think it over a little before we start stringing that wire. Life's too short to squander it in frying-pan weather like this."

Nothing loath, the boys disposed themselves comfortably to Windy's right and left, Barney reclining at ease on a low projecting ledge, his chin resting on his hands. The younger Tim leaned back in the loose shale, his bare feet elevated above him, and amused himself by placing pieces of weathered rock between his dusty toes, cocking his head as he admired the effect.

Windy looked out over the blistering cañon, and his glance came to rest on the gaunt Napoleon. The animal was standing motionless, head drooping, forelegs firmly planted, his great ears hanging loosely forward. Apparently the bony hybrid was enjoying his siesta. His lower lip hung pendulous, and one bony hip pointed sharply toward the zenith. Looking at the disreputable animal, Windy bristled with instinctive animosity.

"You boys is all right," he opined, his black eyes glittering. "Your ma is O. K. That prairie schooner yonder was undoubtedly a good wagon once. But that critter is the biggest hunk of worthlessness I've ever laid eyes on. I've seen some onery, shiftless, no-account critters in my life, but he's got them all backed off the map and hollering for help. I just naturally don't like his looks."

"He's a pretty good mule," said Barney. "He's smart, too. Course he's pretty bony. He didn't always used to be as bony as that. But he's awful tough."

"So was Pete tough," said Tim, dexterously wiggling his toes so that the stones dropped one by one and rattled down the slope. "Ma said it was a wonder he lasted so long."

"Pete was our other mule," Barney explained. "He kind of gave out down there." He pointed toward the sun-drenched hills below. "Before we got to Wasco. He was lying down in the morning when we were ready to start, and he wouldn't get up. It was awful early. It wasn't light yet, and ma says: 'We'll have to wait till the sun shines on him. When it gets warm, he'll get up.' But he didn't. He kind of groaned for a while, and then ma cried and said he was dead. So we dug a deep hole beside him and pushed him in and covered him up. It was hard work, and it took an awful long time. While we was doing it, ma kept

saying that it was awful to drive mules so hard, but we was desperate."

"We wasn't going very fast," complained Tim. "Those mules just walked for days and days. Ma tried to make them trot, but they wouldn't."

"For a couple of days," Barney corrected. "They was too tired. Well, after Pete was buried, ma says, 'Now what are we going to do? We've only got Napoleon left.' And I said to her: 'Ma, how far have we got to go?' And she said: 'It's only about twenty miles farther. It's too bad poor old Pete couldn't hold out a little longer. They's lots of green grass up there,' she says, 'and shade where he could have rested his weary bones.' 'Well,' I says, 'we can put a pair of shafts on the wagon, and Napoleon ought to pull it that far by himself.' And she says: 'Barney, my boy, we'll do it. And Heaven give Napoleon strength. It's the home stretch,' she says.

"So the man brought the shafts out from Wasco and put them on. And Napoleon fetched us up."

"You mean to say," questioned Windy, tugging at his mustache and eying the youth unbelievingly, "that mangy-looking critter hauled your outfit up from Wasco, single-handed?'

"We all walked coming up the cañon from the toll bridge," Barney explained. "Coming up the worst hills, we all pushed. Every little bit, we'd stop to rest. Napoleon groaned an awful lot. Some of those hills were pretty steep."

"Pretty steep!" echoed Windy aghast. He knew very thoroughly the desolate region that intervened between O'Hara Springs and the toll bridge. In his mind's eye, he saw the weary pilgrims toiling up those bitter slopes, the gaunt mule groaning aloud from the travail of flesh and spirit, but his stubborn courage unyielding still. "Yeah, I expect your ma was right. He's undoubtedly got the heart of a lion."

"Well, when we got up here," continued Barney, "Napoleon pulled the wagon up by the house and stood there with his head hanging down. As soon as we took the harness off him, he walked around the house and over to where the grass was. He walked kind of sideways like he was drunk, and he layed right down in the grass. Ma made us carry some water for him in buckets, and, after he had drunk two buckets of water, she told us to give him some oats. So me and Tim put some oats in a pan by the wagon and hollered 'oats, Napoleon.' He most generally comes a-running when we say 'oats.' He tried to come this time too, but I guess he couldn't. He kind of sat up with his front feet spraddled out but he couldn't get the rest of him up. So he kind of groaned and then brayed. Gosh, that was an awful bray! It was just like he was hollering for help. Ma came running out, and she was awful mad. She made us take the oats over to him.

"Well, Napoleon ate the oats, and he licked up the last of them out of the pan, and then he laid down again all stretched out. It was getting dark, and ma said he would probably be up bright and early in the morning after he had had a good night's rest. She said we would sleep pretty late because we didn't have to make camp any more and we did sleep pretty late. Napoleon hadn't gotten up, neither. You know he's got an awful long neck and instead of getting up, he just ate all the grass he could reach all around him. My, he looked funny lying there with his legs under him and stretching his neck way round to the side to get some more grass. You would have laughed."

"What kind of a polecat do you think I am?" demanded Windy. "No, I wouldn't have laughed."

"He felt better in the afternoon," said Barney. "He got up and ate so much grass that me and Tim stood around,

waiting for him to bust. Then he laid down in the shade and slept. After that, he was all right again. He acted real frisky, like he used to in Jackson County. He got interested in everything and galloped around and looked at things, and every once in a while he would bray like he was laughing."

Windy's glance roved from Barney to the recumbent Tim and beyond to the sun-drenched cañon and the giant ramparts upthrust against the unchanging blue of the sky. He had caught several pictures from Barney's narrative. One of these was of the Widow Hogan down Wasco way, wringing her hands over the grave of a mule that had done its best. Another was of the gaunt Napoleon, groaning into the homestretch where the grass of the sheltered flats, because of sparkling springs and sunshine, would be forever green and fresh.

"That critter you buried down near Wasco," he said, shifting his quid to the other cheek, "him and Napoleon was the only ones you had, huh?"

"We had four," said Tim; "when we left Jackson County, we had two more besides Napoleon and Pete. One was Humpy and the other was Jake. Humpy died after we came up into the mountains. We had got past the snow and was in an awful country where there wasn't any ground at all but just rock, that was so sharp you couldn't walk on it with your bare feet."

"He means up in the lava fields," explained Barney. "After we got over the pass."

"You mean you came over the Mackenzie Pass?" Windy stared at the casual youth. "That was an awful tough road you picked out."

"Ma said she thought maybe it would fool them if she came that way," said Barney. "She probably wouldn't have tried it, except, when we was camped in a woods at Springfield, we saw them come by. But they didn't see us. They was on horseback and traveling fast."

"They," repeated Windy; "who was they?"

"The fellers," explained Barney, shifting his position so that he could scratch his back against the wall, "who was follering us."

"The Hogans," put in Tim. "When ma saw them riding by, she said they had murder in their faces."

It was not mere curiosity that caused Windy to hold his breath. Long before, he had mentally arrayed himself on the widow's side. Would the boys reveal the nature of the menace that had driven the widow so desperately and so far? Barney continued imperturbably:

"We traveled all that day and all that night because ma thought the Hogans was right behind. She said she wanted to get over the summit before we camped again. But we got into the lava fields in the morning before it was light, and we couldn't see where the road went. You know it winds in and out and all around, and there isn't much of a trail, anyway. And over a ways we found some cracks in the ground that didn't have any bottom. It was so dark you couldn't hardly tell any difference except it was black down there. And the wind was blowing all the time. Gosh, it was an awful country. And when it got light, Humpy was dead. Ma said the cold wind from the snowfields killed him after he had worked so hard coming up the pass."

"So you left him lay, huh," questioned Windy, pulling his hat lower over his eyes; "you left him out there in the bad lands?"

He felt vaguely grateful for the warmth of the cañon where the heat waves shimmered and danced against the green flats in the still air. Heat was life. He knew the utter desolation of the lava fields, of the Mackenzie Pass. In his lurid career, he had

passed through deserts and had scaled mountains. In the desert, certain hardy plant life had defied the blazing sun and the thirsty sand. On rocky ledges high above the snow line he had found green vegetation persisting despite the hostile environment. But on the barren lava was no blade of grass, no sign of life of any form. Only the unceasing wind from the ice-clad peaks moaned bleakly across the wastes. It was here that Humpy the mule, team mate of Napoleon, had passed on.

"No," said Barney, "ma said she wasn't going to leave him there for the coyotes. So she took the two mules that was left and dragged him over to that big crack. Gosh, it was awful deep. In the daytime, it looked deeper than ever. Me and Tim threw rocks in it and we could hear them bounce further and further down. And for a long time, it sounded like we could still hear it. But I guess we couldn't. Well, we pushed Humpy in there, and then we went away."

"Yeah," said Windy, his black eyes glistening. "That accounts for two of the critters. What happened to the other one?"

"An accident," said Barney.

"It wasn't either," demurred Tim; "it was a bear."

"We met him on a trail above a roaring river," Barney explained. "The bear, I mean. Gosh, he was a big one! He came walking around the corner of the trail. And when he saw us, he sat up and that made him look bigger than ever. Humpy and Napoleon was in the harness and we was leading Jake and Pete behind. That was a long time before we came to the pass, you know, where Humpy died. Well, when they saw the bear, they turned short around, and ma couldn't hold them. The trail was too narrow to turn the wagon around but they turned around anyway, and Jake and Pete and the hind wheels of the wagon went over the edge. Ma said if the halters hadn't busted, we'd all been thrown into the river. But they broke, and the two lead mules went into the river. Humpy and Napoleon ran away down the trail.

"Ma couldn't hold them in. We didn't see the bear any more either. I guess he was just as scared as us. Me and Tim helped ma pull on the lines, and after they had run an awful long ways, we made them stop beside the river below where there was a big falls. Me and Tim wanted to go back and see what happened to Jake and Pete but ma wouldn't let us. She said they was gonners because they went into the river. We waited a long time, and we saw Jake and Pete coming down the river. They came on over the falls and after a while Pete came up and swam ashore. But we didn't see Jake any more. There was a big whirlpool below the falls and the water was awful black where the foam was gone."

"That was the Umpqua River," said Tim proudly.

"Well, I'm danged," muttered Windy. "You folks sure took in all the scenery. What in blazes was you doing in the Umpqua country?"

"That where Ma was heading for first, but I guess she got scared out," Barney said grinning. "She said nobody could catch us if we once got into the Umpqua country. But the first night we camped way up the river, before the day we lost Jake, pretty near made her change her mind. She said she knew it was a lonely place but didn't know it was so awful as that. When we lost Jake, and the mules ran away down the river again, she kept them going in the same direction. She said we would go on up into the Condon country and by traveling a lot at night, maybe we wouldn't be caught."

By reputation only, Windy knew of the Umpqua country, the last of the practically unexplored segment of the

virgin forest that formerly stretched unbroken from the Cascades to the sea. It was a land of towering firs, standing thick as giants with their lofty branches interlocked. The sunlight filtered through this leafy canopy in gossamer-like streamers that served but to exaggerate the eternal gloom and quiet below. It was a land of savage grandeur given over to denizens of the wild; dark cañons in which "white water" rivers thundered, remote valleys that had never echoed to the shot of a hunter's rifle.

"I'll gamble it was a lonely country at that," agreed Windy. "Some day I'm going down to look it over."

"Some of those trees," said Barney, "were so big that a mule could stand behind them lengthwise, and you couldn't see him. Ma said they was more than two hundred feet high. They's lots of trees in Jackson County, but they wasn't any as big as those firs. They didn't have any branches at all up to about halfway up them, and above that, the limbs was as thick through as a wagon wheel. The branches was so thick up above that, that the sunshine couldn't hardly get through at all. When we were on the level, we could see between the trees for an awful long ways like a lot of big pillars holding up a green porch. They was long streamers of white moss hanging down from the trees and from the limbs, and when the wind blew, the trees roared like a river. We saw lots of deer and bears, and at night we heard the timber wolves." Barney leaned forward impressively. "Did you ever hear a cougar scream?"

"I have," said Windy. "It ain't no kind of a song for lads your age to listen to."

"We heard one up on the hill above us. We kept a fire burning all night and every time the cougar screamed, ma made us throw on more wood."

"He wouldn't have hurt you," said Windy. "But I expect I'd have done the same myself."

"Ma said we shouldn't be scared, but she kept her hand on the rifle, and she didn't eat very much. The wolves was in the brush all around us. We could see their eyes every once in a while. We wouldn't see more than one at once. We would see a pair of eyes on one side, and right away afterward we would see one on the other side. They didn't howl or anything, but we could hear them kind of snooping around, like they were wondering why we were there."

"It was the bunk," put in Tim, yawning prodigiously. "I like it fine here. They wasn't any jack rabbits down in Jackson County. They's lots of sunshine here, and ma says after a while, when we get settled, me and Barney can have a horse to ride. I'm going to call mine Buster."

Thus Windy gleaned the story. The naïve, almost casual manner of its telling intrigued him, and held him spellbound. Deeper than his immediate reaction to the story was his sympathy and admiration of the Widow Hogan. The boys had left much untold. He knew, in imagination, the bleak and bitter miles, days of suspense, and nights of watchfulness. The danger from which she was fleeing, he was sure, revolved somehow about the boys. Single-handed, she had made her desperate bid for freedom.

Thinking of these things, Windy squirmed uneasily, half-ashamed. Listening to the story, and following it closely, it was as though he had watched the widow's struggle and had raised no hand to help her. He knew this to be a ridiculous idea since he had not been aware of the widow's existence prior to that morning. Yet he felt that already they were old friends. Henceforth, he promised himself, should the occasion arise, he would no longer appear in the rôle of a mere spectator.

The narrative, too, had given him a somewhat tolerant attitude toward mules. The route the widow had taken was plain to him. She had left Jackson County heading north and had turned aside at the Umpqua valley into the wilderness. Retreating from that harsh environment, she had continued her way northward. At the junction of the Mackenzie and Williamette Rivers, she had turned boldly eastward and had surmounted the Cascades via the Mackensie Pass. North and east again across the high country until she had doubled back at the toll bridge, and so at last to the end of the trail. The boys had not given the time interval, but he knew it to be a matter of days. It had undoubtedly been a terrific journey. Even range-bred horses might have broken under the strain. Only mules could have done it, and of the original quartet of animals, only the gaunt Napoleon had survived.

"There's ma," announced Barney suddenly, bursting forth from his reverie. "She's waving at us to come and eat. Let's go."

"Good grief!" ejaculated Windy, leaping to his feet. "We've done loafed away the whole forenoon. Your ma will think I'm the most shiftless hombre in seven States. You boys run along."

"You better come," advised Barney. "She'll be awful mad if you don't."

"She'll have apple pie," put in Tim, licking his lips. "She got some apples at Wasco. If they's anybody in the world can make a swell apple pie, it's ma."

Unconsciously Windy tightened his belt. It was an expression of weakness. He was suddenly impressed with the fact that the inner man was an aching void.

"Lead on," he said, relenting. "I can look a pie in the face, at that. But if your ma makes any mean cracks about what hard-working hombres we are, you lads has got to help me out."

## CHAPTER VI.

### O'HARA'S DAUGHTER.

WINDY was astonished at the wonders wrought by the Widow Hogan in the interior of O'Hara's cabin. On one or two occasions in the past, he had glanced in briefly in passing. At the time, the dust and litter of years had covered the sagging floor, dust-shrouded cobwebs had caught the sunlight from apertures in the walls and roof, and an ancient and battered stove, too old for O'Hara to take with him on his retreat, had tilted crazily in a rubbish-strewn corner. These and other details had spoken of abandonment and decay.

Now all was changed. The large room was spotless; dust, cobwebs and rubbish were gone. With strips of box lumber, the widow had repaired all the cracks in the walls and had covered the gaping apertures in the roof. An ancient table had been repaired and set up against the wall beneath the window. Upon it gleamed a square of white oilcloth. That the stove, newly polished and propped up with stones, was an efficient mechanism despite its age, was evidenced by the appetizing array of food on the table, and a golden-crusted, deep-bosomed pie, plainly visible on a box nailed to the wall outside the window.

Pitifully meager though the furnishings of the room were, Windy was astonished and deep touched at the changed atmosphere of the place. He sensed vaguely, but none the less strongly, that it was not what she had accomplished alone, but the personality of the woman herself that had breathed into the erstwhile ruins of an ancient cabin an atmosphere of comfort and well being and home.

"It's a shame to invite a man into a place like this," said the widow as she bustled about the cabin; "but give me a little time and we'll make a home of

it yet. Drag up that box there, Mr. DeLong. Tim, I'm surprised at you. And you too, Barney. Chase yourselves back to the spring and get rid of some more of that dust. Will you look at the ears of you? See Mr. DeLong there, how he scrubbed himself till his face shines like a new dollar. Get along with you now."

"I can see now why them lads look so well fed," opined Windy as the pair scuttled away. His glance rested upon the table with warm approval. "I'd take on a little flesh myself, if I was to set down to meals like that three times a day."

"I'll be able to do better when I get settled down," said the widow with becoming modesty. "Still, I always try to do the best I can with what I've got."

"It's a banquet," swore Windy; "no less. I'll swear that johnny cake makes me think I'm back in Texas. Them mashed potatoes sure take my eye. Is that ham you got on that big platter? Sure looks like angel food to me. I'll gamble that coffee would put life into a graven image. Ma'am, don't you think them boys are awful slow? Maybe I better go get them, huh?"

"I'd like to see you lean and hungry lads throw your legs under my table," said the widow, beaming her appreciation. "After I get organized here and get a garden started and have some chickens and a cow, I'll invite you and your partner over to a real meal."

"I'll be here," Windy promised. "Wild horses couldn't keep me away. Only thing is, I'll have McQuirk fetch the buckboard with him to haul me back home. I won't be in any shape to walk."

When the boys arrived, the quartet seated themselves at the table and fell to with a will. Windy discovered that the widow herself was a lady of ample appetite. The boys ate prodigiously. Knowing little of youths of their age and energetic disposition, he was amazed at their capacity. Mountains of mashed potatoes, numerous portions of stewed vegetables and vast segments of golden johnny cake, buttered and steaming, were demolished with an ease that left him speechless.

Never before had Windy been the sole guest at a lady's table in her own home. Women had had no part in his fifty colorful years. He was secretly amazed, but he found himself at ease in the widow's presence. For the first time in his life, he was acutely conscious of his deficiencies in the etiquette of the dinner table. Yet he knew instinctively that he loomed neither greater nor less in her esteem on this account.

He found himself examining her furtively as the meal progressed, noting the white, velvety texture of her arms as revealed in her comfortable house dress, the firm, yet rounded contour of cheek and neck. Already, the tenseness seemed to have departed from her face. Here, within four walls, at her own table, with no far trails yet before her to be traveled, the grim lines were already fading. Her determined features were now cast in a softer mould, more feminine, more charming.

The boys found time to keep up a running fire of comment on subjects concerned chiefly with the annihilation of jack rabbits. Listening to them, Windy was amazed at his own thoughts. Incongruous though it was, it yet seemed fitting and proper somehow that the widow should be seated across the table from him, dark eyes fixed upon him, laughingly, red lips parted in a smile. It was as though old dreams, sternly repressed until he had forgotten their existence, had risen up to taunt him anew.

He started and blushed furiously under the tan, beneath the widow's quizzical glance. To cover his embarrassment, he turned upon the boys, his

mustache bristling. Despite the enormous quantites of food the youthful pair had demolished, they were now eying their mother expectantly.

"You lads are sure out of luck," he averred, pretending a vast satisfaction. "Eating as much as you have, you ain't got any room left for pie. That's tough, ain't it? Well, ma'am, I expect you and me has got to take care of that said pie between us, huh?"

This suggestion was greeted with vigorous protest on the part of the boys. They could eat for a week, they heatedly maintained, and still their capacity for pastry would be unimpaired.

"It's true," said the widow smilingly as she reached a shapely arm through the open window to secure the pie. "It would wake them from the soundest sleep if some one was to whisper, 'pie.'" Her glance sought Windy's roguishly as she took up the carving knife afterward and blushingly he got the force of her next remark. "It seems fine," she said, "to be cutting it into four pieces again."

The boys completed their meal and staggered out, their hands folded over the bulging bibs of their faded overalls. At that moment, Windy would have been prepared to wager a substantial amount that the gluttonous youths were all but paralyzed. A moment later, he heard them shouting on the hillside. Through the open window he presently saw them on the slope above in frenzied but futile pursuit of a gaunt jack rabbit that had inadvertently strayed into the blind cañon.

"How do they do it?" he asked, his black eyes glittering. "If I was to eat that amount of victuals, they'd have to carry me away on a stretcher. That is, providing I didn't just naturally fall apart in chunks."

For his own part, he lingered long at the table, until the last delicious fragment had disappeared. He chuckled inwardly as he pictured Lonesome's chagrin when he would presently describe to him the marvelous product of the widow's culinary skill. His partner, like himself, was, in the parlance of the chuck wagon, a "pie hound."

"Ma'am," he said at last as he leaned back and reached for his hat, "any time you want me to battle a flock of wildcats or some other little chore like that, just you promise me a pie and there ain't enough men in Gilliam County to hold me back. How you can set out a meal like that on canned rations beats me! What could you do if you was given lots of rope? And that reminds me"—he tugged at his bristling mustache apologetically—"this morning I come over here pop-eyed, claiming that your critter had plumb ruined my garden. As a matter of fact, they's a few odds and ends left. If you crave some of that stuff, just come over and help yourself."

"I'll do it, and much obliged," said the widow. "When I get my garden going, I'll return the compliment."

She followed Windy outside. The sun was at the zenith and a narrow strip of shade extended beyond the door of the cabin. Windy pulled his hat low over his eyes and peered across the blistering flats to the row of fence posts.

"Well, I'll get going, ma'am. Me and the boys will hook up them horses and string that wire in a hurry."

"Don't you go yet, Mr. DeLong," said the widow. She indicated a substantial bench thrown against the cabin wall beside the door. "Just you sit down for a spell and rest yourself. It's awful hot down yonder and there's plenty of time. Sit down!" she commanded with mock sternness. "I've got to darn some stockings for them boys. I'll bring them out and keep you company."

He seated himself on the bench as the widow disappeared into the cabin. It was a new and bizarre experience to

receive orders from a woman. He found it strangely pleasant to comply. At the same time, it was unquestionably hot down in the shimmering flats. He pushed back his hat and rested his lean jaw on his calloused hand.

The widow seated herself comfortably beside him with a small basket of darning in her lap.

"A body should set a while after they eat," said the widow as she threaded her needle. "Particularly when you worked so hard this morning. You and the boys accomplished a lot in the time you had."

"Where are them boys?" demanded Windy, his mustache bristling. "When I need them bad, they ain't here. They promised to stand by me when you started pulling mean ones like that. As a matter of fact, we loafed most of the morning up there against the bluff. I was listening to them tell about their various and sundry experiences."

"Did you really? I didn't notice. Most of the times I looked out, you were busy as beavers, the three of you. It seemed to me you stuck pretty close to your work."

"We did," admitted Windy. "We danged near went to sleep beside it."

"And what were the young windjammers talking about? They gave you an earful, I have no doubt."

"They told me about your trip from Jackson County, ma'am." He spoke gravely, conscious of the widow's keen eyes upon him. "They gave me an earful that I ain't liable to forget for quite a spell. They told me"—he hesitated, reached for his black plug of tobacco and tore off a generous chew—"about a lady who drove four hundred miles single-handed over the roughest country in the world to keep her boys safe from harm. As the feller says: 'I learned about women from them.' There ain't but few men could have done it."

Windy did not look directly at the widow but fixed his gaze on the opposite slope where the boys, giving over their pursuit of the jack rabbit, were apparently engaged in discussing ways and means of inducing a sage rat to come forth from his burrow. Yet he knew that the widow had returned her darning to the basket and was sitting quietly, hands folded, watching him.

"What else, Mr. DeLong?" she inquired in a low voice. "They talked too much, those boys. Did they tell you why we left Jackson County?"

Windy flushed a little beneath the tan.

"It looks like I was plumb curious, ma'am, letting them talk that a way. It didn't occur to me till now that I should have shut them up and let them use their conversational powers on some other subject. My fault, ma'am. But I got so interested I never tumbled that they was telling stuff you didn't want carried around." He pulled his hat lower over his eyes. "Fact is, when they was telling it, it made me wonder why I wasn't there to kind of give you a helping hand over the toughest places."

"Don't get me wrong," said the widow hurriedly. "If the boys were going to talk, they wouldn't have done any better than to talk to you. Perhaps I'm taking too much for granted, but I have felt from the first that you were with me and not against me."

"You can bank on it, ma'am," averred Windy. "And I don't give a dang what kind of grief is on your trail."

"I'll tell you about it, Mr. DeLong. I intended to from the first—that is, if you haven't heard too much about my troubles already."

"Tell me if you like, ma'am. Use your judgment." But his attempt to appear casual failed utterly before his eagerness. "Gosh, yes, ma'am; give me the low-down on this business. I'm a gent of gentle disposition, but I crave to take a hand in it."

"It's a generous soul you are, Mr. DeLong. I'll tell you something, my friend, and it isn't blarney either." She leaned toward him confidentially and Windy squirmed with outward embarrassment, but inward delight at the frank friendliness in her dark eyes. "When I was heading toward the springs here a couple of days ago, weary and desperate and heartsick, I wondered what lay ahead of me. I knew there were practically only two ways that anybody could follow me into the springs here. One was by the toll bridge. The other was through the cañon toward the John Day. Well, after I met Mr. Shea at the toll bridge, who was a friend of my father's, I knew I had some one I could depend on in that direction. Nobody used to live between the springs and the John Day, and I hoped it was still the same. When Mr. Shea told me there was a couple of hard-boiled lads ranching in the cañon to the east, I didn't know what to think. I've had so much hard luck lately, it seemed like everybody in the world and all the bad luck in the world was conspiring against me. But this morning when I saw you, before we had spoken a dozen words, I knew I had nothing to fear. I knew" —her voice was low—"that my luck had changed."

"Ain't it funny," murmured Windy, astounded at his own audacity, "when I seen you, I figgered the same too."

The widow did not add that she had been appraising him further during other brief contacts of the day, including the interval of the late meal. It had required no remarkable feminine intuition to analyze the psychological reaction taking place in the hard-bitten old-timer. The boys had warmed to him as to an old friend. Frank hero worship was in their eyes.

She had not found it necessary to admit, even to herself, that this lean and hard-bitten individual who had appeared so casually on her horizon, appealed to her by his very harshness of manner and his utter lack of all recognized attributes of physical beauty.

Nor was she blind to the congenial mood of the moment when Windy, well-fed and at ease, would inevitably be doubly receptive to her story.

"No doubt, Mr. DeLong, you have wondered perhaps how I happened to come to this particular place?"

"I could see you knew about this lay-out here," Windy confessed. "It struck me as kind of funny. Only the old-timers in these parts know about O'Hara's Springs. Being such a hole in the wall as it is, you couldn't hardly have stumbled upon it by chance."

"I am O'Hara's daughter," said the widow simply. "We moved on to the valley twenty-three years ago this coming winter. I was ten years old at the time."

"Well, I'm danged," Windy whispered. He stared at her, jaw dropping. Her brief statement told him much. Instantly his mind bridged the gap of years. "When you backed out of the Umpqua country, headed north, and figured things was crowding you awful hard, you made tracks for the old homestead, huh?"

The widow nodded. "I've dreamed of the old place more than once during the past six years when things were getting worse and worse. A dozen times, I got desperate enough to start out with the boys. But it was a long way and a hard way. And I knew those blackguards would stop at nothing to fetch the boys back. I never dreamed that the old cabin would still be standing. And the spring would be just the same as we left it. And them cliffs yonder, and the sunshine and the sagebrush."

The boys had told of the desperate flight northward. Of the events preceding that flight they had said nothing. They had hinted of dark, sinister

personalities in the background; vague, yet menacing. As the widow talked, these sinister shadows took form and substance. They became men, deep-chested, rawboned, bearded, the black implacable Hogans of Jackson County.

There were four of these notorious Hogans, according to the widow. Originally there had been five. She had married Tim, the youngest of the brothers. He had died after four years, leaving her a legacy consisting of two healthy boys, a square mile of virgin timber, and a distrust on the part of the brothers that had swiftly changed to unrelenting animosity.

Timothy Hogan had been a good husband when sober, according to the widow. But he was usually drunk. Toward the last, one spree had merged into the next. One dark night, he came back to the timber from Hogan's Slough, scene of the clan's carousals. He had been bellowing some song as he swung up the mountain trail, it was reported later. The sound of his voice faded in the timber, and was heard no more by human ears. Because of the darkness, or his own muddled condition, he had turned aside from the trail, and had stepped forth off a cliff into two hundred feet of that darkness upon which the sun does not shine again.

The widow spoke of these details without emotion. Obviously her whole interest had centered in the boys, after the shattering of the first illusions. But it was with a voice, husky with bitter feeling, that she described the ruthless brothers and their unscrupulous leader, "Bog" Hogan.

Bog, Windy gathered, was the arch conspirator of the ill-favored quartet. Without him, the remaining brothers would merely have taken their places among the whisky runners, claim jumpers, and other lawbreakers who infested the remote sections of Jackson County. Under his direction, the quartet became a force known, hated and feared to the fartherest corners of the county. The sheriff was a Hogan man. It was said that no other dared to hold the office. It followed then, that many crimes remained unsolved in the Hogan territory.

With his growing influence, dreams of still greater power had come to Bog Hogan. Through questionable means the brothers had acquired large tracts of timber located in a certain cañon. One day, in checking over the records, Bog discovered, to his furious chagrin, that a life interest in the choicest section of timber situated at the mouth of the cañon, was held by the widow. Under the terms of the will, the timber could not be sold until the boys had attained their majority.

This situation served to focus Bog's attention upon the widow, and later, upon the boys. Bog himself was unmarried, the widow explained. The three brothers had large families at Hogan's Slough, mostly boys. Looking into the future, Bog saw himself as the supreme ruler of an unchartered Hogan corporation, directing the destinies not only of his brothers but of his brothers' children. He had ridden around one momentous day and casually informed the widow that she must move her boys to Hogan's Slough and henceforth make her headquarters there. The boys were Hogan's, he had pointed out blandly in the face of the widow's frenzied protest; she was an outsider, but the boys must come to the Slough.

This had been the one specific horror that the widow had feared since the passing of Timothy Hogan.

"I would have given him the timber, Mr. DeLong. He could have had every stick of it if he had only left the boys alone. But I would rather that Tim and Barney were dead and buried, than to have them raised at the Slough."

Her face was white with emotion. Unconsciously, she twisted and untwisted her hands as she talked. "You

should see those other boys, cousins of them lads there. Hardly more than crawling, some of them, and whisky guzzlers like their worthless fathers. Swearing as they learn to talk. The oldest of them not yet out of their teens, and their feet already set in the path of lawlessness. Terrible things have happened at the Slough; things that only the Hogans know about. My boys are good boys, Mr. DeLong." Her voice shook. "They're all I've got. What kind of a mother would I be if I let them Hogans have them and raise them up to be blackguards like themselves? They would end up at the gallows or behind bars. Rather than that, it would have been better that they were never born. They're my own boys, my own Barney and Tim. I won't let them Hogans take them away!"

She buried her face in her hands, rocking back and forth, her shoulders shaking. It was plain that the mere telling of the story had momentarily taken the widow into the desperate past. It was as though the specter of Bog loomed again at her side, a huge, sinister hulk of a man, beating down her resistance with the sheer weight of his sneering personality. The sight of her emotion was torture to Windy.

"There, there, ma'am," he soothed. "Don't you fret no more. All that business is done and gone. Don't you carry on so, ma'am."

After a moment, the widow composed herself. She wiped her eyes with her apron and peered at Windy, half ashamed. "It's foolish of me, I know. But you don't know what I've been through. What chance does a lone woman have to stand against the Hogans, them that crushes strong men who dare to lift a hand against them? And Bog Hogan? Heaven forgive me, if there's ever a devil in the shape of a man, it's him. Death is the only thing that would stop him, and I—I couldn't do that."

"Ma'am," said Windy softly, "I crave a little information. Why didn't you order that polecat off your place? Yeah, and back it up with your rifle."

"I did," the Widow confessed, "and the thick, bearded lips of him kind of curled in a sneer. I drew a bead on the third button of his shirt, and he laughed in my face. I couldn't pull the trigger. And he knew that I couldn't. The other Hogans would have killed me. Then the boys would have been taken to Hogan's Slough, and I couldn't have lifted a finger to save them."

"He must be a tough hombre at that," agreed Windy. His lean jaw was set. "Yeah, I would have liked to have met up with him about that time."

"I could tell things about him for a month, and you wouldn't know the half of it," said the widow. "He's a bad, violent man with a terrible temper. Mules and men are the same to him. Did I tell you what he did to poor old Napoleon?" She indicated the gaunt mule on the opposite hillside. That bony hybrid, having gorged himself to repletion in the lush flats, was now browsing delicately among the thistles and bunch grass on the all but barren slope. "Bog was talking to me in that cold way of his, telling me what was what. Napoleon was standing in the barn yard with his head hanging over the gate, facing toward us. In the midst of what Bog was saying, the misguided animal took a notion to bray. He didn't mean anything by it. It just came over him all of a sudden.

"But Bog got the idea that poor Napoleon was laughing at him. He was almost foaming at the mouth, he was that mad. So he took a halter chain and beat the dumb animal until the bony body of him was a mass of bruises. With tears streaming down my face, I begged him to stop. He did when he got tired, and Napoleon was down. Then Bog threw the chain from him and went away laughing, looking at me

sideways with those black eyes of his, as much as to say: 'Mules or men, it's the way I treat them that crosses my path.'

"It was all of two weeks before the poor mule was himself again. He's been deathly afraid of a chain ever since."

"That's a-plenty," said Windy. "You don't need to tell me no more about him, ma'am. I'll take your word for it. Now about them boys. You figgered he was fixing to take them from you by force, huh?"

"He would," said the widow. "There was no way I could have stopped him. He told me that, if I pestered him too much, he would go down and get a court order appointing him legal guardian of the boys on the grounds that I wasn't a proper mother to them or some such pretext. Me, who would give my heart for the lads! No, there was nothing to do but to take the boys with me and try to get away. At that, I would never have got out of the county except I heard that they were starting a big spree at the Slough. I knew that they would be drunk for a couple of days, so I took the best of the mules and started out. By traveling at night, and pushing the mules hard, I hoped to get clean away, but I—I don't know."

Despite the heat of the afternoon, the widow shivered a little involuntarily. Her gaze was fearful as she looked out across the sweltering flats. Windy followed her glance. The cañon was empty, the harness team were grazing on the lower levels. The mule was moving lazily along the slope, and the boys were laughing in the shade of the chaparral. Even the towering ramparts that hedged in the valley upflung against the eternal blue of the sky, seemed to breathe of peace and security.

He turned back to the widow, his black eyes unwinking. "You mean you are afraid this Bog critter has followed you all the way from Jackson County? You figger he'll find out where you are and ride in here and pull some kind of a bluff about taking the boys back?"

"If he came, it wouldn't be any bluff," said the widow with absolute conviction. "It would be a show-down. He fears no man and has no respect for law. He never turns aside once he has his mind set on a certain thing. There's a madness in him that drives him on. I know he followed us part of the way. The four of them passed us in the valley. They may have gone on up the valley. They may have come over the pass."

She hesitated and eyed him half apologetically.

"You have heard of woman's intuition, Mr. DeLong. No doubt you have laughed at the idea. But yesterday and the day before I felt that me and the boys was safe here at last. That the Hogans wouldn't find us in a thousand years. This afternoon, maybe because I've been talking about it, I've had a feeling that they weren't far away." She indicated with a gesture the low hills briefly visible through the mouth of the cañon. "Down in them lower cañons somewhere, circling around like wolves, picking up the trail, getting closer all the while——"

She broke off suddenly, biting her lips.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FOUR HORSEMEN.

WINDY rose, hitching his belt a little higher. He yawned and stretched, looking down at the widow quizzically. Under his elaborate carelessness of manner, the widow's tension relaxed.

"You talk like that any more ma'am," he said, chuckling, "and you'll make me feel like going after my gun instead of finishing that said barbed-wire fence. You keep on getting steamed up that a way over this business, and I'm liable to get the willies myself. It's only right

to tell you that when I throw a fit, men come running for miles around to see me do my stuff. You'd best watch your step, I'm that nervous."

The widow smiled faintly at these predictions.

"As a matter of fact, ma'am"—his voice was more grave—"you've been jumping at shadows. You've had a heap of trouble, no question about that. Telling about it has got you kind of unstrung. Now listen to me while I tell you a thing or two." He shook a lean finger at her impressively. "Just you forget your worries. Don't worry no more. There ain't one chance in a hundred that them Hogans has followed you this far. If they didn't trail you over the pass, they could spend the next month scouting around the valley, if they aim to stay on the job that long. If they did come over the pass, they would probably go right down through Wasco and across the Columbia and up into the Washington country. It would be the longest chance in the world that they would ever stumble on you here. Luck ain't on the side of polecats like them."

"They couldn't get in here," he concluded. "They's only two ways to get in, from the north and from the east. This old-timer Shea is a friend of yours, ain't he? Well, he's on the north. Me and McQuirk is on the east. What more could you ask?"

"I suppose you are right," agreed the widow more cheerfully, much impressed by his confidence. "Yes, I believe you, Mr. DeLong. It's nice to know that friends are between me and them Hogans if they ever come around this way." With true feminine courage, her poise had returned again. She smiled upon him broadly. "It's sorry I am to have bothered you with my troubles at all, Mr. DeLong. But I feel, somehow, that I have known you a long time."

"Some folks can live a long time in a couple of hours," agreed Windy, digging the toe of his boot into the ground with embarrassment. "Yeah, it don't seem that you are exactly a stranger to me neither. Well, ma'am," he continued briskly, "I'd better get going. If loafers was prize winners, I'd be a grand champion. As it is, I've got to think up a heavy alibi for McQuirk, explaining why a two-hour job stretched through most of the day."

He strode away, calling loudly upon the boys to accompany him.

"I'll stick pretty close around the ranch for three or four days," he called over his shoulder significantly. "If they's any strays running loose, I'll head them off into some other range."

Windy was not as confident concerning the Hogans as his manner with the widow might have implied. She had drawn in the picture of Bog Hogan a type of ruthless personality that he recognized of old. It was almost as if that bearded and sinister individual had strode up from a lurid past, early days in the frontier country, when laws were frail and human motives were dominant. To men of Bog Hogan's type, who had brushed law aside, the mere possession of the boys or the widow's square mile of timber would be incidental. He could not brook interference, even in his lesser plans, and his determination to crush men and circumstances to his will was a passion that was almost a mania.

As Windy strung the barbed wire across the cañon, he was preoccupied in manner, to the boys' infinite disgust. He could not be drawn into a further discussion of the exploits of one "Laramie Luke," whose trusty rifle, Windy had previously alleged, had caused no less than fifty redskins to bite the dust. Nor could he be induced to enlarge further upon the exploits of "Grizzly Pete," an entirely fictitious but primitive gentleman whose diversions included hand-to-hand conflicts with

bears, running down antelope on foot, and pursuing wildcats and cougars to their lairs.

He did take the time, upon the completion of the fence, to instruct the eager youths in the art of making an Indian bow from tough and seasoned rosewood, using for arrows straight and true shafts of buckbrush, tipped with the tail feathers of the wild pigeon. He promised on a later date to show them how to snare civet cats and porcupines with no disastrous results. He told them in a hoarse and confidential whisper of a certain crumbling ledge in the cañon, beneath which a colony of coyotes had burrowed. One of these days, the three of them would snare these coyotes, and the boys could collect the bounty. He mentioned an ancient snag in the scrub pine where a swarm of wild bees were laying up a golden treasure for a day not far distant.

He was somewhat irritated to discover that he had insufficient materials left over to build the slack-wire gate between the last pair of firmly planted posts in the bed of the cañon.

"You tell your ma," he instructed the boys as he loaded his tools on the stone boat and proceeded to depart homeward. "I'll rustle up a couple of hunks of wire to-morrow or the next day and fetch it over for this said gate. I expect there ain't no call to rush matters. That critter of yours probably don't aim to wander off no more. And that reminds me. You tell her about those vegetables again. If she wants any of them, she can help herself. Well, so long boys." He mounted the stone boat and shook the lines. "You rustle lots of firewood for your ma. And don't you stray out of this cañon for a few days."

As he drove away, he turned to wave at them, fluttering his hand in larger salute to the widow, who returned his greeting from the distant cabin.

At the mouth of the cañon ere he swung his team eastward, he pulled up to survey the lay of the land. Before him, the main cañon dipped sharply down, through the bleak hills, in the general direction of the toll bridge. From his right extended the gap that led upward and eastward toward the McQuirk-DeLong homestead. He nodded with grim approval and mentally accorded the widow a tribute for her unerring instinct in seeking such an all but inaccessible retreat. To an outsider, and particularly to men unused to the high country, the irregular hills, cañons, and pinnacles carried no distinguishing marks. To such a casual rider, it would be merely a vast and desolate domain, devoid of human life.

With the cañon at his feet, he marveled anew at the stamina of the gaunt mule, Napoleon. Up that prehistoric watercourse, boulder-strewn and of a heartbreaking steepness, the disreputable hybrid had labored, with the widow and the boys adding their feeble strength to his efforts. He had done it, furthermore, at the end of a four-hundred-mile trip, completed at a heartbreaking pace that had caused at least two of his team mates to fall by the wayside.

Musing thus, with his gaze fixed on the turn in the divide below, he started suddenly, and his eyes narrowed. As casually as though he had been a part of the dun-colored rock and the tawny sage about him, a rider had detached himself from the bend below, and was toiling methodically up the hill toward him.

The bulging muscles in Windy's lean jaw relaxed somewhat as he scrutinized the approaching horseman. Although the other was a stranger, Windy knew from the way he sat the saddle, the indefinable manner in which he fitted into the environment about him, that he belonged in the Condon country. His mustache bristled sardonically at his first instant reaction of distrust and sus-

picion. He realized that for some time to come, with the knowledge of the widow's trouble uppermost in his mind, he would view all such casual riders as enemies until proven to be really friends.

Nevertheless, it was odd that any rider should be coming this way. He seated himself on the edge of the stone boat to await the other's approach.

The rider became an old-timer, incredibly wrinkled of face, square-jawed, and with keen eyes peering forth from beneath an overhanging thatch of white eyebrows. He sat the saddle with a lounging ease born of years of riding. As he pulled up beside him, Windy knew that his own personal characteristics and those of his team and equipment had already been noted and appraised.

The old-timer draped a leg over the saddle horn and extracted a plug of tobacco from his hip pocket. With a pocketknife, he cut off a generous wedge of the weed and inserted it in his cheek. He returned tobacco and knife to their respective pockets and spat over the saddle.

"Howdy," he offered at length. "You're Windy DeLong, ain't you?"

"That's me," agreed Windy briefly. "Though how you figgered it out, beats me. It's been a long time since my likeness was posted at the crossroads with a reward under it."

"That's the way it goes," complained the old-timer. "I had a reputation too, when I was young and spry. The only way folks remember me now is when they have to fork over four bits to cross the toll bridge. My name's Shea."

Windy warmed to the other immediately. Irrespective of their mutual interest in the widow's troubles, both spoke the same language and had obviously traveled similar, though widely separated trails.

"Pleased to meet up with you, Shea. You're a long ways from home, ain't you?"

"You've wandered a little off your range yourself, it seems to me," the other pointed out. "Yeah, I got another busted-down old maverick like myself who's tending the bridge while I'm gone. It's kind of funny at that, us meeting at this particular place, huh?" Again he eyed Windy's outfit briefly and cast a fleeting glance at the tracks of the stone boat leading up toward O'Hara's Springs.

"Let me ease your mind, mister." Windy reached for his own plug of tobacco and his lean cheek bulged. "You and me is riding herd together. I just throwed up a fence for the widow below the flats." He jerked a thumb toward the cañon at his back. "Between times, she give me the low-down on various little things that has been worrying her."

"Fair enough," agreed the other. His aloof manner dropped from him like a cloak. "There's my idea of a regular woman, DeLong. Her father before her was a fine, upstanding lad. Molly was a little black-eyed, long-legged lass when they went to the valley." His keen eyes twinkled as he heaved a deep sigh. "Yeah, if I was a young feller like you, I'd be doing chores for her too."

"That's a fine line of apple sauce," averred Windy. "You sure this said senile decay hasn't kind of crept up on you? Me being fifty years old, handsome as a wart hog, and onery by disposition."

"I've got twenty years the best of you," retorted the old-timer, "and they ain't nobody making any bright cracks about me getting old. You don't want to let any grass grow under your feet, son. I'll admit," he added judicially, "I've kind of got the bulge on you in looks and disposition."

"So her name is Molly, huh? Molly Hogan." Mentally, Windy repeated the

name. "Molly Hogan." It had a homely yet musical sound, typical of the wholesome personality of the woman herself, her strong voice, her dark eyes, even.

"Whereas," continued Shea casually, "you've probably guessed I ain't rode around on such a blistering day just to be doing it. My business is at the toll bridge. But I picked up a little information that should interest the widow. Meeting you here, and knowing you're on the lady's side, makes me wonder whether I'd best spring it on her. You'll give me your ideas, huh?"

"Shoot," directed Windy briefly.

"A couple of hours ago, four hombres rode up to the toll bridge. They were big fellows, overflowing the saddle, black-whiskered and hard-looking as pot-bellied snakes. Yeah, you've guessed it." Windy had leaped to his feet, his black eyes glittering. "They was undoubtedly the Hogans."

"What did they say?" demanded Windy harshly. "They made talk with you, huh?"

"It was hard to do, but I acted real dumb." The old reprobate grinned mirthlessly. "Notwithstanding that the feller that did the talking was looking holes through me at the time. They asked me if a lady driving a wagon outfit had passed that way. Driving mules, he claimed, and they was a couple of boys. Yeah, and the off-mule was a blue critter, long-legged and bony. Talk fast, they says, real hard-boiled. Had I seen such a layout as that?"

"What'd you tell 'em? You told them where to go, huh?"

"I did," said Shea. "They had a habit of kind of surrounding me while they was talking, like their big rawboned hosses was getting fixed to step on me. It made me nervous. So I spoke up real frank and earnest. I told them, yes, there was a lady passed about a week ago with an outfit just like they had specified. If they'd follow this said trail over the hills to Rock Creek, I told 'em, and down to Arlington, and ferry across the Columbia, they'd probably catch up to her somewhere up in the Horse Heaven country. Yeah, that's what I told them, and you'd ought to have heard them cuss. They was artists, no less. It goes to show a man ain't never too old to learn."

"Fine," said Windy. "So they went across the toll bridge heading for Rock Creek?"

"They growled around for quite a spell first. One of the critters spoke up and said: 'Bog, this blasted business is getting old. Following that blasted widow and them double-blasted kids is my idea of blank nonsense.' Yeah, that was the gist of his remarks. I gathered he was ready to quit and go back to Jackson County. A couple more halfway agreed. But this Bog person kind of snarled at him and shut them up and says: 'We'll look around a couple of days longer, just for luck."

"That's that," concluded the old-timer. "Question is, should I tell the widow about it? Is she entitled to know so she would be on her guard? Or would she get all het up about it so she couldn't sleep for a month?"

The pair stared at each other speculatively, as they ruminated over this problem.

"I don't know," said Windy, eying the older man appraisingly. "With you at the toll bridge, and me at the ranch, we'd ought to be able to head them off if they showed up again. Was they carrying any artillery?"

"Carbines," said Shea. "No side arms."

"Maybe they'll give it up as a bad job and go back to Jackson County, eh?"

The old-timer shook his head. "The rest of them might, but this Bog person appeals to me as a critter who would bury his little playmates and push on barefooted if he had to. He's just like

one of these gents you read about who has what you call a single-track mind."

"Well," said Windy, "I'm hoping them polecats go across the Columbia and spend the rest of their lives hunting around in the Big Bend country, and points north. They probably won't be back. But if they do"—he spoke meaningly—"me and McQuirk can surely handle them from this direction."

"Don't you worry none about the toll bridge, mister," said the old-timer, bristling. "Me and my partner can head them off down below. If it comes to gun play, he's danged near as good as I used to be twenty years ago. I ain't saying how much I've improved since."

"Shea," said Windy, "you appeal to me as a gent that could see through a barbed-wire fence. You and me will have to get together some time and play a little cribbage. Then we won't bother the widow about it, huh?"

Thus it was agreed. Shea rode down toward the toll bridge and again was lost in the dun-colored rocks and the tawny sage. Windy turned his team up the barren cañon toward his homestead. As he rode the jolting stone boat he thought of his guns, hanging in their holsters, above his bunk on the cabin wall. They were spotless, he knew, but he must oil them again tonight.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### NAPOLEON'S ERROR.

WINDY had been home less than two hours when Lonesome rode up from the breaks of the John Day. That worthy's tawny mustache was drooping disconsolately. His pale-blue eyes were both wrathful and chagrined.

"DeLong," he averred, as he unsaddled his horse and fed the animal, "I'm so bowed down with trouble, I'm plumb bowlegged. If grief was one of them said contagious diseases, I belong in a pesthouse. Bad luck sticks to me like burrs to a sheep."

"I can see that both of us have some heavy responsibilities," agreed Windy. "I got my share. But I ain't the kind of a gent that insists on telling his story first. Let's have the earmarks of your alleged trouble."

The pair seated themselves on the broad cabin steps, where a wedge of shade offered relief from the heat of the afternoon.

Lonesome's uneasiness of spirit, it appeared, had to do with the schoolma'am. Upon leaving O'Hara's Springs in the forenoon, he had ridden across the brakes of the John Day and up to Shuttler's Flats, to call on Miss Emmeline. At the Jim Norton farmhouse, he had been informed that the lady was spending the day in Condon and would not return until evening. While in conversation with Jim Norton, a casual rider had dropped by, pushing north from Condon. This individual, upon recognizing Lonesome, had unloosed upon him an evil and knowing grin. Worse than that, his unfortunate sense of humor had impelled him to question Lonesome concerning the mysterious stranger who had established herself on the remote corner of his range.

Lonesome's reactions had been abrupt and specific. Apologetically, and under pressure, the youth had admitted the source of his information. It had been Bull Morgan whom he had encountered on the road to Condon.

"You see what a jack pot that puts me in, Windy. The schoolma'am has been in Condon all day. Morgan has gone to Condon. That overgrown polecat is hailing everybody he meets and telling them about the good-looking widow that McQuirk and DeLong have cached away in the cañon. He pushes his horse hard to overtake them that looks like they was going to get away without hearing about it. I don't give

a dang about the general run of folks that hear it. If they used their heads, they would figure out that this range back of us is free land and anybody that has a mind to, can move on it. But the schoolma'am will hear of it. She can't help it, the way things travel. Putting two and two together, she'll figure that when we come back from our trip, instead of me going over to see her, I was over doing chores for the widow.

"Some of these days"—he shook his fist in a general southerly and easterly direction—"me and Bull Morgan is going to have a show-down, if his lying tongue causes any differences between me and Miss Emmeline."

"Bah!" exclaimed Windy, his mustache bristling sardonically. "I'm a sympathetic cuss, but your troubles sound picayunish to me. Get your mind off your sweet-in-death responsibility and listen to some real grief."

He briefly outlined the events that were closing in on the Widow Hogan. As Lonesome listened to Windy's terse but vivid account of the circumstances leading up to the widow's present status, and the probability that the Hogans were at that minute in the Condon country, he instantly forgot the relatively unimportant dilemma occasioned by the talkative Morgan. By comparison, his own difficulties seemed trivial. Here was a situation that was vital and terrific, composed of elements of human courage that appealed instantly to his generous and sympathetic nature.

"Then you figure, Windy, that quartet of buzzards is circling around, huh?"

"My hunches is hay wire on this deal," admitted Windy somberly. "I figured they weren't even in the country, and, while I was figuring that a way, they was talking to Shea at the toll bridge. If they stick around these parts of the country another day, the stories Morgan is spreading will furnish them just the clew they need. No, I can't tell nothing about it. All I aim to do is sit tight here a couple of days and just wait for what turns up."

"I'm with you, Windy." Lonesome rose somewhat stiffly. "You can count on me. Meanwhile, I aim to take a beauty sleep. Last night, you remember, I was telling the world how I aimed to rest to-day. Yeah, I've rested like a wild cat in a hornet's nest. At sunup, you and that blue mule got me out of bed. In the morning, I dig post holes. Since then, I've been in the saddle continuous. Nothing less than a riot is going to disturb me now."

"Go on and take your beauty sleep," advised Windy. "They won't be no riot less those Hogans show up, and I ain't expecting them."

Left alone, Windy relaxed to a more comfortable posture on the broad steps, his back against the weather-beaten wall of the cabin, his lean legs outstretched. The air was warm, but the heat was not oppressive. A cool wind from the higher levels whispered and rustled in the locust trees beside the water hole. Crickets buzzed incessantly on the sun-drenched slope beyond.

Restful and at ease, he reclined with eyes half closed, lulled by the murmuring world about him and the seductive warmth of the quiet afternoon. Lethargy stole over his body—but his thoughts were unchained. In fancy, he rode across the sweltering hills, down a barren watercourse, and turned again to a quiet cañon where a crystal spring sparkled and spent itself in sun-drenched flats.

Again, he sat at the table with the Widow Hogan, tingling with emotions that were new and strange, observed half shyly the shapeliness of her capable arms, the firm, yet rounded contours of cheek and neck. What was it she had said, her dark eyes resting upon him, the golden-crusted pie before her?

"It seems good to be cutting it into four pieces again."

His thoughts ranged further afield, unfettered by inhibitions and self-deprecations built up over bitter years —like wild horses bursting forth from harness, thundering into the free wind of a new and limitless range. He saw himself striding through breast-high grain on his own land, the boys at his side. He had built a house with timber, hewed by his own hands, and from the friendly doorway, her hand shading her dark eyes, his woman was calling him home.

Windy did not realize that he had slept. He was jerked into instant wakefulness by the sound of steel on stone. Astonishingly as though they had sprung from the ground, four horsemen stood before him in a towering semicircle.

They were big men, deep-chested and huge of limb. Their heavy, bearded faces were expressionless as their black eyes rested upon him with a kind of insolent and half-contemptuous appraisal. The heavy dust of the lane must have deadened the sound of their approach. The fact of their presence was indisputable. He did not need to be told that the Hogans were before him.

Despite the abruptness of their appearance, he did not betray by the quiver of an eyelash, the savage satisfaction that burned in his veins in the knowledge that the encounter had come so quickly. He quelled an impulse to leap to his feet. He yawned, pushing back his hat with a lazy gesture.

His first impression of the Hogans was of their huge bulk. Even as Shea had said, they overflowed the saddle. Their bulk was further exaggerated by the blanket rolls, saddlebags and leather-sheathed carbines. Their horses were of necessity big-boned animals, high-withered, and powerful of limb. From the manner of the silent giants it was apparent that the Hogans were accustomed to overawe whoever stood before them by their very ponderousness and impressive dimensions.

Size meant little to Windy. He returned stare for stare with cool but tolerant amusement, his manner indicating that they were huge, shaggy fellows, colossal perhaps, but otherwise unimportant. He shifted his position sufficiently to extract his plug of tobacco from his hip pocket and tore off a generous chew.

The black eyes of one of the ill-favored quartet smoldered with sudden resentment at Windy's indifferent manner. "Mister," he said harshly, "my name's Hogan. Bog Hogan. These other lads are also Hogans. Brothers."

"Pleased to meet up with you gents," said Windy, shifting his quid to the other cheek. "Are you going, coming, or visiting? Climb down and rest yourselves."

Despite his lazy manner, he studied Bog carefully, noting with instinctive antagonism the grossness of the man, the florid color of his features, visible between his hairy cheeks and his battered hat, the arrogant insolence of his bold eyes beneath black, shaggy eyebrows that formed an unbroken line above his broad, short nose. The physical characteristics of the quartet were similar, yet different. Implacable determination showed in the set of Bog's thick, bearded lips. The others seemed more sullen and lethargic. The faces of all four exhibited an animal-like brutality. Yet in Bog's black eyes gleamed a sinister intelligence that marked him as the leader.

"We've got no time for visiting," said Bog deliberately. "All we want is a little information, if you've waked up sufficiently to give it. We're from Jackson County. We're looking for a woman with a couple of boys. She's driving a wagon outfit with a team of mules, heading north. Have you seen

such an outfit in the last four or five days?"

He eyed Windy unwinkingly. That worthy yielded suddenly to his irritation. As the quartet waited for his reply, they allowed their restive horses to hedge in closer, all but treading on his spurred boots. He leaped up suddenly, waving his arms. The astonished horses flinched back, rearing and snorting.

"You hadn't ought to crowd me," he said apologetically, hooking his thumbs in his belt. "It makes me nervous." His black eyes glittered. "So you're trailing a woman and a couple of kids, huh? That's a fine piece of business for overgrown hombres like you. No," he said truthfully, "they ain't no such an outfit has passed this a way."

Reining in their plunging horses, three of the brothers grinned somewhat sheepishly at Windy's sudden maneuver. But Bog did not grin.

"No?" he repeated with heavy sarcasm. "Maybe you was sleeping at the time. We've been told that a woman has moved in on your range lately." He jerked his thumb westward. "It's funny you don't know anything about it."

"It's humorous at that," conceded Windy. "The gent that give you that idea must be a bigger dreamer than me. They's nothing west of here but cañons and pinnacles. Why in blazes should a woman move in there?"

Bog would have made reply but at that moment came a sound from the hillside above that made Windy's blood run cold. It was a rolling cascade of sound, sardonic yet despairing. Giant laughter that reeked with unutterable woe. It reverberated in the cañon, its echoes thrown back from distant ridges. The quartet twisted in the saddles to look.

"That's that?" muttered Windy beneath his breath.

The gaunt Napoleon was outlined against the sky to the west. Unwittingly, the bony hybrid had revealed the secret of the widow's hiding place.

## CHAPTER IX.

### HEADING SOUTH.

THE black eyes of Bog Hogan resting on the blue mule, flamed with a sudden ferocity. He grinned a peculiarly savage grin, baring huge teeth that stood out in startling white against the blackness of his bearded face. He seemed almost visibly to swell with triumph. Even in that brief instant, Windy noted the reaction of the brothers. They merely stared at the mule in heavy astonishment, in which was a touch of sullen resentment.

"Well, well," said Bog in a thick voice, "if there ain't my old friend Napoleon. He saw me coming, no doubt, and come out to meet me. Fellow"—he turned on Windy contemptuously—"you hadn't quite finished your fairy story. I suppose that long-eared, half portion yonder is one of your saddle horses, huh? Or maybe you never saw him before?"

"McQuirk!" Windy raised his voice but did not take his eyes off Bog. "Come a-running. That blasted mule is back again." There were sounds of activity in the cabin at his back.

"Boys," said Bog, "we oughtn't to take time to tie a couple of knots in this lean but noble protector of widows and orphans. We're too close to what we're looking for. Let's go and leave this sleepy critter to take his nap."

He tightened the reins and the quartet swung their horses away.

"Stop!" the order was short and crisp. Almost involuntarily, the horsemen pulled up at the authority in Windy's voice. "You're on deeded ground."

"What of it?" demanded Bog.

"You're trespassers," said Windy. "Point your critters the other way and

travel. They ain't no road up yonder. If they is, it's closed."

Bog eyed him in astonishment. Windy's lean jaw was outthrust. His confident manner was a disconcerting contrast to his previous casualness. But he was obviously unarmed.

"Bah!" said Bog. "Your trespassing idea is humorous. We've come too far to stand on ceremony. How do you propose to back up your large ideas? Let's go, boys."

They did not go. The quartet froze into immobility. Their gaze was focused on a point above and beyond Windy. The latter knew without turning around that the cabin door had opened softly at his back, and Lonesome stood framed in the doorway.

"We can back it up, boys." Lonesome's voice was mild, almost genial. "Just sit tight. No funny moves of any description."

He stepped down from the threshold with a catlike tread. He was crouching a little, and his elbows were close to his sides, forearms rigid and horizontal. The muzzles of his six-shooters peered at the quartet like round, unwavering eyes. Holsters were strapped to his sides. From these, the butts of another brace of gleaming and highly efficient weapons peeped forth.

Keeping the quartet covered, he stepped in front of Windy, who eased the second pair of guns from the holsters. Silently, the two ex-gunmen circled to the left, always facing the Hogans. They halted with their backs to the sun.

"The odds is even," said Windy with a mirthless grin. "Let me mention that I could shoot the eye teeth out of a mosquito at this distance. My partner is better than me. So 'less you are feeling lucky, don't you wiggle your ears. Now, what was you saying, Bog?"

Astonishment, mortification, and rage swept in successive waves across Bog's swollen features. His chagrin at having misjudged the caliber of Windy was equaled only by his baffled fury at the unexpected obstacles that had sprung up in his path when his quarry was all but in sight. Obviously, the pair before him were dangerous men. He cursed savagely, fluently, and with such vicious emphasis, that Windy's black eyes glittered sardonically.

"You're an eloquent cuss," he averred. "Shea was right. Have you ever heard them strung together just like that, McQuirk?"

"I ain't goin' to swear no more," Lonesome grinned. "I can't stand it to be showed up that a way. I'll bet he ain't sprung everything he knows, neither."

"Listen, you birds"—Bog's voice was somewhat choked with passion—"your nerve is equaled only by your ignorance. You're bucking a combination that has busted better men than you. We've got law on our side. I'm carrying papers making me legal guardian to them boys. There isn't anybody can keep me from getting them. I'm telling you this for your own good. You've got a misguided idea you're pulling a noble grand-stand play. Step out of the picture and we'll call it quits. Keep it up, and we'll wipe you off the face of the map."

"That's a-plenty," said Windy coldly. "If you think we're bluffing, try to unlimber your artillery. You ain't in Jackson County now. You're a fine bunch of pot-bellied polecats, talking about law. There ain't no court in these parts would let you take them boys by force. And that ain't the half of it, Hogan. It ain't never going to get to the court. All I've got to do is hold you here and send McQuirk to spread the word among some of the old-timers in these parts about the kind of sculduggery you hombres has been trying to pull off. They'd ride you out of the county on a rail. You pole-

cats has got to tumble to the fact that you're a long ways from home. But instead of turning loose some of the quick-tempered gents in these parts on your trail, we're going to do better by you than that."

"Yeah?" sneered Bog. "Let's hear it."

"Me and McQuirk is going to escort you halfway to the county line ourselves. From the pinnacles, we can watch you travel for the next two hours. If you keep going south, you're liable to live to a ripe old age if the hooch doesn't get you. Just fix this in your mind. You're never going to get them boys as long as my shooting irons are in order. If you ever show up in these parts again, you're out of luck, 'less you can go for your guns faster than you done to-day."

"Shut up," he directed harshly, as Bog would have spoken. "This hefty conversation has gone far enough. Right now things begin to happen. Turn your hosses east." The lines of his weapons converged on the third button of Bog's broad shirt. "Yeah, swing your squad around, Hogan."

Strange fires burned redly in Bog's smoldering eyes as he wheeled his horse. Grimacing at each other behind their leader's back, the others followed suit. During the interchange, the partners had noticed that the trio had found a perverse humor in Bog's discomfiture.

"Sit tight," directed Windy. "Saddle our horses, McQuirk. Take note, gents, that we're treating you like white men. We ain't depriving you of your artillery. But if you get any ambitious ideas, remember I can place two slugs between each of your shoulder blades in two and a quarter seconds, elapsed time. That is, I'm gambling I can. Place your bets, men. I'll be waiting for a call."

While Lonesome was saddling the horses, a violent altercation broke out among the Hogans. At first, Windy could make nothing of it. Their growling undertones were unintelligible. When the growling rose and swelled in volume, interspersed with blasts of lurid profanity until they were all roaring like enraged bears, Windy gathered the gist of the dispute to his huge inward delight. It appeared that the trio were upbraiding their leader for inducing them to embark on such a profitless journey and calling upon the high heavens to witness their lack of interest in anything save returning forthwith to Jackson County. Several uncomplimentary epithets, directed at himself and his partner, worried Windy not in the least. Nor did he voice a protest when one of the quartet shook a ham-like fist under their late leader's nose.

"Your troubles turn my stomach," bellowed this one, in effect. "We've trailed them kids four hundred miles and run into a pair of pop-eyed gunmen, aching for a chance to fill us full of lead. We're the double-blasted goats in this deal. I ain't had a decent sleep for two weeks. I ain't seen any corn likker since I left Jackson County. When we start south, I keep going. And there ain't any knock-kneed, double-jointed, wall-eyed Hogan is going to stop me. I'm through with your superheated ideas."

This was music to Windy's ears. It was mutiny, no less. It was trebly galling to Bog that his lieutenants were in thorough unison on the subject. If looks could kill, the brothers must have withered in the saddle. If explosive invectives had been bludgeons, they would have been beaten to the ground. But they weathered the storm of Bog's disapproval in good order and replied in kind. Windy was astonished that such lethargic individuals could be masters of such an active vocabulary.

The sun was a red ball above the cascades to the west when they started east. The shadows were lengthening in the cañon. The Hogans, having fallen

silent, rode in the lead. Lonesome and Windy, watchful and at ease, brought up the rear. An hour later, the Hogans halted on the western rim of the John Day cañon. One of the quartet turned back to the partners. Bog, hunched in the saddle like a great toad, did not deign to look around, but stared stonily ahead.

"We've got our extra saddle horses staked out down below." He jerked his thumb toward the cañon. "We was fixing to make camp here to-night. If it's all right with you goat herders, we'll drop down there and pick up them horses and follow the trail up the cañon. We're going back by way of Mitchell."

"Fair enough," agreed Windy. "From that butte yonder, we can see up the cañon for five-six miles. We'll watch you go. How's Bog standing up under his grief?"

"He's liable to fall apart in chunks any minute"—the other's yellow fangs bared in a grin—"but I think he sees the light. He's so peeved at us, he's almost forgotten why he came into this sulphurous country in the first place. Well, so long men. Drop around Jackson County way sometime, and we'll talk it over, no holds barred."

"On your way," said Windy, his mustache bristling. "Here's hoping we don't meet again."

As the ill-favored quartet dropped down into the violet shadows of the mighty cañon, Lonesome and Windy rode up to the promontory that commanded a view of the breaks of the John Day for miles to the north and south.

Windy was delighted at the ease with which the maneuver had been accomplished. The notorious Hogans had come and gone. How great would be the widow's relief at the passing of the menace!

The sun was sinking beyond the Cascades. Brilliant light still bathed the higher levels. In the huge gash at their feet, the deepening shadows were like a dark flood rising to the cañon's rim. Far up the cañon, beside the great divide he caught glimpses of the mounted Hogans and their saddle string, moving south. They watched them disappear around the bend, reappear, smaller than before, almost indistinguishable because of shadow and distance. At times, there appeared to be many riders; at others, only a few. Finally the cavalcade became merely a tiny serpent rounding a bend in a mighty wall, and so were lost to view.

"Well," said Windy, yawning, "let's go, McQuirk. Ain't it funny Bog backed down so quick? Them other mavericks losing interest kind of took the heart out of him."

"While we're here," Lonesome suggested, "let's ride across the river and call on Bull Morgan. I'm peeved every time I think about that polecat. There ain't no call to hurry back."

Windy agreed. They had seen the Hogans depart. A couple of hours before returning to the homestead would make no difference. "We might as well see him while we're in the mood," he said, "though I don't expect Morgan will furnish much excitement."

They mounted and rode down into the deep quiet of the cañon. Morgan, it developed upon inquiry at the farmhouse, was not at home, and would not return until the following day. The partners turned back along the east bank, intending to recross the river at Russell's Ford.

"Windy," said Lonesome suddenly, "I've got an idea. The moon'll be up in about an hour. I'll ride on over to Shuttler's Flats and see the schoolma'am. She's undoubtedly got back by this time. Provided she's on speaking terms with me, I'll persuade her it's a fine night for a ride. I'll fetch her across the cañon and we'll call upon the widow. You'll be there, and after

you get through telling her about this Hogan business, the pair of you will be as thick as thieves. That had ought to set Miss Emmeline's mind at rest, hadn't it?"

"You want me there?" repeated Windy aghast. "It's a heck of an idea, McQuirk." But his mustache bristled at the thought.

They parted at Russell's Ford. Lonesome rode upward and eastward toward Shuttler's Flats. Windy recrossed the river and moved slowly homeward beneath the glittering stars.

He allowed his horse to set a leisurely pace in the deepening twilight. He felt at ease, relaxed mentally and physically after the tension occasioned by the arrival and departure of the Hogans.

As the moments passed, and he mounted higher up the familiar cañon, with the barren pinnacles looming vague and ominous in the half light, an uneasiness stole upon him suddenly and enveloped him. It was as though a cold wind had blown upon his neck, a warning had been whispered in his ear. Through narrowed eyes, he looked about him and his hand stole to his hip. But the cañon was empty. Only the sound of his own progress was thrown back by the rocky ridges.

He strove to shake off this uneasy mood—but as the moments passed, the feeling grew. It was as though some sinister fact, forgotten, yet remembered, was rearing itself in his consciousness, striving to warn him to hurry, hurry, while there was still time.

There was no need of haste, he told himself as he tightened the reins.

Was it something connected with the Hogans? They were gone. He had seen them go, fading into the remoteness of the John Day; tiny riders with their led horses forming a long line. The shadows in the distance had made them seem vague and small, but, of course, there were four riders.

Suddenly his blood ran cold. *Were there four riders?* With a curse half stifled between clenched teeth, he spurred his horse. The startled animal leaped forward like a thunderbolt. Bending low in the saddle, he urged him to a wild and yet more wild speed. Bitterly he upbraided himself for the lazy interval of his return along the east bank of the John Day. Profanely, he reviled his self-confidence discounting the menace that had flamed in Bog Hogan's eyes. Was there still time? There might have been but three riders on the John Day.

Recklessly, driven on by his sheer impatience and mounting concern, he forced his horse to extend himself to the limit of his speed. It seemed hours before he burst forth into the cañon and on among the farm buildings.

As his horse slipped to a halt, he cast a lightning glance about him. In the twilight, there was no sign of life in or about the quiet buildings. He held his breath and listened. At first, he heard no sound save the blowing of his horse, the beating of his own heart, and the whispering of the locust trees.

Then a low, throaty sound from the direction of the cabin caught him like a blow. It was the voice of a woman, sobbing in the last utter extremity of heartbreak and despair.

He leaped from the saddle and plunged toward the cabin. The Widow Hogan was crouched in the dust, her body lying across the broad steps, her head buried in her arms. Her outstretched hands still lay on the threshold, as though she had, but a moment before, knocked at the door in vain.

He knelt beside her and lifted her up, but she strove weakly to shake him off.

"Go away," she cried, sobbing. "You're too late. He took my boys, my Barney and Tim. I—I knocked at the door but you weren't there."

Windy laid her gently down. He

turned on his heel and vaulted to the saddle, reining in his plunging horse.

"It was Bog, huh? Did he come all alone?"

"You told me not to worry," said the widow, unmindful that her words were merciless. "I—I wasn't expecting him. He took my rifle away. He made the boys catch Napoleon and get on him. He said that he'd kill them if they didn't hang on. Then he rode away like a madman."

"Don't you cry no more, ma'am." Her tear-stained face upturned to him, wrung Windy's heart. Mentally, he bared his head as he made his vow. "I'll fetch them back."

He was gone, his spirited horse, sensing the madness of his rider, extended his muscles into commetlike speed. Windy did not hold him back. The cañon closed behind him. In orderly parade, double-quick, the pinnacles sped by. The wind pressed against his face like a cooling tide as he thundered up into the higher levels, heading south.

He knew what Bog had done. Taking the long chance that the distance of the shadows would hide the maneuver, he had dropped out of the procession. Concealed in the cañon after the brothers had gone, he had undoubtedly watched the pair descend from the heights across the river. As plainly as though the sneering face of his enemy was before him, Windy could see the malicious satisfaction that glowed in his eyes as he realized that the carelessness of the partners left the widow unprotected and alone.

A golden moon was emerging beyond the eastern pinnacles when he left the high trails and dropped down into the semitwilight of the cañon. He had evolved no plan of action. He knew that Bog would descend to the John Day with his prize and overhaul his brothers. No doubt the brothers, falling in with the scheme, would ride back to meet him. His best chance would be to overhaul Bog before he reached his reënforcements.

He thundered up the cañon, disregarding the roughness of the going, pinning his faith in his trusty mount. At his right, the moonlight dropped like a mellow curtain lower and lower on the mighty wall, until it was reflected at last in the speeding river.

Suddenly, from far ahead, came the sharp crack of a rifle. Its echoes rattled, ricocheted down the great defile, and were lost in the distance. Windy urged his horse to greater speed. From nearer at hand, around the bend in the rocky wall, another report crashed forth. He pulled his horse aside sharply into the shelter of a jutting crag, leaped from the saddle, and scrambled to a point of vantage commanding a view of the moonlit trail ahead. He waited, but there were no further shots.

Then, in the vivid moonlight, Windy caught a picture that he never forgot. It had elements of the ludicrous, yet it was grimly and desperately pathetic. It was of the gaunt, blue mule, Napoleon, thundering toward him at ungainly but prodigious speed. His great ears were flattened against his bony neck. His long legs spurned the rocky road beneath him with the last ounce of his energy. His lean head was outstretched as though by the mere elongation of his bony frame he hoped to put yet more distance between himself and the menace that was on his trail.

On his back was a burden more precious to Windy at that moment than life itself. It was the youthful sons of the Widow Hogan. Barney, the elder, was in front. Around his waist, Tim's arms were clasped in a desperate grip. Both were crouched low over Napoleon's back. How the youths could ride at such a speed bareback was more than Windy could imagine. But they clung like burrs.

"Pull up," he shouted, waving his arms as they approached his point of vantage. "It's me, old Windy DeLong. Pull up."

The white faces of the boys were upturned toward him. Obediently, they tugged at the reins. Their puny efforts would have availed nothing had not the desperate mule, sensing instinctively that here were friends, swerved aside of his own accord into the shelter behind the crag.

The boys slid to the ground and scrambled up beside Windy. Despite the pallor of their faces, their black eyes were blazing with excitement and they were grinning.

"There was a spring in the bank," Barney explained breathlessly. "It made a little stream across the road. When he came to that, Napoleon stopped all of a sudden. It broke the lead rope, and it upset Bog's horse. So Napoleon turned around and ran back."

"When he got untangled from his horse, he took his rifle and shot at us," said Tim in an awed voice. "When he got on his horse, he shot at us again. I heard one of the bullets. It sounded like a hornet. Then he chased us. But Napoleon had a pretty good start."

At that instant, the raging Bog thundered into view around the bend. His great body was bent low over his powerful horse. His clenched right hand held the rifle clear of the plunging animal.

"I'll throw a scare into him," muttered Windy as he drew his guns and rested them along the edge of the sheltering rock.

Twin reports crashed as one. The plunging horse slid on his haunches to a snorting stop. Bog dropped from the saddle to the shelter of a boulder. The riderless horse wheeled and galloped back.

A tongue of flame spurted from the boulders, followed by the crashing report of the rifle. The bullet spat by overhead and whined away into remote distance.

"Boys," said Windy, "now listen real careful. Them other mavericks will be here any minute to help Bog. Go down and take the saddle off my critter. Climb on him and light out for home—he'll outrun anything the Hogans has got, if they get past me, and you have to make a race of it. Give the critter his head. He knows the way—all you got to do is hang on. Wait a second; take the rope off my saddle and tie that long-eared goat to the chaparral. I may ride him home after this business is over. And I may not," he added beneath his breath.

"But we want to watch you make them bite the dust," protested the bloodthirsty youths, "just like Laramie Luke and the redskins."

Again came the vicious crack of the rifle. The bullet flattened against the protecting crag, ricocheted throbbingly across the river.

"There ain't no telling who's going to bite the dust," said Windy grimly. "Get going, boys. Get along now. Your ma will be awful glad to see you."

## CHAPTER X.

### RIDING HOME.

THE moon was high above the pinnacles when Lonesome and the schoolma'am rode down from the upper levels and descended by gradual degrees into the cañon of the John Day. With the world about them serene and beautiful in the mellow light, and a cool night wind whispering and rustling in the sage, it was, even as Lonesome had predicted, a fine, large evening.

But trouble rode with him in the saddle. His plans, he was forced to acknowledge with an inward grimace, were not proceeding according to Hoyle. Cooler than the evening

breezes, almost chill, in fact, had been the schoolma'am's reception of himself and his protestations of innocence, concerning the stories she had heard of him in Condon.

She had agreed, finally, to ride with him through the moonlit pinnacles for a brief call on the Widow Hogan. But she gave the impression that it was not because he wished her to do so, but on the other hand through some incomprehensible and altogether feminine impulse.

As she led the way down into the cañon, he examined her furtively and with some misgiving. A fine figure of a woman was the schoolma'am, in her trim riding habit and mounted on her thoroughbred sorrel, but where, he wondered bitterly, was the good fellowship and mutual understanding that formerly had ridden with them on the same trail. Some indefinable sixth sense told him that she was about to break the silence that had enveloped them during the previous half hour. Nor was he mistaken.

"It's rather late, Mr. McQuirk," she said, as their horses splashed through the shallow water of the ford. "I really don't see why we should be making a social call at this hour. It's unusual, isn't it?"

Her haughty preciseness of manner, as always, added further to his depression.

"I figgered it was a fine night for a ride," he offered feebly. "I didn't know it would turn out so danged cold."

"But of course," continued the schoolma'am, "you are accustomed to call upon her at any time. The first visit was before sunrise this morning, wasn't it?"

"I done explained how that happened, ma'am," said Lonesome wearily. "Yeah, I could repeat it backward. If if hadn't been for Windy's garden and that prize stall-fed squash he's raising, we wouldn't even have known she was there. That danged mule——"

He broke off suddenly, pulling up his horse. They were on high ground, at a point where the cañon opened up below them in a vast southward sweep. Borne on the breath of the wind, muted to a frail echo by intervening miles, he thought he heard the sound of distant gun play.

"What is it, Mr. McQuirk?"

"Shooting," said Lonesome, chuckling. "Some of the boys cutting loose, I expect. With the brand of hooch them hombres get, they're probably taking pot shots at flying foxes. It's funny," he mused, a little later; "it sounded like rifles."

As they rode through the scattered buildings of the McQuirk-DeLong homestead, the schoolma'am swerved her mount toward the garden fence.

"I'm curious to see that squash you mentioned so often," she announced.

Lonesome leaned over the fence and searched the limited area. With mounting astonishment he looked again. But the spot where the giant vegetable had once reposed was barren ground.

"It's gone," he announced with ludicrous amazement.

"Naturally." The schoolma'am tightened the reins. "Of course, I'm not doubting your word, Mr. McQuirk. There *was* a squash, wasn't there?"

"There was," he stated emphatically. "The dangedest biggest squash you ever laid eyes on. You're casting reflections on my story," he accused. "Wait till you see Windy throw a fit and you won't doubt it no more." Mentally he added to himself: "Now, if Windy ain't over to O'Hara's Springs, I'm sunk."

Windy was not at O'Hara's Springs. This was all the more surprising to Lonesome, since his horse was grazing on the flats as they rode up. The first words of the widow, who saw them coming, and ran forth from the door-

way of the cabin to meet them banished forever any doubt the schoolma'am may have entertained that the lady was a rival for Lonesome's affections.

"You're a fine lummox of a man!" cried the widow, her voice trembling, and her dark eyes blazing with excitement. "A fine partner you are, gallivanting around like this while Mr. DeLong is battling all alone against them terrible Hogans out in that awful cañon. He may be dying this minute —dead for all you know or care——"

"Hold on, ma'am," Lonesome cut in, his pale blue eyes unwinking. "What's all this about? Where's Windy? What's happened?"

In a torrent of words, wringing her hands, the widow explained the situation. The boys, excited too, but more coherent, added clarifying details. It was obvious that the widow, with the boys safe, had transferred her fears to Windy.

Lonesome tarried to hear no more. He spurred away, but not before the schoolma'am's eyes, wide and eloquent with feeling, told him plainer than words that their differences of opinion had been laid low.

"Hurry and bring him back," the boys called after him. "Ma's made five pies out of that big squash she found in Mr. DeLong's garden. She said if he ever came back, he'd be hungry."

Riding furiously, Lonesome encountered a lone horseman proceeding at a leisurely pace along the western rim of the John Day cañon. He did not recognize the horse, but as he pulled up he saw that it was Windy.

"Well, I'm danged." Lonesome wheeled his horse and fell in beside his partner, heaving a deep sigh of relief. "Yeah, I might have known you'd get out of that jack pot O. K. Where's the Hogans? Where's Bog?"

"The Hogans," said Windy, reaching for his plug of tobacco, "is heading south. Bog"—his teeth sank into the weed—"is dead."

Lonesome started, and peered at the other.

"You shot him, huh?"

"No," said Windy. "By the exercise of poor judgment, he done hastened his own departure, as the feller says."

His mustache bristling, he began at the point where the boys had left him in the cañon.

"Me and Bog shot a couple of rounds back and forth, but we wasn't getting anywhere. All I aimed to do, was hold Bog until the boys had a good start. After that, I hadn't figgered. If Bog hadn't been foaming at the mouth, he could have picked me off in a hurry, him having a rifle that a way. He could have crossed the cañon and nailed me from the other side, me being in full view and out of range. But all he done was blaze away, which suited me fine.

"Pretty soon, the others showed up. They dragged Bog back, and the four of them had another of them sweet family confabs. They bellered around for quite a spell. I sat tight and smoked a cigarette. They could argue all night if they had a mind to. Meanwhile, I figgered the boys was riding home.

"After a half hour or so, here come one of them, with his hands up. I let him get near enough to talk, and kept him covered.

" 'We're through,' says this critter. 'We've used a little persuasion on Bog. He's agreed to go south, and no more shenanigans. There's only one little thing he wants,' he says.

" 'He can't have it,' I says. 'What is it? You're a fine bunch of polecats,' I points out. 'You was heading south once before, and you let that maverick pull some more dirty work.'

" 'He's going with us this time,' he says, and I can see he means it. 'But

he's such an onery critter he hates to give in. He wants Napoleon,' he says, and grins like a wampus cat."

"Well, I got to thinking about it. If Bog's stubbornness had got to have something to satisfy it, I figgered the widow would rather give up Napoleon than run the chance of having Bog come back again in the next ten years. Something might happen to us at any time, you understand, and the widow would be out of luck. On top of that, I couldn't see myself riding back on Napoleon. I'm too old to learn how to ride a mule.

"So I says: 'Give me a saddle horse, and you can take Napoleon.' And he says: 'It's a deal.' "

Lonesome eyed his partner askance.

"What did he want that worthless critter for? He took him away, did he?"

"He did not." Windy's black eyes glittered. "Take a squint back along the road."

Lonesome twisted in the saddle to look. Trailing them at a considerable distance, the gaunt mule loomed in the moonlight like a bony wraith.

"They give me this plug," Windy continued. "And they took Napoleon away. Bog couldn't lead him, but the others kind of herded him around.

"Right away, I began to get ashamed of myself. Pretty soon I was calling myself a Judas. I got to remembering how if it hadn't been for the ungodly heart of the critter, the widow would never have got to O'Hara's Springs. Yeah, and I had done delivered him over to the one human hyena that hated him the most.

"So I drew my guns and rode for the bend. A terrible uproar of some description had busted loose beyond, but I couldn't see what it was. I met Napoleon at the corner. Not expecting him, it was considerable of a tangle. I ain't prepared to swear that he went under me or over me, but he went by, and when me and my horse had picked ourselves up, there was the Hogans a little piece ahead, covering up Bog with a blanket.

"It seems that Bog had been wild-eyed over the whole business. He'd got it into his head that Napoleon was responsible for all his bad luck. He wanted the critter so he could kill him. Them other gentle lads told him to shoot Napoleon and call it a day, but Bog says no, he's going to club him to death.

"So he takes up his club and backs Napoleon into a corner against the wall, while them other polecats watch and grin. Before nobody can do nothing Napoleon lights on Bog like a cross between a buzz saw and a loco wildcat. He strikes him, and kicks him and bites him and tromps what is left of him in the dust, and lights out down the cañon. Yeah, there's a gentle critter. I kind of cotton to that old lion.

"And that's that," concluded Windy. "I tried to rope Napoleon so I could fetch him home—but it couldn't be done. I tried to herd him home and he wouldn't herd. So I got mad and left him, and I'm danged if he didn't foller me."

"Windy," said Lonesome, chuckling, as they rode through their homestead. "I hate to bust in on your pleasant reflections. But take note that your squash has done disappeared."

"Well, I'm danged." Windy endeavored to appear vastly disgruntled, but his mellow mood did not permit it. "Ain't it the bunk? I wonder, now, what happened to it?"

"I dunno," said Lonesome, "but I heard the boys remark that their ma had made a half-dozen squash pies on the chance you would show up to-night. How long has this pie business been going on?" he accused. "Partner, you've been doing me dirt."

"Squash pie," repeated Windy, licking his lips. "I could eat a barrel of

them. She had a license to take it," he pointed out. "I told her to help herself to what vegetables she wanted. A squash is a vegetable, ain't it? Yes, sir, I could eat a barrel of 'em. Let's speed up a little, McQuirk."

The pair fell silent, as they pushed on beneath the jeweled sky. Each rode alone with his thoughts. Far behind, beneath the mellow grandeur of the summer moon, the gaunt Napoleon brought up the rear.

As they moved down the ancient watercourse and turned again into the cañon that led to O'Hara's Springs, Windy's lean and forbidding face gave no hint of the dreams he was hugging close to his lonely heart. It seemed peculiarly fitting, as he gained the flat, that the widow should be watching at the doorway, one hand shading her eyes, the other upflung in joyous greeting, waving him a cordial welcome home.

## CHIPPEWA INDIANS RECEIVE FIFTY DOLLARS EACH

THE secretary of the interior has recently authorized the payment of a per capita allowance of fifty dollars to the Chippewa Indians on the Consolidated Chippewa and Red Lake reservations in Minnesota. Approximately 14,300 Indians whose names are on the rolls of the Chippewa tribe will participate in this distribution of tribal funds on deposit in the United States treasury. The appeal for this payment was made because of the severe winter in Minnesota, the lack of outside employment, and the limited resources of the Chippewa people. The total sum distributed will amount to about $715,000.

## ARIZONA ELK HERD INCREASES MANYFOLD

IN 1913, a herd of seventy elk was turned loose in the forested mountains south of Winslow, Arizona, the animals having been brought from Wyoming at the expense of the Arizona Order of Elks. The herd, protected by the State laws, prospered in its new home and increased to such an extent that it is now estimated to contain seven hundred head. A few of the animals have been killed by Indians and by casual hunters. In pioneer days, elk were plentiful in Arizona, but of late years, prior to this importation from Wyoming, they had been practically extinct in the former State.

# Not Worth Shooting

## By Harrison Conrard

*Author of "His Coffee-pot Cache," etc.*

ON the testimony of "Brick" Hubbard, the lanky, carrot-topped manager of T Spear outfit, "Red" Blake was bound over to the superior court.

Brick himself had caught Red in the act of converting the brand on a T Spear yearling into a Box E Prod and, in the preliminary hearing, had supported his evidence by offering as exhibits, the iron that had been used—he had taken from Red—and the green hide of the animal, which plainly showed the attempted alteration.

The justice of the peace listened to the evidence, examined the exhibits, and then bound the accused over, fixing the bond at one thousand dollars, which friends immediately furnished. Red was allowed temporary freedom.

With Brick Hubbard's evidence against him, Red knew perfectly well that there would be no chance for acquittal in the superior court trial, which would come in October. A term in the State's prison awaited him as sure as fate—not a long term, perhaps, but long enough to bring a marked interlude in his sly game of petty rustling.

Ten days after the preliminary hearing, Brick Hubbard drove to Grassville in his buckboard on some errands for his outfit. It was late in the day when his business was at last finished; so he decided to remain overnight in town.

He was out on the street at daybreak. He went down to the town corral and gave his team a liberal feed. In a little while he was back on the front street again and was about to turn into the Chinese restaurant for his breakfast when a whistle announced the coming of the morning east-bound train. After the manner of his kind, a train held a fascination for Brick. He deferred his breakfast and sauntered down to the station to watch it pull in.

Seeing Brick, one could not doubt his calling. The marks of the range upon him were unmistakable—weatherbeaten face, high-heeled, decorated boots, with trouser legs stuck carelessly in the tops,

two-gallon white sombrero, black silk shirt, and buckskin jacket.

The day coach discharged one lone passenger—a slender young man of twenty-one or thereabout. He was clean-cut and neat-appearing in well-tailored blue serge. He carried a heavy suit case. As he stepped away from the coach, his alert eyes, acorn brown like the fringes of hair that showed at the rim of his narrow straw hat, spied Brick, who was casually drawing near with careless cowboy swing. Immediately they lit up as with a flash of recognition.

"I'm glad you're here to meet me, Mr. Blake," said the young fellow in a low, hurried tone, as he advanced to Brick. "Fred told me he'd written you that I'd be in this morning and that you'd be at the train; but I was afraid you might not have got the letter in time. I'm the Texas Kid, you know. Just came from Phoenix."

"Sure, Kid!" Brick breezed with shrewd intuition as he grasped the extended hand. "I'm real proud to see you. So you and Fred fixed it all up, did you?"

He did not feel flattered at being mistaken for Red Blake, but, with nimble wit, he sensed a sinister hint in the young man's words and nervous, confidential tone. With it a quick suspicion reached him that, in some manner, the coming of The Texas Kid to Grassville—whoever The Texas Kid might be—had in it a meaning of vital importance to himself. That he had been sent from Phoenix by Fred Blake, Red's worthless grown son, was especially significant.

So Brick promptly responded to a crafty suggestion that arose in his agile brain. He would pretend to The Texas Kid that he was Red Blake, and perhaps he might be able to worm out enough information to give him a clew to the young man's mission.

"Yes," The Texas Kid replied in a guarded voice, sending furtive glances about to make sure that no one was within hearing, "Fred and I fixed it all up. He paid me the five hundred, as he wrote you, and said you'd hand me the other five hundred on the day I finish the job."

"Didn't Fred fix a date for the finish?" Brick asked as a venture. He relieved The Texas Kid of the suit case, and they started up toward the front street.

"Oh, yes, surely. He told me all about the trouble, and how, if the fellow can be permanently planted before the fall term of court, the prosecution will never be able to make a case against you. So, of course, this being the end of August, it must be done within the next couple of weeks. But—it's a rather nasty job, Mr. Blake, and I want to get it over with quickly, you understand. And I need the other five hundred, too."

With the candid allusion to himself, which Brick could not mistake, instantly came a revelation of intrigue that caused him to gulp in a quick breath. He subtly masked his amazement.

"That's the idy, Kid," he approved. "We're twins on that p'int. Finish the job quick; and the quicker you do it the better it'll suit me."

He sent a sly glance to the young man. The Texas Kid might have been a bookkeeper, or a guileless clerk in a country store. Assuredly, he bore none of the marks of a killer.

Then Red Blake, himself—tall, rawboned and a little beyond middle age, as was Brick—came from a side street on a run, turning down toward the railroad station. At sight of him, Brick's facile wits assembled for definite action, and, with an inward chuckle at its sheer audacity, he promptly formulated a plan to pick up the evident intrigue by the middle and bend it back against itself.

"And here comes the old tarrier right now!" he advised in a whisper.

"You mean Brick Hubbard?"

"Brick Hubbard hisself. He must be runnin' to ketch the train. Now, wouldn't it be a low-down trick if the old reptile happened to slope on us jest when we was all primed to——"

"He—he's a tough-looking hombre, isn't he?" The Texas Kid quavered in an undertone as Red Blake drew near.

Red scrutinized the newcomer thoroughly, looked all around him, then hurried on toward the station, muttering to himself.

"Now, I wonder," Brick speculated, "if the old rattler's goin' to throw a kink in the nice little picnic we've got all fixed up for him, by driftin' off the range?"

The Texas Kid glanced over his shoulder. "The train's pulling out—and he missed it," he said in a disappointed tone. "He's turning back. You say he's a bad one?"

"Bad?" Brick injected a quake into his voice. "Kid, they don't make 'em worse'n that hombre. That's the reason for why I had to drug some outsider like you in on the job. I'm real slick at unravelin' my two little old lead slingers myself; but both my arms acts like they was plumb paralyzed alongside of old Brick Hubbard. Jest the same, I don't reckon it'll be much of a trick for you to shuck him out, you havin' the world beat for speed."

Brick was still probing, but with the utmost caution.

"I'm fast, all right," The Texas Kid admitted as an undisputed fact rather than in a spirit of boastfulness; "but if our man's as speedy as you say he is, I won't take any chances. I'll slip around——"

"And shoot him in the back?"

"Why—if there's no other safe way——"

" 'Twon't do, Kid. Never in the wide world. You'd get a rope looped under your chin quicker'n a cat's wink."

"But, according to my understanding with Fred, you're to see that I get away clean," The Texas Kid reminded him.

"There you've said somethin'," Brick affirmed, making mental note of the added discovery, "pervidin' you put old Brick's lights out fair and squar'. But you want to recolleck that me, or no other man, never could get you away clean if you cracked a feller's spinal colyum—even a no-account reptile like old Brick Hubbard. So there you are. Well, here's where we eat. Corral the talk."

They went into the restaurant and sat at a table, Brick facing the entrance, The Texas Kid's back toward it. While they were eating, Red Blake opened the door; his thumping heels stalled at the threshold.

He cleared his throat; but Brick beat him to speech and called out brazenly:

"Hello, Brick, old timer!" The Texas Kid's hand snapped to his armpit. "Come on in, Brick, and meet my friend, The Texas Kid, who jest sifted in on the mornin' train from down Phoenix way."

Red turned abruptly and stamped away in a sulphurous fog.

"Looks like old Brick's campin' right on our trail, and he's sure actin' hostile," Brick observed in a confidential undertone. "We've got to be mighty keerful so's not to start nothin' here in town, for he's got his friends, like everybody else. They'd be too many witnesses agin you if you bumped him off out in the public street. So it's up to us to keep cl'ar o' him while in the burg and slip out easylike."

"You're right, of course," The Texas Kid conceded. "And, naturally, I'd much prefer to turn the trick—rather quietly."

They were a couple of miles on the road to the T Spear Ranch, with The Texas Kid's suit case behind the buckboard seat, when an automobile, honking malevolently, rolled up behind them.

"It's that cantankerous Brick Hub-

bard agin," Brick muttered as he looked back over his shoulder, and then swung off to the side of the road to give the car the right of way. "And ain't he on the prod proper? But them's the catamount's ways. Mebby he won't be so brash when he finds out—hold stiddy, Kid, and keep your hand clost to the old talkin' iron."

The car almost came to a halt when it drew up alongside the buckboard.

"Hello, Brick, old top!" Brick called out, with an insolent laugh. "So we meet agin!"

"I'll *Brick* you, you sneaking body-snatching coyote!" Red cried in high dudgeon. "I'll——"

"Now, you take my advice and jest meller down, Brick," Brick warned. "Don't start somethin' that mebby you cain't stop. I ain't much myself; but this here Texas Kid's a sure-enough——"

Red's angry foot stepped on the gas, and the rest of Brick's rash sentence was lost in the roar of the motor. The car shot ahead, slowed down with wavering purpose after going a hundred yards or so, and then picked up speed again and whirled away.

"Mebby the old varmint's suspicionin' somethin'," Brick said. "Anyhow, you keep your hand clost to the little old weapon, Kid. He's a snaky reptile, and likely as not he'll crawl into the high weeds som'ers along the trail and wait for us. And don't forget, if the pinch comes, that old Brick's chain lightnin' and you've got to unravel fast. And say: I've jest thought of one p'int we hain't never quite got around to talk over yet."

"Y—yes?" The Texas Kid stammered.

"It's the body. Where'll I ship it if things don't happen to turn out as per schedule?"

The Texas Kid offered no response. He tried to build a cigarette, but abandoned the effort after his trembling hand had scattered the spill of three futile attempts.

"He's sure fallin' apart fast," Brick thought, chuckling to himself. "But you cain't never tell nothin' about a kid. He might tighten up stronger'n ever, all dependin' on jest why he's got to raise that thousand. A young feller like him must have to have money real bad when he's taken this here kind of a job to get it."

Red Blake was not again encountered on the way, and they reached the T Spear by noon. There was no need for Brick to pass the word along to the boys, for The Texas Kid had pleaded to be kept incommunicado. He was assigned to a spare room, adjoining Brick's, in a far corner of the long log ranch house. There the stolid Chinaman served the meals of both; by cunning design, there was hardly a moment that the two men were apart.

In the afternoon Brick and The Texas Kid rode off toward Red Blake's home base, some fifteen miles away—Brick, in rusty bat-wing chaps, a .45 on each straight hip; the younger man in brown whipcord riding togs and puttees, a .38 automatic in his arm holster.

Brick had an early fear that The Texas Kid might discover the deception in the T Spear evidences that were everywhere about, but, by artful delving, he soon satisfied himself that the young man had not come from a cattle region, and that brands were cryptic characters to him.

"Old Brick's people have about gone to dickie," Brick advised as they struck through a scrub cedar area. "It's jest a kind of a greasy sack outfit they've got now, and their headquarters ain't nothin' but a shack. I don't reckon we'll find nobody about but Brick hisself. I'll p'int the place out to you, Kid, and then I'll watch the fireworks from off in the cedars while you dash in and get him. But you don't want to forget that he swings a mean gun."

"Since he's—that kind," The Texas Kid said faltering, "maybe—we'd better go after him together, Mr. Blake."

"Nothin' doin'," Brick demurred shortly. "That ain't the way you taken on this here job."

"I know it's not," The Texas Kid admitted; "but, from the way Fred put it up to me, I had no idea—it was going to be anything like this."

"You'll find it plumb easy, Kid," Brick assured him; "so don't you go and get the wriggles. All you've got to do is to meet old Brick face to face, beat him to the draw, and then pop it to him right squar' betwixt the eyes. Me—I'd jest naturally be in the way, as slow as I am, and mebby get us both in bad. That'd be turrible misfortunate, with nothin' to show for that five hundred you've got in your jeans except a couple o' pine slickers that wouldn't be becomin to neither of us. Now ain't that the truth?"

"I—I've sort of soured on this job," the young man admitted dispiritedly; "and, if I had the five hundred Fred gave me, I'd hand it over to you right this minute, Mr. Blake, and call off the deal."

Brick shot him a reproachful look. "You ain't tellin' me you've scattered that five hundred already, Kid? He rebuked him in a hard tone.

"Why—no. I haven't spent a cent of it. I sent it all to my mother just before I left Phoenix; but, if it isn't too late—if she hasn't turned it in yet—I could wire her to send it back."

"So you've got a ma, have you?"

There was a painful moment of hesitation; then The Texas Kid nodded to a mumbled, "Yes, Mr. Blake."

"And it's for her that you've got to raise that thousand?" Brick questioned.

Followed a sustained stretch of silence. "In a way—but not altogether," The Texas Kid said at last.

"How come?"

"It's—just like this, Mr. Blake," the young man began. "I was bookkeeper in a store in my home town down in Texas—and I got in with a fast crowd. It's the same old story. You understand how it is. Gambled, you know—and lost. I thought I had to keep up my end. I didn't intend to steal—just borrowed from the store—nearly a thousand dollars. The boss found it out, and I skipped.

"While I was in Phoenix, I had a letter from my mother in which she said she'd talked with the boss, and he promised he wouldn't prosecute, and would give me back my job—and wipe the slate clean, if I made good what I took. I don't have to pay it all back at once—five hundred down, and then work out the balance.

"Mother has a little more than five hundred that she's been saving up for a operation, and it must be performed soon if her life is to be saved. I'm—all she's got; and it'll kill her if I don't go back. It would be just the same as murdering her if I should let her use her money to get me out of the mess I'm in."

"Uh-huh!" Brick looked off into vacancy. "And I reckon it'd be jest like her to forget all about the operation, and slip away to the other world so's to sort of ease things up for you, Kid. That it?"

"Why—yes, Mr. Blake, you know how women are."

" 'Specially ma's," said Brick. "Ma's are funny critters. I never could savvy 'em. They hain't got a lick o' sense in some ways."

"Anyhow," The Texas Kid said, "I made up my mind that she shan't use her money to get me out of my scrape. I gave an exhibition of pistol work in Phoenix a few days ago, and, when Fred saw the way I handled a gun, he hinted to me that you'd written him that you wanted a job performed up here. When I told him I was ready to do anything that would bring in some

money, he put the whole proposition up to me. I saw a quick way to get the entire thousand—and I accepted."

"I reckon you're the kind that'd do a heap for your ma, Kid. Now ain't that the truth?"

"I'd do anything in the world for her, Mr. Blake," The Texas Kid replied throatily.

"Even kill a man who never done you a bit o' harm in the world? That it, Kid?"

The Texas Kid winced.

"O' course, that's right and proper," Brick assured him. "'Specially when it's a feller like old Brick Hubbard. And don't you never let nothin' or nobody stand betwixt you 'n' your ma, son. Look around and you'd think they was oodles o' ma's in the world—but, when you get right down to cases, you find they're jest about the skeercest article on the map. I ain't one to find no fault with Providence; but it sure does stick in the craw to think that a feller's never allowed but one—and they's lots of us that hain't got none a-tall."

The Texas Kid stared into the cedars.

"So you do the squar' thing by your ma, Kid," Brick advised. "And that means that you've got to go on as per contract. Jest keep in mind that old Brick Hubbard ain't wo'th one little finger of any ma on this earth."

"I'll get him," The Texas Kid declared stoutly. "Anyhow, there's no way out of it now."

"There you've said a pile, Kid," Brick commended. "For instance, if you was to fall down on this here job, I'd have to have my five hundred back, and, of your ma's already turned it over and, if your ma's already turned it over by havin' her dig up the five hundred she's got stuck down in her sock for that operation. You savvy that, don't you?"

"I've started in on this job, and I'm going to finish it," The Texas Kid said, gritting his teeth in grim determination.

"That's the way to talk," Brick said. "Don't let nothin' interfere with your duty. But you want to be mighty keerful and do it 'cordin' to Hoyle. If you happened to throw a kink in yourself jest at the ticklish second and let old Brick beat you to the draw, it'd make your ma feel turrible bad. Wouldn't it, now?"

A long shudder shivered through the slender form.

"Sure it would! And if you happened to knock him over the teeniest tiniest leetle bit before he started to draw a-tall," Brick went on with brutal candor, "which any jury of your peers'd say was straight first degree murder, you'd jest naturally get your neck jerked out o' j'int."

"Please don't, Mr. Blake!" The Texas Kid cut across the sentence in a tone that went tense with horror.

"It sure don't listen none like no poetry piece, does it now? So you be mighty keerful, Kid, and play the game safe. Not too soon, not too late, recolleck. Jest betwixt and between. It's a ticklish job, all right; but for a go-getter like you—whoa!"

Both drew abrupt rein.

"See that old rattler coiled up yander ahead of us, about fifteen-twenty yards off, and cussin' us out like he was boss of all creation?"

"Yes!"

"We'll call him Brick Hubbard, for instance, and see how you can make the old talkin' machine orate. You go for his head, and I'll take his tail. Ready?"

"Yes!"

"Go!"

Almost coincident with the word, the two guns spoke in apparent unison, but with The Texas Kid's .38 the smallest fraction of time behind Brick's .45. The mottled reptile squirmed in its death throes.

"Nice work, Kid!" said Brick in honest praise. "You've sure got speed to spare. Now let's hold the inquest."

They rode up and dismounted. The rattles had been clipped off clean; the head was held by a mere shred.

"I cain't learn you no new tricks with the old smoke wagon, Kid," Brick said with warm admiration. "I sure cain't. Why, you're jest about the fastest I've ever seen."

"But you're every bit as fast as myself!" The Texas Kid returned limply.

"Never in the world," Brick said; "I'm jest middlin' fast—nowheres near fast enough for old Brick Hubbard."

"Then—if *you're* not speedy enough for him, I can't see where I'm going to get off," The Texas Kid observed in a dejected tone. "I never thought—it'd be anything like this. Fred assured me it'd be easy."

"Easy? It's goin' to be the easiest thing in the world. All you've got to do is to get old Brick jest betwixt too soon and too late — and the money's your'n. So there you are."

They came to a low elevation from which they could look down on Red Blake's log ranch house, which, together with the barn and corral, was set in a clearing in a wide scrub cedar area. Doors and windows were open; Red's car stood in the front yard.

They reined in and, without warning, Brick's throat opened to a screechy cowboy call. The reckless yell snapped at The Texas Kid's taut nerves and caused him to jump in the saddle.

Red Blake came to the door, then dodged back into the house. He reappeared in a moment with a rifle.

"There he is now," Brick said in a stage whisper. "Old Brick hisself, and he's all alone. Now's your chanct, Kid. I'll stick back in the brush while you ride in; and jest before he can wiggle his trigger finger, you pop it to him right squar' betwixt the eyes. It'll be like shootin' fish. But don't forget what I've been tellin' you about not bein' either too late or too soon, and all them other et ceteries."

The Texas Kid sat rigid in the saddle, his mouth agape.

"Ramble, Kid!" Brick snapped out curtly. "Go to it while the goin's good."

"There was nothing in my agreement with Fred that required me to commit suicide," The Texas Kid replied in a dull tone.

"Well—no," Brick agreed. "I reckon that's correct. And it might be downright inconvenient for me to have to tote you back to the ranch, and you with some real important parts plumb missin'. So mebby we'd better put it off till the signs come right. We'll jest take a sashay round the old varmint's shack, ridin' guard like, a little out o' reach o' that mean-lookin' weepon, and see what comes."

What came was what Brick had planned and foreseen. They rode circle around the house all the rest of the afternoon, while Red Blake dodged from shelter to shelter to keep watch on every movement.

The sun tilted down behind the hills; twilight fell; deep dusk, and then night before the two riders withdrew and rode back to the T Spear.

Day after day Brick and The Texas Kid returned to the silent siege—but The Texas Kid could not know that it was a siege. He thought that Brick was impatiently waiting for him to ride in upon Red Blake and complete the gruesome compact. They ate their sandwiches in the saddle as they rode round and round the house, while the beleaguered man, patroling sullenly, kept constant vigil on the tireless besiegers.

In the afternoon of the fifth day, Brick, waving The Texas Kid's nervous protests aside with an impatient gesture, began to draw the circle a little tighter.

"Hoops is comin' loose, and he's sure goin' to staves," Brick observed when

his keen eye made note of Red's shambling gait.

He visualized his sleepless nights, as he waited for a surprise attack in the dark, and his jumpy nerves, scraped raw by the terrorizing fear that was everlastingly rasping on them.

"Old Brick's gettin' so rickety that he'd jest about shoot hisself if you was to tangle with him now, Kid," Brick deliberated. "You won't never get a better chanct in the world than this. So dash him quick, and it'll be safe enough for you to wait till he starts shootin' before whistlin' it back at him. Then it'll be a cl'ar case o' self-defense if you pop it to him right squar' betwixt the eyes. I'll set out here and watch the puffo'mance; and if things don't pan out proper, and Brick makes a bobble and scores a bull's-eye."

"I've gone to staves myself, Mr. Blake," The Texas Kid interrupted, with a high-pitched laugh that indicated repressed hysteria on the verge of exploding.

"You don't mean it!" Brick scolded. "And the job all ready to be finished right this minute."

"I—I just can't help it," the young man confessed in a shaky voice. "I'm—all frazzled. I couldn't hit the side of a house to-day. This thing of riding round and round, with my eye always on old Brick—and on that rifle—has got my goat. I'm afraid—I'll have to give up the job."

"And leave me holdin' the bag?" Brick cried. "It won't do, Kid. Ain't I goin' to get a look-in for that five hundred? If you show up yaller now, and don't finish the job, and your ma's turned the money in to the boss, which she's jest about gone and done long before this, it's goin' to make it turrible hard all around. You understand that, don't you?"

The Texas Kid drew a nervous hand across his eyes. "I'll see—how I feel to-morrow, Mr. Blake," he mumbled. "I'll—see. Maybe I'll be in better shape—to do it."

"To-morrow then, Kid," said Brick severely. "I'll give you one more day. But I'm tellin' you, I'm gettin' plumb fed up on this here dilly-dallyin'."

They rode out the day, The Texas Kid limp in the saddle, Brick glum and scowling, and Red Blake staggering, as he doggedly trudged round the house, with the two persistent riders always in sight.

Brick and The Texas Kid returned to the siege at daybreak, as usual. The Texas Kid had nerved himself to fulfill the contract. Hysteria, no longer repressed, was goading him on. He was eager to the point of desperation. They rode to the top of a low hill from which they could first take the necessary observations. Red Blake was not on guard this morning. The house looked deserted; windows were boarded up; the car no longer stood in the front yard.

"Now ain't that jest our luck!" Brick cried.

"What—Mr. Blake?" The Texas Kid inquired with gulping haste.

"Why, if I savvy the signs, old Brick's cheated you out of your frolic," Brick replied in a regretful tone.

"You mean——" The Texas Kid was trembling.

"That's right, Kid. He's fell clean apart and taken to the brush. Or mebby it's a trap. We'll ease in sort o' keerfullike and have a look-see. But keep your hand clost to metal, for mebby the old varmint is jest playin' foxy."

Their caution was unnecessary. The doors were locked, but an entrance was forced, and the house was found to be empty. Red Blake had slipped away under cover of night.

"He's sure fanned it," said Brick. "Now ain't that turrible misfortunate!"

Inwardly he chuckled with satisfaction. It was far better that the notorious old rustler was out of the country

entirely than have him spend a brief term in the State's prison, and then return to take up his guilty iron again.

"I'd say it's the luckiest thing in the world!" The Texas Kid's hysteria exploded in a shrill yelp, accompanied by two great tears that rolled down his cheeks. "Only—that five hundred, Mr. Blake. I—I——"

"Forget it!" Brick said. "I keer a hoot about that five hundred, now, don't I? You jest let it stay where it's went, Kid. You've got my permission. And now I'm goin' to rush you right in to town and put you on the first train that comes along and make you foller it. You've done noble, anyhow; for you've skeert Brick clean out o' these here Arizona parts, and for keeps, too, I'd say—and that's heaps better'n killin' him. Old Brick Hubbard ain't wo'th shootin', nohow."

## THE OLD-TIMER TALKS OF RETIRING

OH, I'd like to settle down in some little frontier town
Where the mesas ain't too fur away to see,
There to rest my saddle knees and to sorter take my ease
Till the Big Boss of the Round-up sends fer me.
Jest a little bunk house there, and a pard or two to share
Memories and tales of ridin' days,
Jest to watch young punchers go down the trails I used to know,
And sometimes to dream old dreams in twilight's haze.

Oh, I'm gittin' kinder old, and I feel the winter's cold,
And the summer sun gits hot here in the West—
Though I still can ride an' rope and I love my pony's lope,
I can feel my old bones hankerin' fer rest.
Well, it may be in the fall when the grass gits good and tall
I'll unsaddle and bid ranch and range good-by—
Yet there's something makes me stay, and when spring returns I *may*
Mount again and keep my saddle till I die!

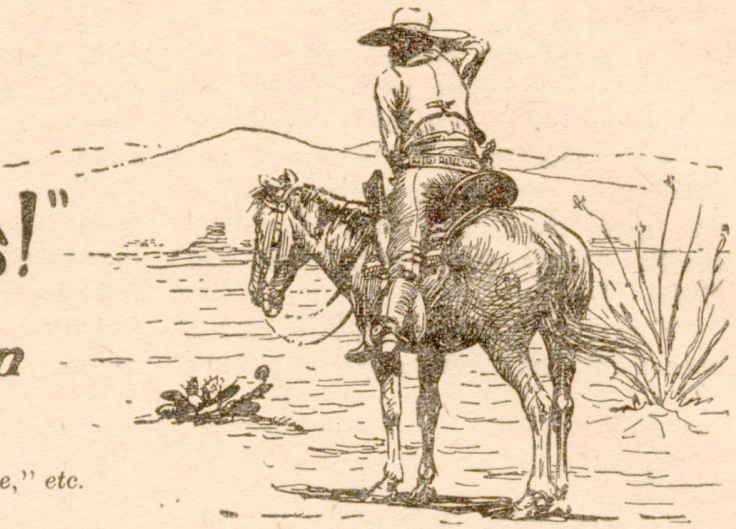
S. OMAR BARKER.

# "Get Jimps!"

By

## Arthur Preston Hankins

*Author of "The Lucky Bug Lode," etc.*



**Synopsis of Preceding Chapters**

LIMPY JIMPS, sheriff of Caldera County, discovers that decoy advertisements from the Laub Employment Agency in Los Angeles are related to the mysterious murders in the desert.

The rival town of Mazorca is out to "get Jimps" with Mate Cox at the head. He is also the head of a crowd of questionable characters with whom he makes a raid on Heroina. Limpy trails them, but the gang is headed off safely by "Squinty" Laub, head of the agency. He has fled from town, and arrived in Heroina with an effeminate young scientist, Lincoln Highfall.

Limpy goes to Mate's ranch to arrest Squinty and spies the arrival of Highfall and a native of Heroina, Tom Barlow. Following them into the desert in hopes that they will lead him to Laub, he discovers that Mate Cox and three followers are out to get them, too. Cox and Gaunister are preparing to trap Barlow and Highfall, when Limpy electrifies them by stepping out of the covert and covering them with his guns.

### CHAPTER XX.

#### IN IRONS.

SLOWLY and cautiously, his six-gun pointing horizontally from his waist, Limpy Jimps left cover and approached the two men, who had thrown up their hands at his stern command.

Colts were in their holsters, only a few inches from their hands when the command rang out, but neither Cox nor Gannister had had the courage to draw. Cox, at least, was a brave man; but odds are odds, and death is death. Those two sharp words of information, "It's Jimps," coming from they knew not where, meant annihilation if they disobeyed.

Stepping lightly on the balls of his feet, Limpy Jimps drew near to them. When close, his big gun began slowly moving from the body of one to that of the other, like a cobra's head. Limpy quickly lifted his left hand, jerked Cox's six-shooter from its holster. In the same instant the muzzle of his own gun left Cox's stomach and pointed unwaveringly at Gannister's.

"Take it out and drop it, Baldy," he said soothingly. "Try anything else you want to, boy."

Baldy Gannister held to his safety-first program, and the Colt thudded in the desert sand.

"Get off, both of you," was the sheriff's next command.

"Is this a pinch, Jimps?" asked Mate Cox, sneering as he swung his right leg over the cantle.

"Sure," said Limpy, "I thought you knew it all along."

The low, broad brow of the ranchman held an ominous scowl. Squat, heavy set, broad shouldered, he stood before Jimps, his short, columnar legs planted and slightly spread, his eyes

blazing with wrath and hatred. He looked like some old-time bucko mate of sailing-ship days.

"Got a warrant?" he demanded.

Jimps shrugged his shoulders and made a movement with his six-gun. "This," he said.

"Well, that goes, maybe, for the present," Cox replied. "And what's the charge?"

Limpy thought about this for the first time. "General cussedness, it ought to be," he replied. "But I can't think of anything legal soundin' except 'disturbin' the peace.'"

"Huh! Ten-dollar fine—about. I'll pay that ten right now, Mr. Sheriff."

"No, we'll take you through the proper procedure, Cox."

"You got nothin' else on neither me ner Baldy," Cox maintained.

This was perhaps true, and Limpy didn't like it. He knew that Mate Cox was a murderer, but he could not prove it. What sentence a judge might impose for captaining a raid on Heroina and shooting up the town he did not know, nor how the charge should be framed.

But he did know that he had Mate Cox, at last, and that he could make arrangements to hold him and Gannister until Laub was captured, provided that occurred within a reasonable length of time.

"We won't indulge in idle conversation about charges and warrants," he told his prisoners. "Ye're both under arrest, and that settles it. Turn around and walk."

"I'll get you for this, Jimps," Cox threatened.

"Oh, yes, I know all about that," the sheriff made retort. "You been gettin' Jimps for several months. But now Jimps has got you. Make dust, gentlemen."

There was no use in further argument. Both men knew Limpy Jimps too well for that. They faced about. Jimps scooped up Baldy Gannister's gun, then swung quickly into the saddle on the back of Cox's magnificent black stallion.

"Ye're headed right," he said. "Walk brisk."

The two prisoners started marching back in the direction from which they had come. Jimps followed them on the beautiful stud. They entered the buttes. Soon Limpy spied his roan's strawberry head raised above the chaparral, small ears pointed forward expectantly.

The roan did not nicker. Nor had he done so, Limpy knew, when Cox's gang rode past him as they crossed among the buttes. This was one of the roan's several admirable qualities. He never neighed at sight of other horses, which Jimps had found convenient on many occasions.

"This'll do," Limpy told his charges.

He had swung from the saddle before they were aware of it.

"Baldy," he ordered, "lie down in the sand, back up."

Gannister obeyed without protest.

"Cox, walk ten steps to your left."

The cattleman quickly obeyed this command.

"Lie down, your back to the sun."

Cox did not comply until after he had looked over his shoulder and sneered into the muzzle of Limpy's Colt. Then, with deliberate slowness, he obeyed.

"Stay put," said Limpy. "O' course, with me on horseback, you realize it would be silly for either o' you to try to get away."

He turned the black stallion and rode to his wall-eyed roan. From the hair-covered saddlebags he took two sets of leg irons. He rode back to the two prisoners, each flat on his face in the sand, ten feet apart.

He dismounted, and immediately the leg irons clicked on Cox's ankles. Limpy stepped to the prostrate Gannister and treated him likewise.

Then he stood erect.

"You both know the desert," he told them. "It's a long ways back to the spring, and that's your nearest water. I'm gonta leave you a little in one o' my canteens—enough to keep you from sufferin' till I get back. I'll take yer horses with me.

"So, though you might be able to get along with those irons on your legs, you can't get far. You could mosey off and hide from me, o' course; but the desert is the desert, boys, and you'd be wantin' me again right soon. Better stay put till I get back. It's safest in a country like this. And now, I'll bid you good-by. Nurse yer water, and you may expect to see me when you see me."

He took the roan's bridle, when he reached him, and led him behind. Baldy's horse he found waiting where he had been left. He took this one in tow also, and at a swift gallop rode the black stallion along the edge of the buttes in a southerly direction.

Limpy Jimps was feeling pretty good at last. He felt that he was accomplishing something after months of unprofitable effort. He had Cox and Gannister. He thought that he would be able to frame up a charge that would hold them for some time to come. Surely the pastime of riding through a town and shooting out the windows was a serious offense.

If he could get Simon Laub, the man might turn state's evidence on Cox, Gannister, and the other Double T desperadoes to save his own hide. This would bring peace to the desert and satisfaction to the soul of Brickbat Trinity. Then Janice might—might think carefully about what he meant to tell her when a good opportunity was offered.

He had never expected to be on the back of the famous black stallion, who would back down a street at a swift trot without the rider's touching the reins. What a beauty he was! His long lope was as soothing as the rocking of a cradle. Limpy looked back at the roan and boyishly cried:

"Hoss, I don't wanta be untrue to you. You and I've been pretty good pals. But, dog-gone it, I couldn't resist forkin' this patch o' midnight just to see what it felt like."

Yes, Limpy Jimps was exultant just then.

His thoughts sobered as he remembered the two men somewhere up on the side of the pink-and-yellow butte, and the two who had come with Cox and Gannister, now on the other side of the chain. What was this business that had really brought Cox and his gang in pursuit of Highfall and Tom Barlow?

Surely they were hostile to the pair; surely Kackley had sent them out here for some selfish reason of his own. This meant that Highfall was not a spy for the gang and not a friend of Simon Laub. More than that, it meant that the chances of Laub's being hidden up there in some recess of the butte was extremely doubtful.

Then what was Limpy's business now? It would seem, from what he had overheard, that there was a long, tunnellike cave up there somewhere, and that it had two entrances. Cox and Gannister had planned to attack Highfall and his hireling, if they came out on this side. Red Imboden and Cyclone Kackley had ridden to the other side to take care of them if they showed up there. It was Jimps' duty to protect these two, anyway, and perhaps he would find other official tasks as the climax drew near.

He reined in the black, dismounted, and left him and Baldy Gannister's bay close in to the cliffs. Then, mounting the roan again, he rode swiftly back and began searching for the beginning of the trail up which Highfall and Barlow had ridden and hazed the burro.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE CAVE.

PATENTLY, Mr. Thomas Barlow, Heroína's most efficient loafer, had lied. He had been known to do so many times before, so that the people who lived in Heroína placed little credence in anything he said. Lincoln Highfall, however, had not been aware of this when he engaged Barlow to aid him in his scientific quest.

What Barlow had lied about this time was the caves. He had led Lincoln to believe that he knew their exact location, had spent many profitable hours browsing about within them, and could lead him to them blindfolded.

When it came to a show-down, and Lincoln was ready for a preliminary trip of investigation, it developed that Barlow's information was the least bit shaky.

He then denied flatly that he had told Highfall he knew exactly where to find the caves. He said that what he had told him, was that he knew the buttes in which they were situated. Which was truth itself, for everybody in that country knew the buttes, except, perhaps, a certain blind Mexican who played a guitar in the Mint Julep Saloon. Barlow made it emphatic that his statement had been designed to convey the fact that he knew a man who *did* know something about the caves, and that he was willing to guide Lincoln Highfall to him.

The mild-mannered scientist, not wishing to mistrust anybody, had managed to convince himself that, because of the fiery whisky he had drunk that day, he had misunderstood.

Then it was that they had journeyed together to the Double T to hold conference with the man who knew. He was Cyclone Kackley. Highfall was not even told that the name of the ranch to which he had been conducted was the Double T. Barlow was obliged to be cautious about this, lest Heroína suspect him of treason.

Mr. Kackley had courteously directed them, even supplying them with a map, as has already been set forth. Had Lincoln Highfall known what was in Kackley's mind when he gave those directions his face would have paled with apprehension.

For Kackley had not sent them to the caves that Highfall wished to see. He knew where the Indian caves were situated, all right, but they were not to be found so readily as the one to which he had sent his questioners.

He had sent them to a cave, a long one, similar to a man-driven tunnel, which extended entirely through one of the buttes and had an entrance on both sides. The other caves were farther on down the chain, and the approach to them was puzzlingly obscure.

Kackley had already heard about Lincoln Highfall. News of the little entertainment that the young Easterner had put on for the desert people, quite unintentionally, had traveled far, even to the Double T. Highfall was being described generally through the country as a man of means, some kind of a scientific bug, and an easy mark of the most pronounced type. The "man of means" portion of the information that Kackley had of him was what interested him most.

Then Highfall had ridden innocently into his arms. Kackley's brain had worked swiftly. Mate Cox and the rest of the gang were in the mountains, so Kackley could do little until he had got into communication with his chief. What he could do was to send Highfall into a remote, wild country, where he would doubtless remain until Kackley had told Mate Cox about the good fortune that had come their way.

The plot, of course, was to kidnap Highfall and, by letter, inform his wealthy father in Chicago that, for a certain generous sum, his son would be

set back in Heroina, right side up, with care.

If Limpy Jimps had not left the vicinity of the Double T and hastened across the desert so quickly, he might have seen Cyclone Kackley riding hard into the mountains after the departure of Barlow and Lincoln Highfall. Up there, Kackley had found Mate Cox and laid the plan before him. The two had rounded up Red Imboden and Baldy Gannister, and an all-night ride over the desert had brought them into the buttes shortly after the event of the cave hunters.

By now, but for Jimps, Highfall and Barlow might have been prisoners in the cave to which Kackley had sent them. Jimps had interfered with the well-laid plan, and two of the conspirators were in his power.

Lincoln Highfall and Barlow, each carrying an electric torch, were busily engaged in studying the rock walls of the ancient cave. Behind Highfall trotted the little yellow dog which he had found on the desert, half starved and nearly dead from the need of water. Barlow had been for shooting the cur to put it out of its misery, but Highfall wouldn't hear of such a thing.

"It is easy, Mr. Barlow," he had said, "to take life, but impossible to bring the dead to life again. This dog has a right to live. Somebody has treated him cruelly and left him to die on the desert. I shall water and feed him, and, if he can't walk, carry him in my saddle until he can."

An unexpected fire had shone in his mild blue eyes when Barlow tried to laugh him to scorn and looked about for a weapon to dispatch the crawling supplicant.

"Listen, Barlow," the man from Chicago had said with cold earnestness, "you kill that dog, and you'll wish you hadn't. That's all I have to say. Go ahead and do as you think best."

Strange to remark, there was no lisp to the words as he spoke them. Barlow, being somewhat wise in the matter of reading certain lights in the eyes of his fellow man, had shrugged his shoulders and ridden on. And the cur, revived by food and water, rode into the Calico Buttes in Lincoln's lap.

He was happy now, and much stronger, so that he frisked continually about Lincoln's legs and ignored Barlow altogether. His new master was far from happy. The interior of the cave, though interesting, displayed no strange hieroglyphics on its walls, chiseled by forgotten peoples. The scientist saw nothing but rock, blank-faced, unmarred.

The cave twisted about like a snake. At times they found themselves in high-vaulted rooms that were quite capacious. At other times they were obliged to lie flat on their faces and crawl through some narrow passage. There were many of these lateral passages; sometimes they joined in the far recesses of the buttes. It was an easy matter for one to become almost hopelessly lost.

This didn't worry Highfall greatly, though. It was the utter absence of bones, stone implements, shards of pottery, and hieroglyphics that filled his heart with disappointment.

The searchers came to a pause finally in one of the high-vaulted rooms. Highfall seated himself on a stone and mopped his brow, though the cave was cold.

"Barlow," he remarked, "we have made a mistake. This can't be the cave that Mr. Kackley had in mind when he drew the sketch for us. There isn't the remotest sign to indicate that this cave ever has been occupied by anybody. Let's return to the horses and burro, go down on the desert again, and hunt for the cave that Mr. Kackley had in mind."

"But this has got to be the one that Cyclone meant!" argued Barlow crossly.

He was excessively tired from stooping and crawling and climbing. He had not ridden much since Heroina sprang into being. He wanted to rest a little and eat much; hieroglyphics didn't interest him at all—especially when there were none to be found.

"No, it doesn't have to be the cave that your Cyclone had in mind," Highfall lisped. "There may be another close by, for all we know."

"If they was," contended Barlow, "Cyclone would 'a' told us to look out for this one and not waste our time on it."

After a long space of silence Lincoln admitted that there was logic in that.

"Well"—he rose to his feet again—"we haven't gone entirely over this one. I imagined it would take several days to do that thoroughly. So we'll keep on. An ethnographer, Mr. Barlow, must be indefatigable. His slogan must be, 'Never say die.'"

"Well, that's a good slogan as far as she goes," sagely admitted Barlow. "I hope she ends there."

"Just what do you mean by that, please?"

"I was beginnin' to think that the rest of her was 'Never say eat,'" drawled Barlow.

"Are you hungry?"

"Like a buzzard."

"You're too fat, Mr. Barlow," said Lincoln candidly. "You eat too much. One should think little of eating when engaged on a deep scientific quest like this."

"And you don't eat enough," Barlow countered.

"I'm not hungry, anyway, and you are."

"I'm a man. A man needs food to keep 'im goin'. And I don't want old bones, neither. I want red meat."

"You mean to infer that I am not a man because I prefer work to eating?"

"I weigh eighty pounds more'n you do."

"Eighty pounds of fat. What little material is in me is muscle."

"It oughta be. You exercise a lot tossin' that hat around."

"Am I never to hear the last of that?" lisped Highfall a bit testily. "Even if I pitch my hat about in playful mood, when I have imbibed, unknowingly, too much of your rotten whisky out here, it doesn't signify that I'm not a man."

"You wear silk stockin's. You whistle like a baby quail when ye talk."

Lincoln Highfall rose slowly to his feet. The cave was lighted but dimly by the two electric torches, so that Barlow could not see that same lighting of the eyes that occurred when Highfall told him to kill the dog if he thought best.

"Listen, Barlow," Highfall's tones came clickingly, "I've heard entirely enough about my silk stockings, my hat and the elastic cord that keeps it fastened to me. I give you fair warning. Mention any of those things in a derogatory way just once more, and I'll show you what this hundred and thirty pounds I carry around is composed of."

"You don't mean that ye'd larrup me, do ye, kid?"

"I'll knock your confounded block off and make you like it! There, now, you danged pumpkin head!"

Barlow roared with laughter till the cave rang with eerie echoes. "Why, Link," he said genially, "ye oughtn't to talk to a reg'lar man like that. Papa'd oughta give ye a turrible spankin' for them disrespectful words."

"Papa may hop to it whenever he feels so inclined," retorted Highfall. "All he has to do, to get an opportunity, is to mention silk stockings, straw hats, or a certain infirmity of speech—which infirmity, perhaps, is not so noticeable right now as on less tense occasions."

There followed a lengthy space of

silence, at the end of which Tom Barlow heaved a deep sigh.

"Link," he said, "it's plumb kittenish of you 'n' me to be quarrelin' here in this lonely cave. Le's eat, then snoop around and try to find them high-low-jack-and-the-gifficks that we come here seekin'."

"Very well," lisped Lincoln Highfall. "Lead the way back to the entrance and we'll see what is in the pack bags in the way of food."

They started, Barlow ahead. Abruptly, he came to a halt; his face, turning to the rear, revealed its sudden pallor.

"Listen!" he said huskily, with a hand cupped one side of his mouth. "I heard somethin'."

"Nonsense! Go on. I'm anxious to get to work again."

"But it ain't nonsense, Link. I tell ye—— There! Hear that?"

Highfall listened. There came to his ears the unmistakable whispering echoes of soft stealthy footsteps on the rocky floor.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE LABYRINTH.

THE yellow dog began to whine and growl. Highfall stooped and muzzled him with his hand.

"Say, Link," whispered Tom Barlow, "I'm skeered."

"Idiot!" Highfall exclaimed. "What are you afraid of? It's only some animal."

"It—it sounded like a man," said Barlow. "Wh-where's yer two new gats, Link?"

"Hanging on my saddle," Highfall replied complacently. "I didn't expect to have to use them in here, and they're heavy."

"And mine's in hock at Rafferty! Link, what d'ye s'pose it is?"

"An animal, I told you."

"No—never. Listen again. The footsteps of a—a man. At least I hope it's a man and not a——"

"Not a what?"

"A—one o' them Indians you was tellin' me about, that's been dead a thousan' years," whispered Barlow. "This here cave is spooky, Link, and I never was so all-fired sure that they ain't any ghosts."

"You're a perfect child!" said Highfall scornfully. "And by that I don't mean that you're the prize winner in a baby show, either!"

They fell silent. Nothing that Lincoln could say would have made Barlow wrathful. He was too deeply concerned over the mysterious origin of those eerie footfalls to indulge in petty wranglings. He was continually gulping.

"Link, if I was to see a ghost a thousan' years old I'd—I'd just naturally fade out like a mirage. I'm plumb skeered, I'm here to admit."

Highfall suddenly raised his voice, and at the unexpected sound of it Tom Barlow flopped over against a wall of the cave and slid down it to his knees, weak as a rag, his teeth chattering audibly.

"Who's coming?" Highfall had called, and the rocky walls mocked: "Who's coming? Who's coming? Coming? Coming?".

When the strange echoes had died to low whisperings there came a voluminous burst of sound. "It's Jimps, the sheriff! Where are you, Mr. Highfall?"

Barlow had shrieked shrilly when the sound began to boom through the cave, but before the echoes had died down he was murmuring piously:

"Thank Heaven, it's Jimps! It's Sheriff Jimps—thank Heaven for that!"

"You miserable ass!" Highfall ridiculed.

"I'm all twisted up!" came the sheriff's echoing call again. "Keep saying something, Mr. Highfall, to direct me

to you. Not loud—that raises too much stir in here."

"All right, Mr. Jimps," Lincoln returned; then he continued to call, "This way; this way."

Finally Jimps stepped into the shaft of light from his electric torch.

"Good old Jimps!" said Barlow.

The dog, his muzzle freed, barked until the cave rang with his clamor, and the men clapped their hands over their ears to protect their drums from the stunning impacts.

Highfall collared him finally, soothed him, and made him acquainted with Sheriff Jimps before peace could reign. Then Highfall and Jimps shook hands.

"Well, this is a pleasant little surprise, Mr. Jimps," he told the sheriff. "I certainly wasn't expecting——"

"Listen," interrupted Limpy, "this is no time for idle talk. You've been gypped, Mr. Highfall. Mate Cox and his gang are after you. Keep quiet till I tell you what I know."

Highfall and Barlow listened with open mouths while the sheriff outlined his recent adventures. "And," he concluded, "its seems that Cyclone Kackley and Red Imboden are waitin' to grab you if you leave this cave by the other entrance. Have you seen anything of that entrance yet?"

"No," Lincoln replied quite calmly. "We haven't been that far. It's a stupendous cave, Mr. Jimps. It would require days to explore it thoroughly."

"Well, that's the entrance you've got to watch out for, anyway, wherever it is," said Jimps. "Because I've got the two who were to watch for you at the east entrance, and they're out o' the running. Now, the thing to do is to get out of here, get our horses, and ride around to surprise Kackley and Imboden. I'll deputize you two to help me. What kind of a gunman are you, Mr. Highfall?"

"I expect I'm pretty much of a zero," answered the student of sicence, "but I'm game. A gun will look as big in my hand as in the hand of any other man, I fancy. And I guess I could shoot the thing off, if I tried. Anyway, I can put on a terribly severe face when I make up my mind to it."

"Where are your guns? You looked like a hardware store when you rode past me some hours ago."

"I have two new ones, and also a new Winchester rifle," Highfall informed the sheriff. "But I left them outside with the horses."

"Where's yours, Tom?" The sheriff turned to Barlow.

"In soak," Barlow replied morosely.

"Well, you can borrow one of Highfall's, I guess. And, Mr. Highfall, if you're gonta tote a gun in this country, I'd advise you to tote her all the time. Either do that, or don't go heeled. Le's go now. We'll attend to the little matter of gettin' these four in irons; and then I reckon I can take 'em to Heroína alone. That'll leave you fellas free to go on with your investigation of the cave."

They started for the east entrance, Highfall and his helper flashing their lights to show the way.

"I didn't see your horses and burro comin' up the trail," said Jimps.

"They're not in sight," explained Lincoln. "Do you remember crossing a little flat halfway up from the desert?"

"Yes, that's where I left my roan."

"Our animals are there, too," said Highfall. "There's a branch trail leading to the left from that flat. We led them along that way and found another level, open place where they would have more room. They're safe enough."

After this there was silence save for the echoing sound of their footfalls. It was Barlow who spoke first again. "Seems to me we been walkin' a long ways," was his remark. "We oughta reached the mouth some time ago."

"I was thinkin' about the same," Sheriff Jimps told him.

"And I," said Highfall. "We're not going in the right direction. Barlow and I found this cave mighty puzzling, Mr. Jimps. We got lost several times."

"We're lost right now," said Jimps emphatically.

"There are so many passages, most of them similar, that it is very confusing. I have a compass, but there's some metal around here somewhere which attracts the needle. I can't depend on it."

"How 'bout the dog?" asked Jimps. "Maybe he can lead us out. They've a certain instinct, you know. Try 'im, anyway."

"How should I go about it?" innocently asked Highfall.

"Blamed if I know," Jimps replied. "Here, Carlo; come 'ere, old-timer! Show us the way to grub."

"He's stuffed right now, Jimps," muttered Barlow. "Link threw grub down his throat till I thought he'd bust. He ain't worryin' about grub."

*"Rats!"* cried Jimps sharply. "Sick 'im, Towser! *Rats!"*

"Towser" seemed not to be a ratter, for he only cocked his head on one side, the left ear crooked forward, the right backward, and looked inquiringly at the sheriff.

"Go on, old-timer!" Jimps encouraged. "Hunt 'im up! Rabbits! Wild cats! Ground squirrels! What's your favorite game?"

With owlish inquisitiveness the dog turned his head from one side to the other and did his best to interpret Limpy's meaning. It was plain that he was a peaceable creature and had received very little training in the gentle art of annihilating the lesser creatures of this earth.

"He's a bonehead!" decided Barlow. "He won't go ahead one foot. He just wants to keep under Link's heels all the time so he'll be handy to step on."

They abandoned Carlo Towser as a guide and set out again—not before Jimps had thoughtfully made a large X on one of the pinkish walls, using the lead bullet of a .45 cartridge as a pencil. Ten minutes afterward Barlow croaked his disgust as he pointed it out. They had described a complete circle through devious misleading passages and returned to the same place from which they started.

Barlow sat down on a jagged stone and mopped his brow. "This is gettin' fierce," he said shakily. "I know there was somethin' phony about this hole when we fust poked our noses into her. Say, it wouldn't be any fun a-tall to keep up this merry-go-round till we dropped, plumb tuckered. I been wantin' to eat for three mortal hours, men, and can't find my way to the dinin' room. Give us a dash outa that canteen, Link. My dredger's as dry as a prairie dog's hole in August."

"Lay off the water for the present," Jimps said sternly. "You're right, Barlow. This *is* gettin' serious. And it'll be more serious than ever if we lap up all the water so early in the game."

"Deprivation—nothin' but deprivation!" muttered Barlow. "No eats, no water, no nothin'. Believe me, I'm off this science racket for the rest o' my sinful life!"

They forged ahead again at Jimps' command. He made different marks, circles, half-moons, squares, triangles, letters as they went along, trying many passages. Always they returned to the characters that he had made, and Barlow would gloomily announce:

"Triangle Ranch, gentlemen—Half-moon Hollow—the celebrated Circle J. One continuous round of pleasure. If I could only chase a cat away from her saucer o' milk, I'd g'rantee to come back in here and die, if that's what life holds in store for me!"

"Shut up!" commanded Jimps, im-

mediately after one of these outbursts. "Hear that? A ground squirrel squeakin'!"

Plainly came the shrill protest from far away, though heard but faintly.

"Where's that dog?" Jimps looked around.

The dog had vanished.

"He's gone outside!" cried the sheriff exultantly. "That ole sentry ground squirrel has sighted 'im and is tellin' 'im what a bad ground squirrel he is. The entrance is close, boys—mighty close!"

The angry squeaking continued. Then suddenly it stopped, and a moment later the yellow dog was once more frisking about the legs of Lincoln Highfall.

"He come from there!" cried Barlow excitedly. "I seen 'im comin' down that there passage!"

All three turned and began running in the direction indicated. The dog, lured into the belief that something exciting was taking place, at last left Highfall's heels and ran ahead of them, barking to show that, whatever was afoot, he meant to have a paw in it.

He led them around an abrupt turn in the rock wall, and the light that was reflected from the yellow desert below struck their eyes with a painful stab.

As they darted into the open, a bullet flattened itself on the rock face of the butte two feet from Jimps' head, and from below came the crashing report of a high-powered rifle.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### HIGHFALL'S BATTLE CRY.

"MOTHER o' Mike!" cried the frightened Barlow, groaning as he staggered back into the entrance. "I don't no more'n get outa this blamed cave till I get homesick for her. Who pulled that trigger, Jimps?"

Jimps had seen, and his face was grave.

"Mate Cox," he announced grimly. "I saw both him and Baldy Gannister. Cox shot at me."

"But I thought you had them shackled!" cried Lincoln Highfall.

"And so I did," said Jimps. "We were wandering about a long time in there." He calmly took out his watch and held it in an untrembling hand. "Half past three," he announced. "Cox and Gannister could have staggered around here by this time, even with the irons on their ankles. But would they try it? And how did they find their guns? They might have located the horses, but I hid the guns."

He flattened himself on the ground and crept forward to the edge of the rocks like a lizard. He removed his hat and cautiously peered over and down.

"There they both are, looking up here," he reported presently. "Cox has a rifle. He's holdin' it as if he expected a deer to break from cover any moment. And, so far as I can see, there are no irons on their legs."

"Take a shot at 'em," urged Barlow. "My gun's in hock," he added.

"No use to waste revolver ammunition on 'em," said Jimps. "There isn't a six made that will drop a deadly bullet down there."

"There's a rifle on my saddle," Highfall reminded him.

"Go down and get it, then," commanded Jimps. "The rocks will cover you, I think."

"Yes. I think so, too, I'll get it at once."

Lincoln Highfall slipped away down the rugged trail.

After a space of silence Barlow said to Jimps, still peeping over the edge: "I just been thinkin', Limpy. I guess I know how they pulled this thing."

"How?"

"Well, I don't know whether we told ye or not, we was so busy talkin' about other things; but Link and me come out here in an automobile truck—hosses,

burro, an' all. Link he said he didn't think he could ride this far first rattle outa the box, as he'd never been in the saddle very much.

"So we hired Nate Watson's big truck, got the hosses and burro in her, and Link, he drove us out as far as we could go into the buttes. That's how come it we passed the spring, where you was hid, so early in the day."

"Merciful Peter!" gasped out Jimps. "And you think that——"

"That Cox and Baldy Gannister, comin' later, rode past that truck where Link and me left her. So they knew she was back there, and guessed you didn't. And when you left 'em they gets on their feet and hobbles back to that truck, where there was likely a cold chisel and hammer in the tool box which would cut their irons off.

"Then they got round to Cyclone Kackley and Red Imboden and borried the Winchester offen 'em. A six, too, maybe—Kackley's a two-gun clown, ye know. Maybe took their hosses, too, seein's they didn't need 'em just then. Rides back in front o' this entrance, and—and here they are!"

"You've named the play," Jimps said sourly. "That's exactly what they've done. And now——"

Highfall spoke so suddenly that Barlow jumped with apprehension.

"Our horses and the burro are gone," was his stunning announcement. "Your roan, too, Mr. Jimps. They've sneaked up and stolen them, guns, food, and everything."

Barlow collapsed. "Food," he muttered. "What is the meanin' o' that there word? I heard it somewheres."

Limpy was puzzling over an entirely different matter. Why did Cox shoot at them now, when he made no hostile demonstration at the time that Barlow and Highfall went down for the burro and the horses, to lead them up the cliff? And why, if they had planned to appropriate the horses and the burro with the supplies on his back, had they not done so then?

These questions were answered sooner than he expected by Mate Cox shouting up from the base of the pink-and-yellow butte.

"Jimps! Oh, Jimps!" came the call that opened negotiations.

Limpy looked warily over the edge.

"Well?" he shouted down.

Then he withdrew his head, and held it on one side so that he could hear without exposing it to a rifle bullet.

"We got our own hosses, all o' yours, an' the canary with the grub," came the heavy voice of Mate Cox. "We got your burro, too, Jimps. You hid 'im, but he wandered out, I guess, and we picked 'im up. Get all that?"

"Easily," Jimps replied. "Proceed."

"We coulda got this Barlow and this dude's outfit long ago, but we didn't want 'em then."

"I see. And a slight interference on my part may have had something to do with that, too, eh?"

"Maybe so—maybe so. Anyway, we didn't want 'em then. We wanted Barlow and Highfall to come down an' get 'em and take 'em as far as they could up the trail. We meant to get 'em then, after they'd gone in the cave. We knew jest how far up the trail they could go with the brutes."

"All clear, Cox. And then?"

"Well, we got 'em, and all the grub and all the guns, exceptin' a six that you may have. In other words, we got all o' you right where we want you."

"Then why'd you try to smoke me up?" queried Jimps.

"You—you're different. We're out to get Jimps at any time o' day or night. We'll kill Jimps on sight any old hour you may name. Sorry I missed ye, Jimps.

"I'd jest as soon you were out o' this little game. But, now that you're

up there, we'll treat you jest like the other two, lessen we get a chance to pick ye off—which we'll do pronto. We don't want you at all—alive."

"Perfectly understandable, Cox. I know just how you feel about it. Well, about the others, now?"

"Jest gonta freeze 'em out. Starve 'em out, thirst 'em out. Got nothin' pertickerler against Tom Barlow, but he don't count, anyway, dead or alive. What we want, Jimps—and you can tell it to the dude if he can't hear—is a letter to his wealthy papa in Chicago askin' for the sum o' one hundred thousand berries in order that he may continue his bone huntin'. Otherwise he'll be uncomfortably hungry as the days go on.

"Ye see, Jimps, we got ye. You got not more'n one gun, and it a six. Admittin' that ye're somethin' more'n an amatoor at spreadin' lead around, ye could shoot at us all day from up there with a six-gun and gather no medals for yer work. But this here ole rifle will be spittin' at ye the moment you show yer face.

"So, providin' we don't get you that way, ye can starve with th' other two. It's a long ways to Chicago, I been told, and the sooner that letter's wrote the better for you cave dwellers up there. Think that over while me and Baldy eats a bite and washes her down with fluid from that spring back there. That's a beautiful spring, Mr. Sheriff. Got plenty of water in yer canteens?"

"And is that all?" complacently asked Jimps, as Cox ceased speaking.

"Just about, Jimps. Think her over. Us two'll be here when ye got anything to say. If we ain't, others will be. We'll take turn and turn about, ye know, at watchin' that hole up there."

Limpy Jimps crawfished his way back from the rim. He turned over on his back, sat up.

"Well? Did you hear?" He had spoken to Lincoln Highfall.

"Yes, I heard everything," the young man replied, seating himself on the ground. "Does—did he mean it?"

"I have every reason to really believe that he is in deadly earnest," Jimps replied.

"Dear, dear!" Highfall's smooth brow wrinkled under his blond hair. "This is a pretty pass. And I haven't found one bone, one example of picture writing, one shard of pottery. A rather expensive undertaking, Mr. Jimps."

"Find a shard o' corn bread, er somethin' like that," Barlow grumbled. "This is fierce, boys. Mate Cox is a bad actor. I'm skeered o' that hombre, no foolin'. I wished I'd kept outa this here parade!"

"Shut up!" said Jimps. "I'll throw you down to them if you don't."

"I wisht ye would, providin' the lightin' ain't too hard. They ain't got nothin' agin' me—they said so. *And they got grub.*"

"Is the situation really serious? Is this Mr. Cox actually in earnest?" Highfall asked Jimps again.

"It is the most serious predicament of your career or of mine," Jimps told him soberly.

"They wouldn't harm me, then, if they got the money?"

"I think not. They'd drive you out of the country, perhaps, in order to protect themselves. Unless Cox could sell the Double T and, considering that he has enough money, duck the desert himself. That's likely what they'd do—beat it. They'd hardly dare to stick around after they'd turned you loose."

"But could Cox sell readily, do you think?"

"He'd meet with little difficulty. I think twenty-five thousand dollars would buy the ranch. He'd drive off the beef stock and turn that into cash. This is just the time of year for that, all the four-year-olds rollin' in fat from the mountain meadows. Another ten

thousand would cover the younger stock and the breeders. Cox has been reducing his stock to some extent for several seasons, I've been told. Aimin' to weed the longhorns out and stock the ranch with better beef critters.

"Yes, thirty-five thousand would turn the trick. As soon as he gets the money from your father he'll sell out. He'll keep you a prisoner, of course, until he's ready to go. I know men who would buy him out to-day, and gladly."

"Who?"

"Brickbat Trinity, for one."

"Oh!" said Highfall.

He was thoughtful a long time, absently twisting about one finger the elastic cord attached to his new Stetson hat. He sighed finally and looked at Jimps. "Well, what had we better do?"

"Would the amount mentioned cripple your father much?"

"It would hardly phase him," Lincoln replied. "He's sinfully rich, Mr. Jimps. Retired, you know. He clips that amount in coupons twice a year. He lives simply, and just—just piles it up."

"Well, then," said Jimps, "if it's possible for a man to shell out a hundred thousand smackers and not be everlastingly ruined—which don't seem possible to me—I say you'd better write the letter."

"And how about you?"

"I'll try to take care of myself," said Jimps.

"But you're not included in the transaction. Cox said he would shoot you at the first opportunity that offered. They wouldn't free you with me, then?"

"And how 'bout *me?*" cried Barlow.

"Don't *you* worry," Jimps assured him. "They'll just forget you, perhaps. You're safer than any of us."

"But you haven't answered *my* question, Mr. Jimps," Highfall kept on. "How will you come out?"

"Fightin', probably," answered Jimps.

"Then," said Highfall, his thin lips tightening, "I'll come out fighting, too. If they won't guarantee you your freedom also, the deal is off. We'll stick it out together and see what happens."

"Oh, no, we won't," Jimps told him. "Don't you worry about me. This is only one act in the little show that Cox and his gang, and I, have been puttin' on for several months. Your case is separate. You do what you think is best for your own prospects, and let the gang and me fight the rest of it out between us."

"Decidedly not!" The light of battle shone in the eyes of the man who wore silk stockings. "You go out with me, unharmed, or I shall have nothing at all to do with the matter."

Limpy Jimps looked at the Easterner with growing admiration. "Link," he said softly, "you're a deceptive creature. You're agreeably surprisin', to say the least. I think I'm goin' to like you terribly if we ever get outa this and meet again. I'm mighty sorry I thought hard things against you less than four hours ago."

Then he told him of the suspicions which had vanished completely now.

"Dear, dear!" Highfall remarked. "What a stir I do create—all unintentionally. And I detest publicity, too. Well, everything's settled, then. We like each other, and we're going to stick to each other to the bitter end. Eh, Limpy?"

"I was hopin' you'd quit callin' me Mr. Jimps soon," drawled Limpy. "But, Link, we can't stick together. Cox won't have it. His battle cry is 'Get Jimps!' and, thinkin' he's got him now, he won't let loose because you ask 'im to. There's no use tryin' to include me in this deal. Shout down and tell 'im you'll write the letter to your dad askin' for the money, and get his instructions as to its delivery. And forget about me. Those are the only terms Cox will listen to."

"Then he won't listen to any," said

Lincoln Highfall firmly. "I've a new battle cry of my own: 'Get Jimps, get Highfall.' We stick together, Limpy."

"All very pretty," put in Thomas Barlow, "but how 'bout me?"

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### DESERTION.

THE afternoon dragged on. The three prisoners lay on the rock floor before the mouth of the cave, occasionally talking in lowered voices. Lincoln Highfall and Limpy Jimps swapped experiences of their past lives, while Barlow merely lay and listened. Or, when the historians were dwelling upon passages that did not arouse his interest, he whimpered to himself. Twice Limpy had jerked him away from the canteen, at which times he had howled like a baby deprived of its nursing bottle.

"Well," remarked Highfall at last, "we're pretty good friends now, Limpy. Strange how a situation like this makes men really understand each other. And now I've a suggestion to make. I'm never prone to laziness, and I know you're not either.

"So, as long as we're here—and likely to stay here until this old cave actually has some bones to boast of—let's kill time by nosing around. Barlow and I didn't halfway explore this interesting natural tunnel. I don't want my trip to be entirely a failure, and you haven't anything else to do."

"That suits me fine," Jimps replied, springing lightly to his feet. "They won't come up after us. Not till they know I'm too weak to level my six, at any rate. They may not respect Jimps, but they do respect a Colt revolver in Jimps' hand.

"And even if they do come, we could stand 'em off better in the cave than we could out here. Barlow, rise and shine. We're goin' to make this expedition a success, after all."

"Limpy," said Barlow, "I'm jest naturally too weak. I'm a reg'lar feeder, I am, and if I don't get my chow on time I go all to staves. And ye won't le' me have enough water to float a humming bird's feather. I don't want to weaken myself any further. You two go on, and I'll wait here and guard the entrance. If I hear or see 'em comin' up, I'll yell and duck in after ye."

"I don't know but that it might be a good plan to leave him here," Lincoln said in a low tone to the sheriff. "He's a rotten companion on a quest like this. So abominably lazy—and always howling about one thing or another."

"If we leave him," Jimps whispered back, "I'll bet my last cent he'll wave the white flag and sneak down to Cox. He'd give in, do anything Cox told him to, for a corned-beef sandwich."

"Perhaps so. But let him go. He has no gun, and wouldn't fight if he had one. And his big mouth makes one more to help drink the short water supply we have. Maybe, too, if Cox sets him free, he'll get word to somebody where we are held, and a party will be sent out to aid us. If only he could contrive to let Miss Janice or her father know."

"Don't let your hopes rise in that direction," warned Jimps. "Cox will see to it that he doesn't gain his freedom until this show is over. But he won't kill him, anyway. He'll be anxious enough to take him in, in order to learn how we accepted the glad news. I really wish he would go. That water's precious."

"Then let's take the canteen along with us," suggested Lincoln. "Barlow will have all he wants within a few minutes after we've disappeared."

Jimps nodded, stooped, and scooped up the canteen.

"Ye ain't takin' all that water along with ye, are ye?" spluttered Barlow; but there was in his eyes a look which revealed that he was merely acting.

"Sure," said Jimps. "You'd lap it all up while we're gone."

"Nice way to treat a brother in distress," grumbled Barlow. "A fine pair of birds, you fellas are!"

But, paying no further heed to him, Sheriff Jimps led the way into the chilly silence of the cave, the little dog following at Highfall's heels.

When the two had progressed about fifty steps Jimps laid a hand on Highfall's sleeve. "Wait," he said. "I'm going to sneak back to the mouth of the cave and see what's happened."

Ten minutes later he rejoined Lincoln.

"Has he?" asked the scientist.

"He has," replied Jimps grimly. "He's down there eating and drinking now."

"I hardly expected the man to prove a—a traitor," said Highfall bitterly.

"He's not that," Jimps returned. "He's only the space that a doughnut surrounds. He hasn't as much strength of character as this yellow dog. Just one less pair of lips to grab the neck of this canteen, Link. It's better so."

"This is going to be tough, Limpy," remarked Highfall seriously, as he flashed his electric torch. "How long do you suppose we can stick it out?"

"Is that your idea—to stick it out to the end?"

"Why, yes, Limpy—if Cox refuses to set you free with me for that hundred thousand."

"I like it, Link," said the sheriff, "but I don't approve. I'm hopin' that you'll give in when the sufferin' grows intense. That would suit me fine. Then I could go down shootin', and, if worse comes to worst, they can only get Jimps.

"That doesn't matter greatly. O' course I never been killed, you understand, but I wouldn't mind it much. I've been so near it so many times that the prospect holds slight terrors for me."

"Really?"

"Hope to die, Link!"

"What a remarkable man you are, Limpy. You interest me so greatly that I have fully decided to stick around and see you at work, if it comes to that. I've never seen a gun fight, except on the silver screen. I wish I had a gat!

"I'd like to go that way, too—with you, if it must be. That's far better than starving, or dying from the want of water. But let's be hopeful. Night follows day, you know, and it may bring new plans. Maybe we can accomplish something after dark and get them yet."

"Maybe," said Jimps. "Lead on—let's hunt for bones. Or pretend to outrselves that we're huntin' for 'em, anyway. What I'm gonna hunt for, though, is that other entrance. We might be able to surprise Cyclone Kackley and Red Imboden, if they don't yet know that we've had a talk with Cox and Gannister.

"It all depends on what the western entrance looks like, and how the land surface is beyond it. For all we know, we may be able to sneak down a trail and let 'em have it before they know we're anywhere about. If this happens to be my lucky day, I might get both of 'em, if the targets were set just right."

"An admirable idea, Limpy!" Highfall praised him. "But we'll look for scientific data as we go, if you don't object."

Limpy took a cartridge from his belt as they started out.

"I think I'll blaze the trail," he observed, "so we'll be sure to find our way back to the east entrance, anyway."

"I wouldn't," said Highfall quickly. "If Barlow has told them we have gone into the cave again they may decide to come up and have a try at getting you. A marked trail, in that event, would lead them directly to us."

"You're right," Jimps agreed, slip-

ping the cartridge back into its container. "Lead on—we'll take a chance."

An hour later, after much wandering about through the labyrinth of mysterious passages, they halted and seated themselves on stones. Lincoln at once shut off the light of the electric torch so as to conserve the energy in the battery, and they sat in the dark and talked.

They had discovered no evidence whatever of the cave's ever having been occupied by a vanished race. Neither had they discovered the western entrance.

"Tell me about these ancient Indians, Link," suggested Limpy. "What sort of objects were they, anyway? And what made you think you'd find traces of 'em on this desert?"

"Professor Dirth of Wentworth University," Lincoln Highfall readily complied, "found traces of them on the California deserts ten years ago. But his discoveries were not conclusive because later tribes had removed the greater portion of the specimens which would have been of inestimable value to Dirth.

"The professor died before he could finance another expedition. He didn't leave much data behind him, but he convinced some ethnographers that tribes of cliff dwellers at one time lived in California, even as they did in New Mexico and Arizona.

"That's what I want to prove. To establish that fact may seem like a trivial matter to you, but, I assure you, it would mean much to science. It would establish a new line of thought entirely, for, to date, it has never been proved that the cliff dwellers ever existed so far West as this.

"That's about all there is to my quest, Limpy, except that, if I found anything to prove the theory as correct, the find might include something new. Something that would throw new light upon the culture and the point in civilization to which these remote tribes had advanced before they became extinct.

"There was discovered recently in one of the States I mentioned vast caves containing mummified bodies, much pottery of a highly artistic type, jewelry—mostly set with turquoise—and even examples of basketry. You wouldn't believe it, Limpy, but baskets were discovered which were thousands of years old. They had to be handled with care, I can tell you, but they were gotten out in time, more or less intact, and sent to a museum."

"That's hard to take," Limpy observed. "Baskets that looked like baskets thousand of years old!"

"I'm telling you the truth. It's the strange climate of the desert that accounts for it. These tribes knew nothing at all about embalming their dead, yet mummified bodies were found which were in a state of preservation equal to that of discoveries in Egypt.

"The hot, dry air simply desiccates them. It absorbs all the moisture and preserves them to an astonishing degree. Skins were found which were over a thousand years old, even. The deserts of America may be destructive of life, Limpy, but they preserve the grim relics for countless ages. If we were to find some of these things, Limpy, you'd be as enthusiastic over the discovery as I would."

"Perhaps," said Limpy Jimps, "if I really knew they were thousands of years old."

"That part is easily proved," said Lincoln. "It's the easiest part of all."

Their talk drifted to other topics, but they avoided the subject of their grave predicament. They were conversing, it seemed, in order to crowd bitter thoughts from their minds. Neither liked to think of what might be in store for him. Neither liked to take up the seemingly unsurmountable problem of their release from this gloomy cave.

But they did talk about Mate Cox and Simon Laub, known to Lincoln as Whistler.

"I'm as sure as I'm sittin' here," said the sheriff, "that this Whistler you rode out with is Squinty Laub. But I'm havin' a time to prove it. Laub's really the only one I got anything on.

"I can't prove that Mate Cox and his gang had anything to do with the murders, though I know they had. Tell me, Link—when you were at the Double T, did you have any reason to believe that there was any one on the ranch besides the two you talked with?"

"This Cyclone person told Barlow that he and the other man were alone, that all of the others were attending to the cattle in the mountains."

"You didn't hear, for instance, anybody groanin', did you?"

"I'm sure I didn't. Why?"

"It's those two fellows I smoked up on the abandoned road," Limpy explained. "They're both severely wounded, if I'm anything of a diagnostician. My bullets ordinarily make holes close to the place I aim. I got both o' these jaspers, somewhere; and, even if they didn't cross over the hills, they're still laid up. Up on Cox's mountain ranch, I guess.

"That's where I wish I'd gone instead o' trailin' you fellows over here. If I could find those two wounded men, and could prove that they were vaqueros hired by Cox, I could go a long way toward implicatin' Cox himself. Don't you see?

"I've messed this thing, Link. I'm forever messin' everything I tackle, seems. Now my fool blunderin' has got you in a hole. If I weren't here you'd write that letter and get yourself out.

"But, bull-headed kid that you are, you won't go and leave me to fight it out with the Cox gang. And my bein' here ain't helpin' you any. They'd got you in this fix, anyway. I'm sore at myself, and I ask you once more to reconsider."

"Forget it, Limpy!" Lincoln cut in briskly. "That subject is taboo between us. We go out together, or we stay here together till relief comes. Somebody will surely institute a search for us when we don't put in an appearance within a reasonable length of time. There's Janice, for example."

"Yes, there's Janice," Limpy agreed. "I been thinkin' for some time that she's our only hope. But we don't want her mixed up in this!"

"There we go talking about our difficulties again!" Highfall said, laughing. "Come on, Limpy—we mustn't talk. Let's hunt for bones, as Barlow puts it—bones and the western entrance."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### JANICE INVESTIGATES.

THREE days had passed since Tom Barlow and Lincoln Highfall left Heroína in an automobile truck, which carried their saddle horses and a pack burro. No one who had seen them depart knew their destination, for Highfall had ordered secrecy. Neither did anybody know that, the day before, the pair had ridden through Mazorca to the Double T, for that had been Barlow's secret.

If it had become known at Heroína that he was taking Highfall to see Cyclone Kackley for any reason at all he would have been looked upon with high disfavor. Heroínans had nothing whatever to do with anybody who belonged to the Double T, for it was considered treason to do so. But Barlow knew that Cyclone Kackley alone had knowledge of the caves—and Barlow needed the money that Highfall offered for his services.

As to Limpy Jimps' disappearance, no one remarked on it, save Bill Caldona. Bill knew that Limpy had gone to the Double T to find out what he

could about the squint-eyed man who answered to the description of Simon Laub, wanted by the sheriff of Los Angeles County. Limpy had told him that he expected merely to spy on the ranch and try to discover whether or not Laub was there. Of course, if chance offered, Bill knew that his chief would come from hiding with gun advanced and try to make arrests.

The deputy, quite accustomed to Limpy's lone-hand plays, to not seeing him for several days when he set out on some mysterious errand, did not worry much until the third day of his absence came. Then he began to wonder what had happened.

He had just decided on getting a few citizens together for a ride over toward Cox's ranch, and on up to the mountain meadows if they learned nothing at the Double T, when Janice Trinity came into his office.

It was a cold, cloudy September morning. There had come a sudden change in the weather. The night before there had been a heavy rain. Fall had arrived beyond a doubt.

There was a slightly worried look in the girl's large, dark eyes, but she was fresh and neat in a tight-fitting, gray jersey and a divided whipcord skirt.

"Where's Limpy Jimps?" she asked immediately, merely nodding in response to the deputy sheriff's eager salutation.

"Been wonderin' myself, Miss Janice," he drawled.

"You don't know where he is? Where did he go?"

"To the Double T, ma'am."

"To the Double T! Alone?"

"Yes, ma'am. He likes to ride alone."

"Oh, I could—could spank him!" she cried. "He makes me so tired! Always trying to do something spectacular and trying to hog all the glory. He's the most egotistical man I ever met."

Bill rolled a cigarette. "Limpy ain't no swell head, Miss Janice," he said reprovingly. "He's jest naturally a—now what was it a fella called Limpy one day? I gotcha—an individualist. That means he's got a lot o' confidence in Jimps, I take it. In other words, he fights his own battles and seldom squawks for help."

"These are not *his* battles!" cried Janice. "They're the county's battles, the public's. Help has been provided for him. Why doesn't he make use of it? He's entirely too cocksure—too self-contained."

"But, ma'am, he jest went on a little spyin' trip this time."

"That means nothing. He may have started out with that in mind, but if anything turned up he'd march right into it, no matter how great the odds."

"Oh, not so bad as all that, Miss Janice. I've seen Limpy at work. He's mighty cautious. But he does take chances, I'll admit. That's jest his way. And, if ye'll pardon me, we ain't overstocked with help. They's only me besides Jimps, and somebody's gotta look out for the office and the town when the chief's away."

"He could have deputized a posse of citizens to go with him!"

"Easy said, ma'am. But, as long as I been dep'ty sheriff to Jimps, I never seen any citizens runnin' to be dep'tized. Not that we ain't got a lot of 'em that's there with the goods when it comes to a show-down; but they ain't many of 'em likes to be hauled away from his work, day after day, to go chasin' off over the desert after naughty boys that shoot up peaceful towns fer pastime. They git tolerable tired o' that sort o' thing, and they's been a lot of it since this imitation town was whelped."

Janice bit her lip thoughtfully. She realized that there was truth in what Bill had said. Still, it didn't bring Jimps back sound and well, and she couldn't help worrying about him.

"Do you know what has become of our guest at camp, Mr. Lincoln Highfall?" she asked.

"Ain't seen the gent fer sev'ral days. Le's see—four days back I seen 'im in the Mint Julep, talkin' with that bum of a Barlow."

"The day following that he was to start out on his search for certain caves, located somewhere in this country. I saw him the night of the day you mention. He was at camp, but didn't spend the night there. He said he would stay at Heroína so as to be able to get an early start next morning. I had intended to go with him on this first trip, but, as I wasn't feeling very well, I told him to leave me out. Besides that, dad wanted me to help him get ready for the barbecue he's going to give in a day or two, when he opens up his land to home seekers. I had to prepare some ads for the printers."

"I see," said Bill, since something seemed to be expected of him.

"Well," continued Janice, "I haven't seen Mr. Highfall since. Now, Mr. 'Temporary Guardian of Heroína,' where is Lincoln Highfall?"

"When did ye expect 'im back, ma'am?"

"Next afternoon. He intended only to locate the caves that day, if possible, and get the lay of the land. And, if he started on the day after you saw him, he's been gone three days."

"See the fella they got the truck from," suggested Bill. "Maybe he knows somethin'."

Janice left him and found the truck owner, who professed that he, too, had expected to see the adventurers long before this. No, he couldn't say where they were bound for when they set out. However, he knew that they had taken the road south out of town.

The girl went back to Bill. "Well, he knows nothing," she reported. "Now what are you going to do about Limpy Jimps?"

"I reckon I'll get some o' the boys together and set out lookin' fer 'im," he told her.

"Will you go to the Double T first?"

"I judge so, ma'am, seein's that's where Limpy said he was headed for when he left me."

"And if you don't find him in the vicinity of the ranch, I suppose you'll go on up to the mountain meadows, where the cattle are?"

"That's likely, Miss Janice. This change in the weather'll send all o' the Double T outfit into the mountains after the cows. Heavy rain here on the desert last night, what was it like up there? The mountain grass won't be good any more now—no strength in her. Cox'll be makin' his winter drive right pronto."

She looked him straight in the eye. "Bill, aren't you the least bit worried?" she quizzed.

Bill Caldona squirmed in his chair. "To tell ye th' truth, Miss Janice, I am," he confessed. "But I didn't wanta scare ye any more'n necessary. I'm hittin' the grit right now. I'll let ye know soon's anythin' turns up. But don't fuss about Jimps. He usually c'n take care of 'imself."

"Well," said Janice, "it's early, and I've nothing much to do. I guess I'll ride out along the south road and see if I can get sight of Mr. Highfall's truck returning. Goodness gracious, I hope I never get married and have a family of boys! They're hopeless. I'd be worried stiff every minute from morn till night. So long, Bill. Don't forget."

She left the twelve-by-sixteen office and galloped her white horse south out of town, and she had not gone far before she picked up tracks left by heavy tires. The rain had not obscured them greatly. Automobile traffic, what little there was of it, ceased almost altogether at Heroína. So she was almost sure, when she noted the broad impressions

in the sand, that she was on the trail of the heavy truck.

Letting the white have his head, she galloped him hard into the south, following the line of the Calico Buttes that loomed hazily to the east of her.

It was noon before she drew her horse to a standstill. She had been able, from the very start, to see occasional indications of the big truck's passage. Ahead of her the tire marks still showed, but her horse and she were sadly in need of water. Therefore, she dared not proceed any farther along the rutted road.

Old Henry Braman, the prospector, was known to her slightly. His alleged mine, she believed, was somewhere close on her left, a short way within the buttes. She must have water for her horse, at least, and she knew that there must be water at Henry Braman's.

She swung the white from the road and galloped him toward the distant buttes, entering them within half an hour, when she was at once gratified to find a beaten trail snaking its way farther into their midst. At the end of that trail, she was quite sure, she would find Braman's cabin. She urged her horse on, and soon a turn in the path revealed the roof of the hutlike structure. Also she saw old Braman working patiently at his windlass as he hauled up muck from the shaft he was running down to bedrock.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### A SHOT IN THE RAIN.

THE grizzled old desert rat, Henry Braman, led Janice Trinity's horse to the clay-lined hole below his spring, into which cold water seeped constantly. He drank, while he surveyed the girl with his filmy eyes.

"It's got me guessin', too," he said, "why Limpy don't come back with my best canary."

"You don't mean to tell me that you've seen Limpy!" cried Janice. "I wasn't expecting to get track of *him* here. But I thought you might have seen something of Barlow and Lincoln Hightfall."

"No, I ain't seen 'em, miss. I know Tom Barlow by sight, but I've never set eyes on this other fella. Limpy told me about 'em, though. In fact, he was on their trail when he rid through here."

"On their trail!"

"Well, scarcely that, either, miss. But he knew they'd be makin' this way shortly, and he rid ahead of 'em, so's to be on hand when they passed a spring far up in th' buttes and trail 'em on from there."

"But I don't understand, Mr. Braman," protested Janice. "Can you give an explanation of Limpy's moves?"

"Well, I might, now, but I don't know that I oughta, miss. He was on official business. While he told me what was up, I don't know that I ought to let her leak."

"Nonsense! Limpy is one of my best friends. He tells my father and me everything, except when he's preparing to sneak off and risk his life. Surely you know that Limpy Jimps and Brickbat Trinity have a great deal in common in this country."

"Yes, I know all about yer dad's big land deal, and that he was boostin' Limpy fer sheriff. Just the same——"

"Well, I understand how you feel, Mr. Braman," the girl said, knowing the loyalty of this class of men. "Just the same, something ought to be done about finding these three. I think I understand. Limpy hasn't got over suspecting Lincoln Highfall of being in complicity with the Cox gang. That's why he wanted to trail him and Barlow. But he's all wrong there. However that may be, the three of them must be looked up immediately. What can you suggest?"

Braman shrugged as, walking abreast

the girl, he led the horse to the cabin door and brought out rolled barley for him in a washbasin.

"Will you go with me now and help to find them?" asked Janice.

"Well, I ain't got any saddle horse," he answered. "Too old and stifflike to ride if I had one. But I c'n hike still. Suppose you go back to Heroína, miss, and tell the folks there what ye know. Same time I'll make it into the buttes and see if I can get track o' Limpy Jimps. I know where he was headed for, all right."

"You do? That's something."

"He had a map that a certain party had drawn—that is, he had a copy that he'd made 'imself o' that map. It showed a fella how to wind in and out among th' buttes till he come to a place that th' fella who made the map had marked X. Jest what's at X, I can't tell ye. I guess I never been quite there. I never monkeyed around much in these buttes beyond the spring that was marked in the map. I located this here claim only a little while after I come into this country, eight months ago, and didn't have to scout around a great deal."

"But could you take me to X?"

"I reckon. Close to her, anyway. I got a little dynamite and caps and fuse cached up that way. Been aimin' to go after 'em for quite a spell. We'd locate their trail beyond the spring, I reckon. Rain last night settled the sand so it won't blow and cover their tracks. And there's more rain comin'."

"Then let's set out as soon as possible," Janice suggested. "I'll pay you for your trouble and time wasted."

" 'Tain't that, miss. I don't want no pay fer doin' somethin' fer Limpy Jimps. But it ain't any trip fer you. You better fog it fer Heroína an' get a crowd."

"Every moment may be precious," the girl pointed out. "I'm sure that something dreadful has happened to all three of them. One never knows what is going to happen to a person wandering about on this treacherous desert. I want to go along with you. I'm not afraid. And I'll have my horse if I have to ride for help."

"Ye oughta be gettin' back to yer pa," he said reprovingly. "It's no trip fer a girl. We won't get back tonight, likely—back here, even."

"That doesn't worry me."

"It'll worry yer dad, though."

This was quite true, and Janice realized it. Still, with the impetuosity of youth, she was resolved to find out, with as little delay as possible, what had kept the three away so long.

Eventually she overrode the old man's objections, and when they had eaten and the horse had rested they set out together, the girl in the saddle, the desert rat walking beside her horse and holding to a long saddle string for support.

As they plodded along through the moist, yielding sands they refrained from speech, for the old man needed to save his breath. In one short conversation that took place between them, he told the girl that he knew nothing of the caves that Highfall was seeking.

It was late in the afternoon when they were nearing the spot marked "Water" on Cyclone Kackley's map. Then it was that the desert rat suddenly said, "Whoa!"

Janice reined in. "What is it, Mr. Braman?"

The old man pointed ahead at the sand. "Automobile tracks," he announced. "It's stopped here and turned. Look—a lotta tracks, miss! Washed by the rain, but still plain."

The girl was out of her saddle at once, giving them a minute examination. They were unquestionably the same impressions that she had followed from Heroína.

"It come from in that a way," remarked the prospector, pointing south-

west. "We been marchin' along abreast of 'em for some time, I reckon, just about fifty feet to the north."

He was examining a series of footprints and other indications of a brief occupancy of the spot by human beings.

"Cowboy boots," he proclaimed. "Deep heel marks, and small. Here and there I see streaks in the sand left by draggin' rowels, miss. There's been a lot doin' here. But the truck's gone back the way it come. See the back tracks there?"

He glanced ahead, studying the situation. "This is about as far as they could go in her," he observed finally. "Land's strewn with rocks ahead. They had a time gettin' this far, don't ye think? Dodgin' sand mounds and clumps o' sage and greasewood."

"What does it mean, since they've taken the truck away? And what shall we do? Follow it, or——"

"Look for footprints and hoofprints ahead," he said. "They brought that truck this far with the idear of travelin' on afoot or in the saddle. Ye say they brought two hosses and an ass in the truck?"

"So the owner of the machine said," Janice answered.

"Then we'll find hoof marks ahead, though they won't show much in those rocks. One here and there, maybe, though—enough to follow."

"But the truck has gone," Janice pointed out. "They've done whatever they came to do, come back, and driven away. I'm speaking, of course, of Lincoln Highfall and Barlow. What has become of Limpy Jimps is another matter, it seems."

"Don't be too certain," he reproved her. "It's likely I c'n read signs in the sands better'n what you can, miss. Le' me nose around a bit and see what I c'n see."

For ten minutes he walked in ever widening circles about the spot, dim eyes fixed on the sand. Then he returned to her.

"As near as I c'n make out," he said, "they's been all o' seven hosses walkin' over this place. And sev'ral burros, too. Also they's been men afoot, an' two of 'em wandered off that a way." He pointed down the buttes to the south.

"Up in that a way"—his finger described a semicircle until it was pointing eastward toward the heart of the chain —"two men, wearin' cowboy boots, come along headed this a way. They took mighty short steps, miss, and between their foot marks the sand is dragged, kinda. I been thinkin' Limpy had handcuffs an' leg-irons in his saddlebags. Maybe he got somebody an' put the jew'lry on 'em. Two fellas—no more. And as no other tracks are showin' there, these two was makin' it to the truck, duck-footin' along with shackles on their legs.

"If that's so, they got in the truck and went, I reckon. I hate to mention it, miss, but it looks mighty much like Limpy's ironed these two, and that they afterward got the best of 'im and beat it, but wasn't able to get the irons off."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, let's hurry on, then!" cried Janice. "He may be dying somewhere in these buttes!"

The old man nodded gravely, and they set out again, directing their course toward the bubbling spring ahead of them.

At the water hole they found more evidence of human beings having recently refreshed their stock and themselves there. It was now quite late, and Henry Braman was for camping for the night. But Janice wouldn't hear to this. While there was light left she was determined to search for Jimps, for by now she had ceased to worry over Highfall and his companion. They, she felt certain, had left the buttes in the automobile truck. And if Braman thought otherwise, he kept his own counsel in the matter.

"We'll take water with us," she said, "and ride as far from the spring as we dare. There'll be a moon, if the clouds break. I feel that a moment mustn't be wasted, when Limpy may be dying beyond there somewhere."

"I c'n find the spring, all right, moon or no moon," admitted Braman. "But the clouds ain't gonta break. It'll be rainin' in an hour."

"No matter! We must keep on! We can't take chances. This merciless desert——"

"All right," the gold seeker gave in, and stooped over the spring to drip water into the canteens till they would hold not another drop.

Then they set off toward the east again, winding their wearisome way among the now shadowy buttes, so mysterious and awe inspiring in the weird lights of the dying day.

An hour of travel followed, and then the rain poured down. They had passed entirely through the chain of buttes, for Henry Braman was, as nearly as he could determine making for the point marked X on Kackley's map.

On the west of them now stood a tall, grim butte, its face blazing forth now and then as lightning flashed.

"We're gettin' mighty clost," the prospector remarked, "if I'm any judge o' distance. It oughta be about here that my dynamite and stuff is cached in an old black-powder can back of a big loose stone at the base o' that butte. An' over there——"

His sentence ended in a strangling gasp. Immediately a loud explosion, somewhere on their right, seemed to burst the night asunder. With it came a flash of vivid lightning.

Henry Braman was tottering around in short circles, his head bent forward and sinking lower and lower toward the ground. Then, with another gasp, he fell face down in the sand and lay there twitching.

With a shrill scream of horror, Janice leaped from her horse and bent over him.

"Got me! Got me clean!" he muttered. "Ye can't help me none, miss. Get back on yer hoss and ride. Ride—ride away from here before they get you, too! Ride fast—good-by!"

A shudder shook his thin body. It stiffened, and his dim old eyes glazed suddenly as they looked up unseeingly at the brooding sky.

Another shot rang out as Janice ran toward her snorting horse. The frightened animal shied away from her as she reached out to him. In trembling tones she tried to soothe him; but he sensed the terror in her voice and leaped away. There came one more fluttering snort of fright; and, with Janice clutching in desperation at the reins, the horse bolted into the darkness.

Janice ran afoot with all her speed from the figure that she had seen against the butte when the lightning flashed, and the bullet sped on its way to Henry Braman's breast.

Terror seized her as she darted through the dripping night. For the man who had killed Braman was the owner of the Double T—Mate Cox.

**To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.**

# False Face

## By Ernest Haycox

*Author of "A Good Man to Lie For," etc.*

"NOW listen, you gol-durned, slab-footed curmudgeon," exclaimed Sheriff Bart McKenzie, "you're goin' to take the deppity star I give you! Don't want to hear no more objections. It's my duty an' privilege to draft an' swear in whomsoever I choose. You ain't got no right to stand there an' tell me you feel disinclined to serve yore country; it's a downright perversion of public sperrit, and I'm not a-goin' to stand fer it."

"Don't want nuthin' to do with it," repeated old Dave Budd with a still greater vehemence. "Ain't goin' to go around with that hunk o' tin on my shirt lookin' like a dumb fool."

"Fool?" roared Bart McKenzie. "I take it I look like a fool fer carryin' my star, then?'

"You're a duly 'lected sheriff," explained Budd. "People wanted you to serve, or they wouldn't have voted you in. As fer me, I'm a fat, old man, and my fightin' days are plumb past. Git yoreself some young and spry feller that likes to ride saddle all night long, or live on a slice o' bacon four days runnin'. Me, I got to have more comfort in my old age, Bart."

The sheriff neatly strung together a series of strong words. "Why, you idiot, you're no older'n me! Call forty-eight old? Howsomever, I ain't askin' you to track no criminals across the desert. You don't have to. Yore word is pretty much law in these parts, anyhow."

"Well, that bein' so," replied Budd, "why should I have to wear a gol-durned piece o' soldered tin on my shirt? Now you listen to me, old-timer. I got my own way o' dispensin' sech justice as these parts need. It don't have anything to do with totin' a badge around, either. Why, that'd set all my folks agin' me, Bart. No, sir, you let me be. We're real peaceful at this end o' the country and don't need no deppities. When suthin' outrageous

happens, you git here soon enough, anyhow."

McKenzie opened the clasp of the deputy's badge and got hold of Budd's dusty vest. "Ain't listenin' to no more palaver," he said, snorting. "I'm a-goin' to brand you right now, critter. There, Deppity Budd, you're a handsome-lookin' peace officer."

The storekeeper's huge face was wreathed in a scowl as he stared at the trinket of authority on his vest. "It's all turrible foolish," said he. "What'm I to look after? Jack rabbits and coyotes?"

"You old maverick," said the sheriff in placating tones, "I been lettin' you alone fer a good while, but now's time fer some serious work. Jest take a look out in yore front pasture, and I reckon you'll know what I'm deppitizin' you for."

Budd had no need to glance through his front door. The invasion had descended upon him a week ago in the form of broken down farm wagons, old-time schooners, buggies, pack mules and solitary riders on every shade and size of horse. Mostly it was a family affair; the clearing in front of the store was dotted with tents and lean-tos and stray baggage and fires. Men clustered in groups, speaking guardedly or else in heated discussion, while the women bustled about the flames and prepared the night meal. Even as the storekeeper scanned the group he heard the creaking of fresh wagons through the trees.

They came from every corner of the State and from adjoining States; rough people and refined, all eager to share in a new prospect of comfort and prosperity. The cause of this boom was a mere rumor, a thin, unsubstantiated report that the government, long idle in this part of central Oregon, was about to dam a distant river in the hills and construct great main canals to irrigate the land. Budd shook his head solemnly. It was, he repeated to himself, only a rumor—and rumors had ugly ways of dying out, never again to be heard. Nevertheless these hopeful people came, camped in his clearing, while preliminary scouts were sent out to find land that had not been homesteaded, and then vanished through the jack pines, bound for their new El Dorado, somewhere beyond in the open country.

"Reminds me of the old days in Oklahoma," said Budd. "Dang me ef there wasn't a rush fer the Indian lands. I can still hear the bugles sound for the sign we could cross in. By golly! Reckon I was younger then."

"Ne'm mind that sad extemporizin'," interrupted the sheriff. "Jest foller my ideas a spell. You see that red-headed young man with the scowl on his face? I want you should keep an eye on him, Budd. Folks have been complainin' about losin' money and valuables from their wagons and sleepin' places durin' the night. Well, now, he's a reckless-lookin' son of a gun, and he's been hangin' round these diggin's fer a week, hain't he?"

Budd chuckled. "Huh, it's a girl that keep him glued here, not money."

"Powerful suspicious lookin' to me, Dave. You keep an eye on him. I been sizin' the whole crowd up, and he's the only one I'd figger to watch."

"All right, all right," agreed the storekeeper, turning morose again. "Got to be a cussed bloodhound, have I?"

The red-headed young man evidently had something on his mind; he fished through his pockets and fumbled among the few effects piled on the ground by his saddle; rising empty-handed, he turned toward the store. The sheriff clapped on his sombrero and started out.

"I'll vamose, Dave, and let you alone until next week."

He climbed into the saddle as the young man swung to the porch. The

sheriff's horse, catching sight of a skittering sheet of white paper, reared and snorted, plunged against a porch column, knocked a board off with his feet, and drummed out of the clearing.

"Huh!" exclaimed the young man. "What's he aimin' to do, make a fence jumper out of that cayuse?"

"Horse is jest a mite skittish," said Budd mildly. He opened a fresh box of tomatoes and began packing the cans to the shelf. Halfway, he stopped to observe. "Horses are plumb like women that a way. Purty, but skittish."

"Yeah," said the young man, suddenly looking harassed. "Ain't it the solemn an' miserable truth?"

He took off his Stetson and scratched his flaming thatch. By no means could he be called handsome, with his pugnacious chin and nose, his slate-gray eyes and his gaunt, weather-worn frame. It seemed as if he might have been recently subjected to an illness, for he seemed a little nervous and finely drawn. "Yeah," he muttered. "I'll tell a man it's so. First you're it and then you ain't." His eyes were fixed on a couple that moved in and out of the trees.

Budd chuckled at the tomato cans and blandly asked, "What'd you say, Bill?"

"First you're it, and then next thing the earth ain't big enough to hold you." He wrinkled his nose in surprise. "How'd you know my first monnicker?"

"Heard a gal call you by it," said Budd.

"Huh! You won't hear her callin' me that no more. Oh, no, she don't know I'm a human bein' these days." He was talking as if half to himself, still keeping his slate-gray eyes fixed on the couple. They had advanced from the main road and were twining around the wagons and fires—a sturdy girl and a tall man in chaps. "Huh," he muttered. Then again: "Huh. Gimme a sack of tobacco, Budd. What road do I take out o' this country? South, I mean."

"Leavin'?" queried Budd. "Well, jest keep to the main way and you'll strike Klamath by'n by."

"Uhuh," said Bill. He rolled a cigarette, licked it and reached for a match. "Thanks."

He leaned against the counter and drew a mouthful of smoke. Budd saw his face turn perfectly bland and cheerful. There was a gay burst of laughter and a man's short speech. The couple came in the door. The girl, foremost, stopped short at sight of Bill, looked at him and through him; her smile disappeared and a color came to her cheeks. Bill drew a deep draft of smoke and spoke to Budd as if continuing the conversation.

"Yeah, first thing in the mornin', I guess. This country don't strike me so much. Guess you'd better lay aside a can o' them tomatoes and some bacon. I'll be back for the duffle later."

"Don't let me interfere with your business," said the girl haughtily. "Sam and I are only visiting."

"Oh, no," said Bill in sprightly tones, "there ain't room enough for all of us in such a small place." He walked by her and approached Sam. He had to look up a little to meet Sam's eyes. The man was tall; his accouterments were neat and his clothes well kept. He had a face that, to the genial and shrewd Budd, seemed as uncommunicative as any a man could boast. It rarely smiled and it rarely displayed emotion. To cap off the expression, Sam was exceedingly sparing of his words. Bill ground his cigarette on the floor and spoke shortly, but to the point.

"So Sam's the monnicker, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Huh. Don't open yore mouth too wide, Sam, or you'll show a tooth. Shucks, they named you wrong. It ought to be 'Paralyzed.'"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," affirmed Bill.

He stepped back a trifle, teetered on his heels and swung his arms idly, the slate-gray eyes boring into the big fellow. Sam remained unconcerned; his face was perfectly impassive. It irked Bill. He snorted once, twice, and moved out of the door humming a tune to show his perfect indifference.

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl. "Did you ever see such an overbearing man?" She looked at her escort a little curiously. "What did you think?"

Sam seemed to ponder. "Didn't want to hit him," said he lazily; "might hurt him."

"Yes," responded the girl. Budd, keeping his own counsel as to that eventuality, thought he heard a minor chord of doubt in the girl's voice. "Well," said she, "I think we'd better run along and let Mr. Budd alone. It's getting dark. Supper's ready."

Budd watched them go across the clearing, the girl waving her hand here and there to friends, the man bending a little under his height and moving as if he had all the time in creation. Finally they parted and disappeared in the shadows. The storekeeper set his shelves in order and cruised to the kitchen to make supper. It was not a complex operation, consisting of slicing a few potatoes into a pan and dropping several strips of bacon alongside to lard the frying. For the main part, Budd's mind ran along its habitual channels, prying a little here and pondering a little there.

What kind of a man was this wooden-faced Sam, anyway? No, not wooden-faced, corrected Budd—poker-faced was the better term. It was not the ordinary thing for a man to value his emotions and expressions so highly that he turned himself into a sphinx. You never could tell about those fellows—whether they wanted to give you a present or sink a slug of lead into you. Budd stirred his coffee and chuckled. Now, Bill was a fellow that wasn't made to conceal much of anything. He had a fighting face and, to judge from his last speech with Sam, he had a fighting heart. Certainly, he was badly taken with the girl, and she hadn't found him so distasteful until the last day or two, at which period Sam had ridden into the scene. No, Bill had seemed to be the favored one until a quarrel blew up. What it was Budd didn't know—or care. He had seen many such spring up—and die away.

He ate his meal, washed down a good many cups of coffee, and treated himself to a cigar from the shelves. In striking the match his hands came upon the metal of the deputy's badge and he snorted in plain disgust.

"Shucks! Goin' to be a gol-darned snooper. Dave Budd, I'm plumb ashamed of yore unhan'some behavior. Paradin' around like a monkey on a stick."

It was in his mind to pin the thing inside his vest, but, having once taken the obligation, he found himself unable to hedge. He stepped down the porch and sauntered forward.

The fires veered and danced in the late twilight; a fog sank over the tree-tops, bringing with it a clammy touch. For the most part the people had finished with their supper and were now lying around, spinning yarns and weaving dreams. It was a time for babies to be cooing in the wagons, half asleep; for the younger boys and girls to be out among the shadows playing hide and seek. One darted up to Budd and used the storekeeper's vast bulk for a momentary refuge. A guitar strummed and a couple intoned a song about "Sweet Genevieve." It struck directly to the hearts of all the middle-aged in that particular circle and voices died away. Budd moved on with a feeling of compassion. These were his people, his kind of men and women. Then he

saw Bill squatting, Indian fashion, before a solitary little blaze.

"No comp'ny?" said Budd.

Bill nodded his head to the group ten yards beyond. "Sam's there tellin' the gol-darndest stories. I don't need no comp'ny when I can listen in on them yarns."

Sam was, indeed, relaxing from his taciturnity. He sat with his feet crossed and illustrated his yarn with a jerky motion of his fingers and arms, greatly resembling Indian sign language. The girl sat across from him, her chin cupped in a palm, sometimes looking to him and sometimes away. Budd wondered if she had deliberately put her back to Bill. " 'Spect so," he thought, chuckling, and went on.

His last glimpse was of her staring somberly into the fire. He paid his compliments here and there, answered a question or two and returned to the house. It was pretty late and he had worked rather hard. In ten minutes he had found his bed and was fast asleep.

Budd's manner of slumber was an inheritance from early range days. No matter how exhausted, he had trained himself to wake at the least untoward sound. So it was that an unsual commotion out among the wagons around midnight brought him up instantly. A moment later he was diving into his clothes upon hearing the repeated bark of a revolver. A man's voice lashed out in the night, calling down all the wrath of heaven. A dog began to howl dismally and a woman screamed. Budd, forging to the porch, saw the glimmer of a newly lighted lantern and heard the mumble of a gathering crowd. He walked over to the scene where a dozen sleepy men had gathered. The lantern, held high, revealed an irate and whiskered citizen waving a gun and shouting:

"I'll get the ornery sneak! Come right into my wagon, by gollus! Snuck the wallet from under my coat." He saw Budd and reiterated his charge. "You got to do somethin' about this, Mr. Budd! Took four hundred an' ten dollars right from anunder my nose, by gollus! Jest stuck his hand through the canvas and holped himself."

A murmur ran through the group. Four hundred dollars was a large sum of money, and the manner of taking had been audacious. The thief had obviously threaded his way around sleeping bodies until he found the wagon. Equally obvious was it that he must have spent some few days in observing the robbed man's habits.

"That's a purty tidy sum of money," ventured one. Budd's vast presence seemed to absorb responsibility like a blotter. To a man they turned their attention his way. He walked to the wagon. "Stuck his arm through here?" he asked. On affirmation he plunged his own burly hand through the slit. "Put yore coat right where it was when the money was took."

The man climbed inside and did as requested. Budd pawed around the wagon bed. "You shore that's where you had it?"

"By gollus, don't I know? Sure."

Budd shoved the weight of his body against the canvas and by dint of an extra lunge his fingers touched the coat. He said to himself, "That feller's arm was right long to do things so quick and quiet." He turned. "What kind o' wallet? How'd you have the money?"

"One o' these twice-fold-over dinguses. It was black leather. My wife give it to me as a present nine years ago. Nine, wasn't it, Carrie? Yep, shore. Four hundred an' ten dollars in greenbacks. Sixteen twenties and the rest tens." He sat down weakly and ran a hand over his head. "By gollus, I—I don't know what to do about it! Powerful lot o' money to lose."

The crowd moved again. Sam's tall,

impassive presence stood forth. "This ain't the first time," he added significantly. "Stealin' been goin' on for three days. Jest little things."

Other lanterns arrived and the circle became fairly well illuminated. Budd swept the faces, and for the first time made out Bill and his flaming red thatch standing silent and speculative with his slate-gray eyes fixed on Sam.

"Got to stop," continued Sam. "What I say is: Search every man here an' search his duffle."

There was a dubious approval. Men bent their mind to the feasibility of it. A voice murmured, "Sounds kinda severe, but I'd be willin'."

"Only way," asserted Sam. "Got to stop it now. Any man to object sh'd be considered guilty."

A dry answer met this. Bill rubbed his red crest and stuck out his chin. "Go lay down, Paralyzed. Yore voice makes me tired. Moreover, yore idea is plumb foolish. Search the whole camp? Shucks, the man that got this money ain't an entire fool. He's cached it away by now."

"Mean to say," countered Sam in the same, unexpressive drawl, "you're unwillin'?"

"Yore brain does you credit. I said that an' I mean that. Don't care about a lot o' loose fingers pokin' through my war bag." The chin seemed to advance a little farther. Those slate-gray eyes fired a plain challenge at the big man. But Bill had reckoned without the sudden, unanimous spirit that sometimes takes hold of a crowd. A pair of arms pinioned him around the waist and the circle closed in like a rubber band. "See about that, young fella!" cried one.

The few women withdrew quickly. Budd, still a spectator, saw the girl's troubled face by the lantern's gleam. Then she was gone. Somebody took upon himself the task of inspecting Bill's clothes and for his pains found nothing. Sam's curiously disinterested voice pointed the search in another direction. "His war bag, boys. Better look there."

Two or three left the circle with a lantern. Budd, waiting, found time to study Sam's face again and was compelled to mutter admiringly, "Ain't that a poker expression, though?" Bill was plainly outraged and bucked in his captor's arm. "Boys, you better hold tight. Dad gum my soul, somebody's goin' to dance fer this!"

"Hi! Boys, here's the wallet all right! Take a look, fella. That it?" The crowd moved over, the robbed one identified his wallet with a brightening eye and the crowd turned upon Bill with a satisfied sigh.

"Now, 'Red,' you're in poor comp'ny. Better cough up the money or we'll get plumb mad."

Bill stared around him in plain disgust. His gaze fell upon the cool and aloof Sam. "Paralyzed, I shore give you credit for bein' the little deteckatiff." Then he grew sober. "Oh, go home, you galoots, and get a night's sleep. I got nobody's money. Can't you see it was planted? That's terrible old stuff. Gamblers used to pull that in Montana when I was a little boy."

They were all silent and ominous. Some one spoke the popular opinion. "Talkin' ain't helpin' yore case at all, Red. Figger you'd like to dance a jig in the cold night air? Don't be foolish. Where's the man's money?"

Bill snorted in anger. "Money? I tell you I ain't got the money! Was sleepin' peacefullike when some ornery maverick stepped in my face and hollered there was a wallet missin'."

Once again silence and finally a slow, hesitant suggestion. "Mebbe a rope'd help things out consid'ble, boys."

Budd elected to become active. He put out his two arms and moved a half dozen men out of his path in the manner of one shoving aside the branches

of a tree. "Reckon the talk is gettin' a leetle wild, friends. When a gent says 'rope,' the time's come for a mite o' mature reflection. Speakin' as deppity sher'ff, I guess I'll jest take the boy in hand. Mebbe a few hours' thought'll change his mind."

"Don't need no reflection," muttered somebody. "Need rope. Ain't goin' to be sidetracked this a way. The measly cuss stole a man's hard-earned money, and it ain't to be tolerated in these parts. I'm fer summary justice."

"Ain't carin' what you're for," stated Budd in flat finality. "Anybody wishin' to doubt my authority?"

Somehow in the lantern light the man had become as a mountain of purpose; his face, which in daylight looked bland and cherubic, was rock hard. He spoke easily and his movements were deliberate, but there was no single man to raise a voice in further protest.

"Bill, you just march in front of me to the store. Rest o' you night birds walk around a while and cool off. Don't get no queer ideas about rope and tree limbs; I don't aim to tolerate foolishness. We'll stick to plain law."

He marched Bill into the storeroom, shut the door, and put his lantern on the counter. "Regardless of circumstances and greenback bills," said he, "I reckon I'll have to tie you up for the night. Don't aim to make it any harder on you than I have to. There's blankets on the floor. Git down on 'em, young feller. I'll bundle you up so's it won't bind you."

"This," said Bill in a kind of restrained fury, "is plumb unreasonable and aggravatin'. First I get my face stepped on, and next they want to lynch me. Now I got to be wound up like a roll of fence wire."

Budd clucked his tongue. "Shore is enough to make a man swear. Git down, Bill. Now take it easy. But sometimes certain moves lead to certain other moves."

Bill submitted to the operation. "Yeah, ain't that as clear as mud? First you put out yore right foot and then yore left. But if I never do anything else in my life I'm shore goin' to change that waddy Sam's complexion. I shore am." He rested, finally, with his arms and legs more or less tightly bound, and yet Budd had done the trussing cleverly enough to allow the prisoner a certain comfort on his hard bed. Then he strung the free end of the rope through the kitchen door and tied it to a leg of the range. "Reckon if you go to threshing around too much," he observed, "I'll hear the stove creakin'. Now I aim to finish off a little business of six hours sleep."

Bill surveyed his bonds and cast a candid eye upon his captor. "Now listen, hombre, if a man wanted to wiggle out o' this——"

Budd looked him in the eye. "You dang fool," he muttered; "you dang fool."

The captive closed his mouth and opened his eyes a little wider. After a few moments silence he muttered, "Oh."

Then he turned his back to the big storekeeper and fell silent. Budd was as inscrutable as a Chinese idol. He picked up the lantern, went back to his bedroom and blew out the light. "Feel a lot easier in the conscience," he muttered, "if I didn't have this cussed piece o' tin."

He stared at the ceiling and presently was asleep. No more strange sounds from the wagons awoke him that night, and if the kitchen range creaked, he gave no notice that he was aware of it. Yet he seemed fated to be wakened by another noisy event. When gray dawn seeped into the clearing a file of excited men trooped through the house, banged at his door, and brought him up from the pillow with one trenchant question.

"Whar's yore prisoner?"

Budd yawned and reached for his pipe. "Guess you'll find him sleepin' behind the counter where I tied him."

A sarcastic rumble greeted this. "Yes we will! Of all the fool ideas! He shucked himself out o' that rope and vamosed."

The storekeeper's heavy lids drooped; he fumbled with his tobacco pouch and muttered, "Y' don't say!"

Then he slid into his clothes and led the impromptu committee back to the storeroom. True enough, his bird had fled. The free end of the rope still was tied around a stove log, but the rest of it was slit in a dozen places. The cheese knife, which ordinarily rested on the counter, was stuck in the floor boards, mute witness of Bill's manner of passage. Budd ruefully clucked his tongue. "Slick an' clean. There's a dum good six-dollar piece o' rope made wuthless."

"Huh—you're a sweet deppity! Should've let well enough alone last night! Now what're you goin' to do?"

Budd picked up the knife and sliced himself a piece of the cheese. "Well, now, first I aim to eat. Then I aim to take care o' the store. Then mebbe I'll do a little figgerin'. Might even send word to Sher'ff McKenzie to keep a lookout at his end o' the county. Come back later an' I'll tell you the rest."

"Meanwhile," stated one of the committee, "he's scootin' with four hundred dollars of this man's hard-earned money. Turrible!"

They conferred among themselves, found Budd strangely imperturbable and went out, unsatisfied. The storekeeper cruised back and got his morning meal.

As the day wore on he found part of his duty performed for him. The more determined of the landseekers organized a posse and galloped up the road toward Bend. Around noon they came back with nothing for their efforts. A few beat into the jack pines a half mile or so and returned empty-handed. Budd, standing on his porch, gave them a few choice words of advice. "Takes an experienced hand to find anything in the brush. Not much good in yore tactics." They chose not to give up the pursuit and after dinner again scoured the road, this time to the south. Budd was not much interested in these movements. Such time as he spent on the porch was used to keep a shrewd watch over the girl and Sam. The latter had not elected to go with the posse, but at one point in the afternoon he picked up his gun and, seeming to have a plan of his own, marched directly into the pines and was lost for the best part of an hour. The girl, who had been idling around her wagon, watched him go and after a short interval vanished up the road. She was back in a little while, coming directly to the store.

"Mr. Budd, this is dreadful! Do you suppose any one will find him? If they do, they'll be sure to shoot."

"That's the portion of thieves, ain't it?"

"But he's not a thief!" Then she seemed to collect herself, and a color rose in her cheeks. "No, I don't believe he did it. I don't believe it."

"Thought you didn't think so much of him?"

"Oh, that! We may have been quarreling, but—but I know him to be an honest man."

"How long've you known him?"

"Why, we met on the road about a week ago." She saw a question in the storekeeper's face and flushed again. "It doesn't take a woman forever to judge, you know. If Bill chooses to run off, I'm sure I have no reason to worry about his affairs." She spoke it primly, unaware that her eyes told another story. "But I'm quite sure he'd not be a sneak thief."

The girl changed the subject abruptly

and asked a question about homesteading. Budd turned to one of his never-failing stories and kept drawling away until he saw Sam duck into the clearing and make for the store. He sighed, fingered the deputy's star on his vest and turned toward the cigar box which served as his cash till. "Storekeepin' used to be a nice quiet trade until this boom hit me. Now I got to be a regular bookkeeper." He was shuffling a pile of paper bills on the counter when Sam came in.

"Yore prisoner," said he in the same lazy voice, "is a slick one. Got plumb clean."

"Twen'y-five, thirty, forty-five," counted Budd, thumbing the bills. "You been chasing him, too?"

"Thought I had a scent, but it petered out." Sam's eyes followed Budd's pile of money. "He's ducked. What I can't see is why he didn't make a stab to get his duffle and horse."

"Eighty-nine dollars and fifty-three cents," tabulated Budd, rumbling to himself. He made a few weird scratches with a stub pencil and thrust the money carelessly back in the cigar box. Sam watched the operation with his poker face, blandly uninterested. "Well," continued Budd, "he'll be caught sooner or later. They always do. Never saw a crook git far yet."

"That's right," assented Sam. He turned to the girl. "Care to amble around and scare up an appetite?"

"Yes," said she.

Her eyes were likewise fixed on the cigar box. A swift look went to Budd. He was slivering off another piece of cheese, intent on the process. So the two walked out and circled around the wagons.

The storekeeper put the cigar box on the counter, ransacked the shelves for writing paper and sat down to compose a rather long letter. He was not a rapid penman, and before he had finished night once more was upon the clearing with the fires sending their veering tongues of flame to the black sky. He went back to the kitchen, got something to eat, and sat down for a long, dark study over the tip of his cigar. Alternately he chuckled and frowned.

"That girl," said he, "is shore a case. Been playin' Sam agin' Bill to even up a quarrel, and now she's turrible sorry. Jest like what a woman'd do." He looked down at the star and was acutely displeased. "This thing shore sets on my mind. Ef I was jest an ordinary citizen it wouldn't be sech a risky experiment; bein' an officer makes my conscience troubled, and that's a fact."

He went to the front door and swung his lantern idly to and fro, passing a glance at the wagons in which most of the landseekers were now asleep. Then he turned back, still swinging the light so that any one looking through the open portal might see him, and passed to the kitchen. There he blew out the lantern, turned about, and tiptoed to the front room. He took up the blanket, wrapped it around him and sat down behind the counter with his back to the shelves and his revolver in his hand. Presently he dozed off and dreamed of his boyhood in Pennsylvania.

He seemed, after a time, to have trouble with his dream. It was winter and he was skating with his young companions on the ice. There was a crack in the middle of the pond and a danger sign pointing from it. But he felt as if he could safely dare that sign, so he skated to the very edge and turned away. He had been too bold. There was a sharp cracking of the ice and—he woke with both eyes fixed upward. The illusion of cracking ice had been made by a loose board creaking under a weight. Budd took a firmer grip on his gun and breathed softly. Again the board registered protest; not a loud

sound, but enough to tell the storekeeper that the bait in his trap found a willing stalker. Something very slight swept over the counter surface and struck the cigar box with an audible tick. Budd made out a dark, moving shadow in the gloom. He hoisted his body with surprising celerity and quickly snapped the revolver forward.

"Freeze right in yore tracks," he commanded. "Hands above yore haid. Hurry now!"

The command was not obeyed. Budd, peering closely, saw the intruder's weapon arm streak downward. He moved aside and shook his head under the stunning crash of gun fire. A little finger of orange-blue momentarily flashed in his face. He jumped, and again the room shook under heavy echoes. The intruder let out a great breath of air as if he had been punched in the stomach, pawed at the counter and seemed to dissolve; first the gun struck the floor; then the body collapsed, muttering, "Got me, you sly ol' fox."

All was still. Then the wagons came to life and a few landseekers ran up to the store; a lantern swung and winked.

Budd lighted his own lantern and bent over the intruder. It was the man he had supposed—Sam, his long body sprawled awkwardly on the boards, his face white and wholly without expression, staring toward the storekeeper. He was dead. In falling he had pulled the cigar box with him, whose contents of greenbacks now scattered over the floor.

The landseekers crowded into the room, and the assembled lanterns made a great light. It was a story too plain to need explanation, and in the silence Budd ventured his mild explanation.

"I knew it was this feller all the time, and not Bill," said he. "But I wasn't plumb shore. So I arranged to let Bill escape and baited my trap with the money in the cigar box. Sam saw it and sprung the trap, shore enough."

"Why'd you let the other fella go?" inquired one.

Budd smiled and pushed through to the porch. He expanded his lungs and bellowed at the pine trees. "Oh, Bill! She's all settled!" Then he made further explanations. "I don't *know* that he's hereabouts, but I'm figgerin' so. He ain't the kind to run off 'thout tryin' to clear his name, and I guessed he'd try to catch Sam in the act o' cachin' the money somewheres in the woods, or else raisin' the cache."

Footsteps thumped on the porch, and Bill, drenched with the night dew and tousle-haired, came up. "You old son of a gun," said he. "You're purty shrewd. I figgered you'd make a play like that. Saw it in yore face last night." He held out his hand for a cigarette. "When mornin' comes I'll show you where Sam hid the four hundred dollars. I was in the brush an' saw him go to the place this afternoon. That's when all the boys were threshin' the thicket for me. Shucks, don't you know it's a hard job to ketch an old hand in the brush?"

There was a call from the porch; a woman's urgent command. "Bill!"

Bill grinned. "Reckon she's been tryin' to clear me, too. Tried to foller Sam this afternoon, but got lost and ran plump into me."

"Still mad, is she?" asked Budd.

Bill passed him a wink and elbowed his way out of the room.

# The Tyrant

By

George Challis

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE INTERVIEW.

I COULD not have remained quietly in that room while the talk went on between Monsieur and Antoinette. That interview would decide whether or not my father was to meet me in tolerance or in a mortal passion which might bring to this sad house the most terrible of all the tragedies that had occurred within its walls. I could not have remained still. Once I rose and began to move back and forth, it was impossible for me to do other than one thing—to start for the window of the room of Lafitte, where Antoinette now was—and to which Monsieur was going.

You see that I do not even attempt to excuse myself or veil my actions with an honorable excuse. It was very dishonest; there is nothing more vile than the eavesdropper. Yet I did not even pause to consider on which side honor lay. I went to the second story as fast as I could and through my room to the balcony upon which my outer doors opened.

The May night was sharp, with the chill of a gathering mist in it that promised to give us rain before the morning. All the windows were clotted and clouded with it, and it pressed against my face like a wet, icy hand. It was a grateful touch to my aching head. I hung on the railing of the balcony for a moment, with my head thrown back, letting the chill come against my beating throat as well. Only half the sky was darkened. The stars and a thin edge of moon floated in the other half, with the billowing mist now and again washing half the stars from my sight and then, like the wave of a curtain, giving them back to me again.

Then I turned toward the lighted windows of Lafitte's room, just above the chamber of Monsieur. There the balcony ended, and a heavy shaft of ornamental stonework descended like a support for the balcony from above. On the massive scrollwork of this shaft a child could have climbed with perfect safety, even on a dark, wet night like this, so I worked my way in a trice up to the windows of Lafitte. With my feet firmly braced on the uppermost scroll of the stone I was in a position to keep my head between the two windows, and in this manner I could peer in from time to time, while hearing everything that was spoken, as long as

it was in a voice loud enough to carry above the noise of the wind.

Monsieur was not yet there, and, rapidly as I had climbed, I knew that he must have paused once or twice on the way up the stairs, in order to con his lines again before the critical moment. I cannot tell you how much this meant to me—I, who had seen him in terrible situations before this, but never in such a place that he was at a loss for a right word.

I did not hear the tap at the door, but I saw Antoinette lift her head, and I saw her face change. Monsieur had at last arrived. He came in at once, and I could not help a smile of admiration. He had so thoroughly mastered the tremendous passion of yearning and fear which I knew to be in him, that he was able to nod and smile at her in a very brisk, friendly fashion. At the same time, he went forward to the bed and looked down to Lafitte. A gesture of the hand sent the nurse from the room.

In all that followed, I saw Monsieur at his best and at his most dangerous. When I consider now the consummate tact he used to this girl, whom he loved with all his heart and who had already announced her intention of leaving the château—and his life—when I think of this, I wonder that he did not enter into political life of some sort, for I am sure that his success in it would have been very great.

He considered Lafitte very seriously, at first. The poor secretary was now in a wretched condition, his head still bandaged, his eye sometimes closed and sometimes open, but never with a light of sense in it. He moved continually and needed close watching. Antoinette had remained with him so much because her voice had a quick influence over the delirious man, whereas the others often had to use force to control him.

"The doctor's report is a very serious statement," said Monsieur.

"It is, François," said Antoinette.

"Ah! ah!" said Monsieur. "It is a very pleasant thing for me to hear you speak that name; particularly now that I am to hear your voice so seldom."

If he was calm—at least in his appearance—it was nothing compared with the perfect ease of Antoinette. She looked up to him as she said: "You have talked with Aunt Marcia, then?"

"I've just finished talking with her."

"Well," said Antoinette in her slow way, "I hope that I have said nothing unfair. It is so easy for a girl to be a haphazard little fool! But I have been thoroughly frightened, François."

"Is that possible? I admit that it is an ugly mess throughout. This Lafitte—ah, well, one cannot hate such a fellow. I think he said no more than he honestly believed."

Antoinette leaned back in her chair until her head rested against the wall, watching Monsieur—not boldly, but with thought. She was so fearless and so honest that one could see her reaching for the truth, always. By so much was she beyond all the other men and women of the world!

"It is not that I have closed my mind to what you may have to say, François," said she. "I am only wretched because I have had such a panic. If you wish to explain——"

Monsieur permitted himself to smile on her. "You are marvelously honest and fair, Antoinette," said he. "But I don't think that I shall try to defend myself. Lafitte has condemned me with ridiculous universality. Well, my dear, perhaps he is right in spirit, even if he is wrong in facts. He accused me—of what? Of murdering one son and driving another from the château; of destroying two wives because—who knows why?"

"Monsieur, I never could have entertained such suspicions of you. No, never, of course."

"I know that you could not," said my father very gravely. "You are too wise

and too just to do such a thing, Antoinette, but you gave your ear to the thing behind his words. And in that I admit that you are very right. Indeed, I hesitate to review a great deal of my life, even with my own eyes."

"Do you, truly?" she asked, wondering at his candor almost as greatly as I, crouched outside the window, watching this battle of the giants, wondered at it.

"There are periods—years at a time," said Monsieur calmly, "which I like to keep buried in my memory. They are black times, you may be sure! After all, it would have been very difficult to season my nature with much of the saint—very difficult, Antoinette! If I were now what I was two or three years ago, I should never have been able to come to you so calmly. I could not sit still and acquiesce in such a loss; I would have been like a wild devil in the château, I assure you. In fact, my dear, I am astonished at my own mildness at this moment!"

She, of course, could never read signs which she had not seen before, but I, who was familiar with every possible expression of Monsieur, knew by a spasmodic opening and closing of his hands that a devil was torturing him. Yet he could speak of his mildness with apparent truth. How great a man was Monsieur!

"And I am surprised, also," said she.

"But I have had a great lesson," said Monsieur. "My last outbreak of temper sent my dear Jean flying away from the château, and there was a time during which I feared that I had lost him forever. At last I won him back to me. However, that was a fright which has helped me to school my bad temper!"

Antoinette watched him with the most eager interest. It was plain that every instinct was working in his favor now; because, by making a few adroit admissions. he seemed to nullify the force of all the rest of the accusations of Lafitte, either explicit or implied. By freely accepting a partial blame, he seemed to make the importance of his sins evaporate. I have seen other men do cleverly diplomatic things, but I have never watched one negotiate half so effectively as Monsieur.

"Monsieur, if I return to Gerardin——" she began.

"I shall start with Jean for a little jaunt around the world. That is all. In a few years I suppose that I shall be as much recovered as most from heartbreak. You see that I do not sham, Antoinette. I do not think that many men have the power in their dull souls to love any woman as I love you—but it will not kill me if I lose you."

"You would not let us begin again as rather close friends—but not with this sudden thought of marriage."

"Forgive me, Antoinette. To be beaten, to be forced to surrender after a hard battle—yes, I can conceive of that. But to live between day and day, wondering: 'Does she care more? Does she care less?' That, Antoinette, would be impossible for me."

She dropped her head a little and pondered. "I believe you," said Antoinette. "I do think that you are fond of me, François. And I dread making any quick decision. May I take another day?"

She was not watching him at that instant, so that Monsieur allowed some of his joy to spring into his eyes. It was a ragged lightning flash. I did not wait to hear more of that interview. I did not wait to see anything more, but I climbed down as I had come, as secretly as possible, and regained my room. What Monsieur would do at the end of the day might be as violent as what he would have done on this day if she had not put off the decision. In any case, the blow would fall upon me, because it was due to me that Lafitte had burst into such full cry.

I was about as thoroughly unnerved

as I had ever been in my life. In the past two or three hours there had been a lifetime of joy, shame, and fear and sorrow mingled. In the family of Limousin one was forced to control such emotions. Let me say that Monsieur appeared at the dinner table more suave than ever, and his astonishing candor surpassed all else. It seemed impossible that one could go so far as he did.

He said openly to me: "Jean, you are to understand—it may keep you from embarrassment—that Antoinette and I are in a state of suspense, and our engagement discontinues."

After which he went on with the ordinary current of small talk. I could not help feeling that he had benefited himself again in the eyes of Antoinette. Keen as she was, even she could not be expected to look through this mask of blunt, apparent honesty to the keener evil behind it. It is easy enough to detect the ordinary villain—Iago escapes.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### "TO DIE FOR HIM!"

THE first thing in the morning, of course, I went to see the condition of my victim. I found Lafitte weak and pale, but his wits had come back to him. The effects of the blow promised to do no more than to keep him in bed for a few more days. He was so swollen and poisoned with malice that, when I spoke to him, he would not speak to me for some time; at length this muscular person said: "It was a trick, Monsieur Jean. Otherwise I should have been able to block that blow!"

Considering all that that blow had meant, I was a little shocked and a great deal amused by this answer from Lafitte. However, to find him so much recovered was a huge relief. I should have endured a great deal more from him without attempting any argument. I could not help going to the window and looking at the place where I had played the part of eavesdropper so shamelessly the night before.

There was a low-lying mist, not sufficient to wholly shut away the sun, but transparent and luminous with its light which struck through and made the forest, with all its new, yellow-green leaves, glisten—except in the distance, where the fog was pooled through the woods like thick, white smoke. It was such a day as makes one eager to be out in the open; certainly I could not have guessed by the face of that morning that the blackest of all the dark chapters of the château was about to be written.

When I left Lafitte I met Antoinette in the hallway, coming to see her patient—coming, as it seemed to me, with all the beauty of that morning like rose and dew upon her face. It was the first time I had been alone with her since that fateful afternoon of the day before, and I paused to try to find some words for a miserable apology. Then I saw, with bewilderment, that she was as much frightened as I.

I do not feel that I have given you a living picture of Antoinette, but perhaps you have guessed that she had seemed to me second in strength and courage to Monsieur alone—yes, able to meet even him upon equal terms. Therefore, when I saw her color change and her eyes widen a little, I was amazed. I said:

"Antoinette, I know that you despise me, but will you try to forgive me for yesterday? Will you call it madness and try to forget it?"

What will you say when I tell you that she could not meet my eyes and that she looked down to the hall floor, saying: "I shall think of it as you wish me to, Jean."

I went from her feeling more than ever like a guilty dog, full of sorrow, and yet full of excitement, too—I could not tell why! In the lower hall I had that meeting with Monsieur which I

had been dreading. He chose to say nothing, but held me with his brilliant eyes while I saw the scorn and dislike and reproaches shadow his face in turn.

He merely said contemptuously, at last: "Mademoiselle Marcia has gone out for a walk in the woods. I think you had better follow her and offer her your company. Remember that you can help to undo the pretty work which you have done!"

"But, Monsieur," I cried, "is not Mademoiselle Marcia your ally?"

"Stuff!" said Monsieur. "Do you believe the words she speaks? She is the soul and incarnation of suspicion! She is more filled with the devil than a cup can be filled with poison!"

This was what he chose to say of that apparently simple, outspoken woman whom I liked so very well on account of her honesty. However, I could not deny him; his knowledge of human nature certainly was a great ocean compared to the small pools of my knowledge. I went out obediently to find Aunt Marcia and ask her if she wished for my company.

She was a brisk walker, however, when she chose to step out. The direction she had taken was pointed out to me, but though I walked on briskly for a good half hour I did not come on any trace of her. I started back more slowly, convinced that she could not have gone so far, and weaving more deliberately from side to side—from one path to another path. It was well over an hour after I left the house before I caught a glimpse of her, not on any of the roads or paths, but on a hillside down which the breeze was sweeping bright ghosts of mist. She was not alone, but was talking with a tall shadow of a man the sight of whom sent a shock of fear through me. It was Reynal!

I hurried forward. What he could be saying to her I dared not so much as try to guess. I lost sight of them as I descended into the hollow. When I came up the hill beyond, I found Marcia, alone, coming down. Reynal, of course, had disappeared. That extra sense which he possessed must have warned him of my approach.

My good-natured Mademoiselle Marcia passed me like a cloud without a word of greeting. When I came up to her side she gave me one eloquent look and with, "If you please, monsieur!" she banished me from her.

She went straight back to the house, with me trailing at a miserable distance behind. When she came to the château, she paused and let me come up with her.

"Will you ask Antoinette to come out to me here?" said she coldly.

I could only bow to her and hurry in. What should I do? I rushed to Monsieur to tell him.

"She has seen Reynal; I found them talking; Reynal disappeared before I came up, and mademoiselle went by me with a face like thunder. She is outside the château, now, and asks me to send Antoinette to her!"

Monsieur, while I burst out in this fashion, went on with the task of taking out a cigarette and rolling it to the proper softness—because he liked a cigarette which burned freely. Then he lighted it and blew out a thin, blue-brown wisp of smoke as I ended. My father merely said:

"If you had come up with Reynal, what would you have done?"

"I am armed, Monsieur," said I. "I should have killed him as I would kill a wolf!"

"My brave little Jean," said Monsieur, half amused and half contemptuous and half surprised, also. "Would you do so much? Let me tell you this—he would not lift a hand to keep you from sending a bullet through his heart! Does not that surprise you?"

I could do nothing but gape at him.

"But now, Monsieur, what shall I do?"

"Find Antoinette, of course, as you

were told to do, and escort her out to Mademoiselle Marcia."

I did as he bade me do. What was the right or the wrong thing to do, I could hardly tell—but I felt, for some odd reason, that in this whirl of entangling rights and duties the simplest thing for me to attempt was to work for the right of Monsieur. I found Antoinette curled up in a chair in the library with a great book of old maps in her lap, and her angles gathered in one slender hand.

"I am marking out the district of Limousin," said she, smiling up at me.

I told her that her aunt wished to see her and that she was outside the château.

"It is something serious, then?" said Antoinette.

"Alas, Antoinette," I could not help exclaiming, "is there anything but seriousness in this sad house of ours?"

I tried to escort her, but she said that she would go alone. I watched her stepping lightly down the hall, then turned around to find the somber form of Monsieur just behind me.

"I should think, Jean," said he, "that she would make even a cold heart like yours leap. I should think that she would make even a timid nature such as yours thunder and rage like white waters."

He had his glance fixed upon the bend of the hall around which she had just disappeared.

"I do not speak of her brave, calm soul, Jean," said he. "I do not speak of her wise and understanding mind. Such things are delights to old men like François Limousin. But consider only the beauty of her face, because even a child will love a charming face; or consider the exquisite workmanship which has been lavished upon her body."

Here he combed his glossy, curling beard and allowed the devil in him to smile upon me.

"But to a child like you these things remain mysteries, I presume. Learn from me, Jean, that the whole woman is revealed in her hand; and how curved, how tapered and delicate is the hand of Antoinette. Even granting that you are nearly blind to such perfections, still there remains a fragrance of beauty which I should think, in spite of closed eyes, would steal upon the brain and fill you with an ecstasy. Yet there is not even a tinge of color in your face as I speak of her!"

I cannot guess why he should have chosen to torment and insult me at this moment of all moments in his life, unless it were, perhaps, that he had a suspicion even then of the truth. This I greatly doubt. He immediately added:

"The time has now come when my fate may rest in your hands, Jean. How much Reynal has said to Marcia I can only guess. For no one can know what is in the mind of Satan; even I cannot guess it! Very well, Jean, you may presume, as I do, that a great deal will bear upon my treatment of you and of—Julie! It may be that a few words from you might balance against all that Reynal has said. I cannot force you to speak these few words. But I put myself in your hand, Jean. I put the happiness of your father in your hand. Jean, do what you can for me—in charity!"

Perhaps even this was acting, but when he laid his hand on my shoulder and spoke with a tremor in his voice I suddenly pitied him from the roots of my soul. He left me at once, and I saw him stride down the hall with his head bowed a little as he passed into the library; in that moment I was prepared to die for him!

Do you not wonder, as I do, at the ease with which he had passed from the character of Monsieur—terrible, cynical, contemptuous—to the character of my father?

I had hardly a chance to control the great swelling of my heart, which was

filled with pity and a will to serve him, when Marcia and Antoinette came into the house and found me.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE TORTURE CHAMBER.

WITH a single word, Mademoiselle Marcia gathered me into their party and conducted us, by an unlucky chance, into that same little chamber where the empty canary cage of my mother still hung. I could see that there was trouble ahead; it was darkly written upon the face of Aunt Marcia. Antoinette was still protesting.

"This is a very clumsy and embarrassing thing, Aunt Marcia," said she.

"Embarrassing?" said Aunt Marcia. "It is!"

She turned a gloomy eye upon me.

"Young man," said she, "you saw that I was talking with Pierre Reynal."

"I did," I confessed.

"He has told me everything that you will imagine he could tell, to point out to me that Monsieur is not a fit person to become the husband of my niece. May I be forgiven for bringing her to this place and the curse which rests on it! But the curse already seems to be working in Antoinette, because when I repeated to her what Reynal had told me, she has refused to leave the château. Merciful heavens, Antoinette, what is in your mind? What are you thinking of, Tony?"

Antoinette said nothing. She sat by the window with her head turned a little away, as though she were more interested in the loveliness of the day outside than in what might be said in this room. Yet I thought that I saw in her the same tenseness which had so bewildered me at the door of Lafitte's room, the same tremulous sense of weakness. Though there was more reason for it now that the revelations which Reynal was capable of making had been poured into her ear.

"You see?" said Mademoiselle Marcia to me. "She acts like that. I don't recognize her. How in the name of all that is wonderful has Monsieur been able to hypnotize this girl? And now, Jean Limousin, are you willing to answer some of my questions truthfully?"

"I shall say what I can," said I.

"Tell me first, then, if it is not true that Monsieur has been a haunting ghost to you all the days of your life?"

I turned that blunt question back and forth in my mind. "It is an odd question to ask concerning my father," I replied.

"I can say that by implication you have said, 'Yes!' But I want something more concrete! Is it not true, Jean, that Monsieur on a certain night rose from the dinner table and denounced you and ordered you from his house?"

I was cold and sick to my very soul. "I had transgressed his express commands," said I.

"But is it true?"

"It is true!" I was forced to whisper.

"Ah, you have this confirmation, Tony!" cried that terrible Mademoiselle Marcia. "Will you look at Jean?"

"Yes," said Antoinette, but she looked upon the floor only as though, I swear, she feared to lift her eyes to mine.

"Will you consider, Tony, that there was never a gentler soul in the world than that of this poor boy?"

"I do consider it," said Antoinette in a shaken voice.

"And yet he was ordered from his father's house—because the foolish child had been tempted to play cards—and had lost a few score of dollars! Do you hear me, Tony?"

"I do!"

She spoke as though the words were wrung from her.

"Tony, is there no sense of pity in you?"

"Oh, yes, Aunt Marcia!"

"But that is not all! Is it not true—

answer me, Jean Limousin, as you hope for heaven!—that when Monsieur was denouncing you, your poor young mother ran in between you and begged him——"

It lifted me from my chair, to the back of which I clung, wavering. "Mademoiselle!" I gasped out.

"Ah, I am sorry, Jean—but for the sake of opening the eyes of this poor child—is it not true that he brushed her brutally aside, and that she fell to the floor—Jean?"

I covered my eyes.

"She died, Jean, in your arms, with her last breath begging Monsieur to show you mercy—is it not true?"

I was too dizzy and sick to answer, and I was kept from the need of it by a strange intervention. Antoinette jumped up and cried suddenly:

"You shall not speak of it, Jean! You shall not ask him another question, Aunt Marcia. Ah, is there no shame in you? Is there no shame?"

"I want truth, Antoinette—you blind girl! I want the truth for yourself, and you must have it! Then tell me, Jean Limousin, if it is not true that Monsieur pretended a reconciliation with you, and that he bribed you with money and with your safety from the hand of the law to return to the château and pretend a genuine affection for him—if he did not bribe you to do this in order that the suspicions of Antoinette and of me should be killed? Is not *that* true?"

"Jean," cried Antoinette, "you need not answer; you must not answer! I shall close my ears. I shall not hear him, Aunt Marcia!"

She tried to run from the room, but Mademoiselle Marcia caught her with an arm as strong as the arm of a man and held her.

"Answer me, miserable boy!" cried she. "Heaven forgive you for what you have done or tried to do, if you speak the truth to us now! Oh, look, Tony, and see the guilt in his face, even if you will not listen to his voice!"

I said in a voice so hoarse that I had to try twice before I could make myself heard: "Mademoiselle Marcia, it is all true—and less than the truth."

There was a moan from Antoinette, and she dropped her head on the shoulder of Aunt Marcia.

"I honor you, Jean!" cried Marcia Gerardin. "Even if it is a late confession, I honor you for it!"

"Will you believe me, Mademoiselle Marcia?" said I. "I could not have let the marriage take place without speaking—but like a wretched coward I have delayed from day to day."

"Do you hear, Tony?" said Marcia Gerardin. "Do you hear what Jean has told us? Does it mean nothing to you?"

She only murmured: "Let me go, Aunt Marcia! I shall die if you keep me here."

"Will you face Jean and——"

"Face him? No—no—no!"

To my astonishment, to the very visible horror of Mademoiselle Marcia, Antoinette burst into tears.

"The world is ending!" cried Marcia to me with a startled look. "Antoinette—come!"

And she led her from the room.

There was a very perceptible time after this, but I had not yet gathered enough strength to leave that torture chamber when Monsieur came in to me. He gave me a single look and then cried: "You have talked, baby! You have chattered of everything you know! Is it true?"

"I have told her everything that she asked," said I. "At least, I have told her what seems to hurt you most."

"How blessed I am in such a son!" said Monsieur. "Ah, what a blessing are children!"

He was in such a cold fury that I shrank away from him; I think, if he had stirred a step toward me, that I should have flung myself through the

plate glass of the big window; I should have leaped over a cliff to avoid him. He saw it at once and merely sneered at me.

"I am not going to put a hand on you," said he. "For such things as this a mere physical punishment is nothing —nothing. But there are other ways of which you will learn. You are not the son of a fool, my dear Jean! You are not the son of a fool, of that you may be sure!"

He was about to say more and find some vent to his agony through his acid tongue when the door was cast open by Mademoiselle Marcia. She was as full of fire as Monsieur himself.

"I am glad that I have found you together," said she, "and I suppose that you are counting the number of eggs left in the basket. But, in the first place, I shall announce your victory, Monsieur. What madness has taken hold on her, I cannot tell; but with her eyes opened to the truth, with all the black facts arrayed before her, she will not see the light."

The voice of Monsieur was like a shout of victory.

"By all that is noble in heaven!" cried he. "She still will not leave the château!"

"She will not," said Mademoiselle Marcia gloomily. "But I have come to warn you, Monsieur, that your victory is not complete. Until the day for this unlucky marriage arrives, I shall be striving my poor best to bring her to her senses! And, in the meantime, I shall wait for you, Jean Limousin, to show that you are worthy of your mother, and not a coward!"

With this fierce announcement, she turned her back on us and went from the room, pausing once or twice as though there were many more words in her which she yearned to utter. At last she disappeared through the doorway, and we could follow her heavy step as she went up the hall and then up the stairs. Monsieur, after this bewildering revelation, was a changed man. He was able to sit down and light a cigarette, saying:

"I could not have guessed it. Frankly, I could not have guessed it. But I should have known that to a nature as proud and as strong as hers, only what comes into her own life affects her will. If she has decided to marry me, what would the revelations of creatures like Reynal and Jean Limousin mean to her? Nothing! She is a goddess, and she must know the gap that extends between her and other women. Yet it is very wonderful! As for love—no, I cannot delude myself. It is only esteem. Not for my wealth. She is above that. It is esteem for the mind of Monsieur. Oh, strange and wise and beautiful girl!"

He paused in his ecstasy and said dryly to me:

"I retract some of what I have spoken to you, Jean. Perhaps it was better that she should have known everything before the marriage. I have sailed my ship between the reefs; there is a fair harbor before me now!"

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A RIDE ON THE GRAY.

THERE are times when, in an emotional crisis, moments run as slowly as they drag along on a railroad platform when a train is late. What I felt when I left Monsieur was a feverish desire to find some employment. If I could have put a canoe into the river and paddled it with all my might, it would have been most to my liking. But, remembering my last trip down the river with my mother in the boat, I shrank from that amusement. A walk would not be motion swift enough for me. By instinct rather than actual desire, I found myself in my room changing my clothes and putting on riding togs.

If I wanted a smooth jaunt over the well-built roads, there were wire-strung thoroughbreds who would flash me along like the wind; or there was the young mare which Monsieur was using for hacking back and forth on the estate. What I wanted, however, was to plunge through the woods, get into the thick of cross-country action, and pour as much excitement as possible into my moments in the saddle. So I asked McGurdy for the big, gray Irish hunter, and he had the monster brought out.

"He's better in the knees every day," said McGurdy, looking critically from the side. "It would take a wise eye to see that he's been broke down. *I* think he'll come back near to shape. Are you meaning some stiff work for him?"

I told him that I felt like a brisk spin across country, the crosser the better, and at this McGurdy looked me in the eye and said:

"I'd lay to it that you'd like the new path, sir!"

"The new path, McGurdy?" cried I. "Why, man, it's smooth enough for a child to take its first riding lesson on! What fun would there be on the new path?"

Monsieur had barely finished the construction of it. It wove among the trees, dipping pleasantly with the rise and drop of the ground, from the château to the river side. I had been over it once and did not like it—because the cleavage through the trees left them too raw-edged, the gravel was too firmly rolled, and on the whole there was a pioneer air of newness about the path which made me decide to keep off it for another year, at the least. McGurdy made a gesture with both hands and cocked a deprecatory head upon one side.

"You never can tell where the fun will come," said McGurdy. "Sometimes in the rough—sometimes over the flat! You never can tell where the hardest falls are coming!"

"Now, what do you mean by that, McGurdy?"

He would only shrug his shoulders and study an aimless diagram which he drew in the gravel with the toe of his boot.

"I dunno," said he. "I just gave you a suggestion for a ride; you suit yourself!"

With which he strode off toward the stable doors. Of course, no one employed at the château would have dared to use such insolence—no one other than McGurdy, who had made himself so useful to Monsieur that I think my father would have parted with his right arm sooner than with this omniscient horseman. I felt that it was strange conduct, even for McGurdy. It looked remarkably as though he felt that the river ride had a mysterious interest for him—and for me.

On this day I was exactly in the mood for riding straight down the throat of the first mystery I could find. The dangers in the château, which lay like a cloud behind me, were such impalpable, shadowy things that I would have welcomed some physical threat. I had a holster strapped at my hip, and I was wickedly prepared to use it, I assure you. So I took the river road, which brought me upon my destiny. Even so I might have gone whisking by my fate, had it not been for a great freak of chance to which I have been grateful ever since. For the gray Irish hunter, so famous for the sureness of his footing, so wise of head and perfect in schooling—this paragon of a hunter who had worked across the worst of rough country with never a misstep, stumbled as he ran down that smoothly finished trail and flung me straightway over his head!

I was shooting the big animal along at a racing gait, eager to be off the new path and away through the woods; I was jockeying him with my body pitched along his neck, with so little

expectation of any mishap underfoot that that heavy stumble flicked me lightly off his back. I landed in thick shrubbery that received me like a set of wonderful springs and tossed me back upon my feet, where I gasped once or twice and then started after the gray. That wise beast, having bolted for half a furlong, now came about and waited patiently for me to catch up with it. It was while I hastened toward it, cursing and stamping, that a familiar shadow glided out of the woods upon my right. I whirled about upon Pierre Reynal!

He was more repulsive in appearance than ever. Under a beard of four or five days, his ugly face was blotched and swollen where the blows of Monsieur had fallen during their murderous battle. Though he was leaning on a long rifle, I did not make the least gesture toward my own weapon. If it were true that this Reynal had been my very vindictive enemy during most of my life, and that he had attempted to kill my father not long before, still what can one do to a man who will not strike back? I had learned from experience that this brave and terrible man would not lift his hand against me. I regarded him, therefore, with only a little more than my usual interest and loathing. Some people have such feelings of revulsion when they see a spider crawling or a snake coiling; it was in this manner that I regarded Reynal. I never could keep my emotion about him sufficiently behind a mask. This was almost the first time that he cared to speak of it.

"You are as happy as ever to see me, Monsieur Jean," said Reynal.

"I cannot see you," I answered him sternly, "without feeling that it is my duty to shoot you down or call for others to help me."

"Your duty to whom, monsieur?"

"For one, to my father, whom you have tried to murder, Reynal!"

"But is it murder to stand before a man and to fight with your two hands?"

"I shall not argue. Only, Reynal, if you love your life, do not remain in the grounds of the château long, for Monsieur has sent out a dozen men to hunt through the woods for you. And if they find you, they are instructed to say that they mistook you for a rabbit."

Reynal favored me with his frightful smile. "You are too kind, Monsieur Jean," said he.

"You knew it all before, Reynal," said I, understanding him at once. "You seem to have your informers; and tell me—did you direct McGurdy to send me down this path to you?"

"Is McGurdy a man to be commanded?" asked Reynal, with one of those graceful Latin gestures which were so incongruous in the man.

"Very well," I said. "You may choose to play with this danger if you will; but I cannot help warning you. In spite of all the reasons I have for hating you, Reynal, I have a kindly feeling toward you; I wish you no harm."

Reynal seemed moved by this, and he even made a step or two toward me, saying: "Monsieur Jean, is it true? Is there one touch of fondness in you for Pierre Reynal?"

I could not help shrinking from him, and I said coldly: "I said that I did not hate you, Reynal, and I have no wish to see you lose your life—which you will surely do if you remain near Monsieur!"

"It is true," said Reynal, standing again. "In fact, this is the last day."

"You are leaving the place, then?"

"I am leaving, Monsieur Jean," said he with his ugly smile. "I shall not see you again," he added in a singular voice, "although you may see Pierre Reynal."

"Now, what do you mean by that?" I asked him.

"Forgive me for such a riddle," said

he, "but we have not a great deal of time. The reason that you rode down the new path was to learn something from me which I must tell you now."

"What is that, then?" I asked, very curious indeed.

"It is the reason why Mademoiselle Antoinette Gerardin is remaining at the château," said he.

"And you can tell me that? However, I know it well enough!"

"If you know, why are you here? But you do not know, and I shall tell you. You dream that it is because the strength and the strangeness of Monsieur has surrounded her. Ah, how blind you are, Jean! She remains today and to-morrow and perhaps even more days, almost to the very moment which Monsieur has appointed for the marriage, and it is because she has no power to take herself away from the man she loves. What a love it is, Jean, that keeps her chained here, although she dreads and loathes Monsieur!"

Now I leaped, with a great, blind flight of the spirit, upon his meaning.

"Reynal, Reynal," I cried, "do not taunt and mock me! But you could not know; there is no means by which you may be able to know!"

"Is there not?" said he. "Nevertheless, I have a perfect knowledge of it. It is you whom she loves, Jean. Your arms are the first that were ever around her. Tell me, my dear, blind Jean—is she a woman to whom such a thing could happen by chance? No, no! Go back to her. Go quickly—only, beware of Monsieur! He is already full of many doubts. Beware of Monsieur. Go with open eyes; but go at once, because every moment is a torment to her!"

I struggled for an instant to understand how it could be. Then I felt that I must not try to reason it out, but do blindly what Reynal had directed, as though he were a prophet sent to me from heaven. I rushed for the gray hunter and sent him hurling back to the château.

When I dismounted at the stables, it was McGurdy, himself, who took the horse.

"What?" he asked. "Did you find a fall even on a smooth road like that?"

I looked at him wildly and cried: "McGurdy, Heaven bless you!"

So I rushed away to the château, leaving McGurdy gaping after me, reasonably sure, I have no doubt, that I was a madman in very fact.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### AN INCARNATE DEVIL.

I WENT toward the western entrance of the building, feeling that I was less apt to encounter Monsieur if I went in from that direction. He was apt to be in the library at this time of the day, or working in his office. Nothing could happen of a sufficient importance to take him from his work. When I hurried through the garden I found Antoinette there, dressed in a great stiff apron, with gloves and a huge pair of shears, cutting long-stemmed roses.

Suddenly I felt that the one subject of importance, which every one pretending to culture should thoroughly master, was flowers. Then again I thanked Heaven that I found her dressed in this fashion, so busy, and so plain, like any gardener's wife. It would be easier to talk with her, yes, and to talk privately. The overgrown hedge which bounded this little square of garden shut it off from all of the windows of the château except two tall gables where was that long-unused room of Hubert Guillaume. Even at that moment, with joy leaping in me, I felt as though the eyes of my dead brother had looked down upon me.

Antoinette saw me with a side glance when I first came near her; I saw her start a little. She pretended that she had not; she was very collected when

she straightened from clipping a stem and showed me the bunch she had gathered.

"The garden is going frightfully to pot," said Antoinette.

I looked from the roses to her face, and back to the roses again, without being able to speak a word. Antoinette leaned over suddenly and seemed to busy herself with selecting the next rose. Then I said: "Antoinette, I must talk to you a little."

She did not look up to me. "What do you wish to say, Jean?"

"I wish to say—I wish to say—do you not despise me for the manner in which I took advantage of you yesterday?"

I thought I saw that her hands stopped fumbling among the tall stems. "No, Jean," said she.

"I—I can't talk to you, Antoinette—unless I can see your face."

"Of course," said she in a rather stifled voice, and began to rise.

In some manner the roses slipped from her arm and tumbled to the ground. I dropped on my knees to pick them up; but I reached only blindly for them, for the face of Antoinette was scant inches from mine, and I could not help seeing that she was flushed a sweeter color than the flowers themselves.

"Antoinette," I said, trembling.

"Yes, Jean——"

"It was not madness that made me—I mean, it was the truth, Antoinette."

"I don't understand," said she, rising in great haste. "But I must go back to the house; I have forgotten——"

She left me kneeling foolishly, but it seemed to me that she did not hurry very fast down the path to the house. Once she almost paused. Before she reached the gate I was in front of her, having trampled the roses to a horrid pulp on my way.

I stammered: "If you leave me, Antoinette—if you run from me in this way—I shall not know what to do; I shall go mad."

"But, Jean—I forgot——"

She tried to shrink past me, but I touched her arm, and the touch was enough to stop her. She turned to me, with her eyes down and her lips parted a little. I felt the trembling of her body, and suddenly I knew all that I wished to know—so that a great sense of power made me cruel."

I said: "Will you look up to me, Antoinette? Do you fear to look up to me?"

"Of course not," said she, but it was no more than a whisper, and all that I had was one frightened flash of her eyes. At that I was a madman indeed.

"Antoinette," cried I, "tell me if God has made me happy—tell me if you love me!"

"Do not touch me, Jean!" said she. "The house—if Monsieur——"

"What of him?"

"Would he not kill even his son?"

"I, also, am a Limousin!" cried I, full of courage. "Do I care if the whole world should see?"

"Jean!" she gasped out. "Do not touch me—come no closer and I shall tell you everything—but don't touch me—let no one see!"

"Tell me, then!"

"You will promise? You will not come near me?"

"On my soul!"

"Then—oh, Jean, from the first day I knew! From the first moment that you came to me I knew that I loved you. But, Jean, you have sworn!"

"It is too much happiness; it will kill me," said I. "I only wish to fall on my knees before you, to tell you how I worship you, my beautiful Antoinette!"

"You must let me go past you now, Jean. Do not stop me. Do not touch me, or I shall be in your arms, telling you——"

"There is no one to see; in those two windows there is no one."

"I cannot tell, Jean, because there is a mist over my eyes, and I can only see you, oh, my dearest."

"Antoinette——"

"Do not, Jean; do not touch me."

"I cannot live without one kiss."

"It might be the last—I am afraid! I am afraid! Oh, Jean, be patient, and you shall have me forever as your wife. But now——"

Now, twice I had taken hold upon myself and drawn myself back, and twice this rosy, trembling beauty called me closer. She was half in fear and half in smiles, and, with every instance, her dark eyes, which looked every way except into mine, were more filled with magic. Against all the power of my will, I held out my arms to her, and she, with a little moan, stepped within them.

Then the lips of Antoinette were saying against my lips: "Am I to die, Jean? Because such wild, sweet, sad happiness must be followed with pain."

"There is no such thing as death," said I, "because every hour of our life together will be as unending as—what is it?"

She had suddenly shrunk in my arms with a sort of indrawn cry of agony. The sound of the voice was less than the word she spoke, for in that word the terror and the grief and the pain of my life were summed:

"Monsieur!"

I have never known what brought him there, except that the great emotions of the last two days may have carried into his mind the thoughts of the first Madame Limousin and of their dead boy, Hubert Guillaume. When I turned I knew to look up to the tall gables of the room of my brother. There, somewhat dim behind the glass, like an imagie in water, I saw Monsieur. At that instant he stepped back into the shadow of the room.

"Antoinette," said I savagely, "you must not faint."

"I shall not; I am perfectly strong," said she. "I shall go in to face him, Jean—and——"

Believe me that, as she spoke, she was already moving toward the gate, but I stopped her and swept her back in an ecstasy of fear.

"Face him? You had better face the fiend!" cried I to her. "No, no! We have only one surety for our lives, and that is never to let him find us. He would not pause. My life or yours means nothing to him at this moment."

She fled with me through the garden and beyond, toward the woods.

"Where shall we go?" cried Antoinette.

"The river—and the canoe," said I. "No more talk—keep every breath for running."

I dropped back a half pace behind her. She had torn off that clumsy gardener's apron and the big hat and the heavy gloves. Now I watched her running like a boy, with the very wind in her feet.

We flashed down the curve of the broad path which wound into the woods toward the river, leaving the grave of Hubert Guillaume at our right, then through that narrow cleft in the trees which Monsieur had opened to give the grave a prospect of the river which Hubert had loved so well. We turned from that to a narrower bridle path, and we were already well down it when I heard the beat of the hoofs of a horse, flying at full speed. Antoinette cast one glance of agony toward me and gave her last strength to her running. I saw instantly that it would not do. I took her arm and stopped her.

"We can never reach the water in time," said I.

"Then the trees, Jean——"

"He would hunt us down in five minutes. No, he must meet me here. Go into the woods, Antoinette; hurry up to the house; I shall stay here and try to persuade him to be reasonable."

She made a first step to obey me and then whirled back.

"You are not armed, Jean?"

"I am not," said I firmly. "But do not think that he will go so far as that; I am his son, after all."

"You have told me yourself that he will be a fiend. And I know that he will—Jean, if you stay to face him——"

She had thrown an arm around me to draw me toward the sheltering trees. As she did so, by an unlucky chance her hand touched the revolver beneath my coat; it was in her hand instanty.

"You did not mean it!" cried poor Antoinette.

But I was possessed, then, of the devil which lived in the blood of Monsieur himself. I tore the gun from her fingers.

"Go to the house, Antoinette," I commanded her in a terrible voice. "Find whatever men you can at the château and bring them here. They may not come too late!"

"It is your father!" said she, trying vainly to get the weapon again.

"It is an incarnate devil!" I answered her, and brushed her away. "If there is a death, it is on his head. Go back, Antoinette."

Here Monsieur broke into our view as he swung his horse from the broader river road and rushed down the path toward us.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### REYNAL'S SECRET.

TO have followed us so quickly, he could not have waited an instant; indeed, he had not paused even to buckle a gun about his hips, but he carried the naked weapon in one hand while he gathered the reins in the other. His head was bare, with the hair he wore so long whipping back and his short beard parted by the wind of that racing gallop. To me, standing on lower ground, he looked like a giant. But I was neither afraid nor too excited. His own blood was rising in me, as I held the revolver ready and brushed Antoinette away a second time.

It seemed that God would not give to the earth so terrible a crime, for out from the trees before Monsieur stepped Pierre Reynal with one hand raised to warn back my father and a long rifle in the other. Monsieur did not even draw rein, but shot Reynal down and fired again into his body as he rushed past and on toward me.

Afterward, when the wounds were seen, no one could tell how enough life had remained in Reynal to permit him to do the thing, but I saw him twist upon his side and level the rifle. His bullet struck Monsieur fairly in the back, and the big man cast up his arms and swayed from the saddle. He rolled to my feet in a cloud of dust and flying gravel, and lay on his face, with a great red stain growing on the back of his coat.

When I turned him on his back again I thought from his open, fixed eyes that he was already dead, but he said at once in a wonderfully natural voice:

"It was Reynal, was it not?"

It was Reynal," said I.

"There are nine lives in that cat, then," said Monsieur.

I was working with stumbling hands to cut away his coat.

"Do not trouble yourself," said Monsieur. "I am a dead man. But put me on the grass. I have a foolish aversion to dying like a dog in the dirt."

I did not need to tell Antoinette what to do. She had caught that plunging horse already and dragged herself into the saddle and flown up the road for help. As for Monsieur, he was miraculous.

"Have a look at Reynal," said he. "The hero should not be allowed to die without a hand to close his eyes—your hand above all, Jean."

I reached Reynal in three bounds, but he was dead long before. Either of the bullets of Monsieur woud have ended him. I merely paused to lift him from the road and cover his face; then I hurried back to Monsieur.

It did not seem possible that he was dying; the bank to which I had moved the great bulk of his body sloped sharply, so that he might have been thought reclining for a moment to enjoy the strangeness and the beauty of the sky. The mist of the morning had not cleared away with the progress of the day, but was drawing thicker and thicker. It was now a sheet of milky white, luminous with the sun behind, and every green tree stood against this background in unearthly beauty. Even the Limousin River flowed pale between its banks.

To complete the illusion, he had lighted a cigarette when I reached him again; though I think that this was rather an affectation, for by the tremor of his hand I guessed that every movement of his arm was a mortal agony to him. I begged him to lie quietly and to allow me to attempt to bandage the wound and stop the flow of death. He merely smiled at me.

"You talk, my boy," said he, "as though I had made a will and as though there were still time for me to change it. You need have no fears. I have no will; the estate passes to you freely. Do not spend it too fast, Jean. Let it linger out a few years."

"Monsieur," said I, "I swear that I wish to receive your commands."

He grunted at this, and then smiled at me his old smile which had chilled my blood so many times in the years before.

"An obedient son, now," said Monsieur. "A moment ago, when you stood there waiting for me with a gun in your hand, I could have sworn that the Limousin blood flowed in you, after all. But now will you show weakness? No, Jean, be bold; talk frankly, because I love frank strength and have always loved it. It will amuse me to hear you tell me now how you hate me."

"Monsieur," said I, "believe that I have forgotten everything except that you are my father; and believe that there was never a time when I could not have loved you if you would have had it so."

"Tush!" said he. "Even after Julie?"

I shuddered. "Even after that," said I, and I think that I meant it truly. "But now compose yourself and do not waste your strength talking. There will be a doctor in a few moments; something still can be done. I am sure of it!"

"I detest arguments," said Monsieur. "Let me tell you finally that the ice of death is in me; my body is already dying; my brain will follow soon after. Look at Reynal, though, with his face covered! Well, it is an infinite consolation to know that while he lies there I am enjoying the tender green of these trees—and your conversation, my dear Jean."

Once more he smiled on me in his terrible way. It was impossible, even then, to pity him as much as I feared him.

"Is it not a strange day, Jean? And is it not fitting that such a life as mine should close with such a scene? On a miraculous day, and by the hand of my son!"

"Not mine!" cried I.

"Don't quibble," said Monsieur. "The hand of Reynal was your hand. He struck for your sake."

"No, no!" cried I. "I have no part in it! Do not say it, Monsieur, or I shall be haunted the rest of my life!"

He looked at me for a moment thoughtfully. "That is the voice of Julie," said he. "And I swear that I believe that you will grieve for me after I am dead, just as she loved me when

I was living. Well, I was a mystery to her, poor child, but she was a greater mystery to me. But think of Reynal; raise him a monument higher than these trees. He saved you, my gentle Jean; for I would surely have laid you where I am now lying. Even if the jury bribes had cost me half my estate! For when I saw you—I cannot think of it! That she should have looked from me down to you! No more of that—we return to Reynal."

"I could never understand him," said I. "Why he should have tormented me, striven to ruin me with you—and then——"

"And become your slave the moment you left me? Shall I leave you your little mystery in order that it may dignify your entire life? No, I shall tell you the truth, which is not so marvelous. Well, Jean, when your mother and I were touring in Europe, a certain young, strange Frenchman who was about to take holy orders saw your mother. He gave up the divine calling to follow her divine face. That was Pierre Reynal!"

"Impossibe!" cried I. "My mother never knew it!"

"Ah, but she did—or guessed it. Even Julie was not such a fool. Very well, Jean. He knew that he could not have her; he decided that he would take the creature which looked most like her—you, my dear boy. There is still a bit of the girl look about your face. And the scheme of that madman, that odd Reynal, was simply to disgrace you in my eyes so that you would be forced into the world, where he would make himself necessary to you, and become like your father—like your slave—I think he hardly cared which!"

Monsieur laughed, softly because of the torment which it caused him.

"Very delightful that his ugliness should have driven you almost mad in your childhood! An exquisite irony of fate."

He made a sharp pause and closed his eyes; his color had become livid, then settled to a deadly gray.

"It is nearly the end," said Monsieur. "I shall not open my eyes again except to behold her for the last time; if Antoinette comes again—speak to me—but otherwise let me die in peace!"

What the doctors will say I do not know, but my own conviction is that my father would have died at that instant except that, by a giant use of his will, he drove death back from him.

He opened his lips to say only one thing: "Faster!" That was when the beat of the hoofs of horses and the rolling of wheels was heard by us from the upper path. Antoinette flew in the lead on Monsieur's tall horse; behind her came a carriage with half a dozen men jumbled in it. Antoinette herself was first; as she slid into my arms, and the horse trotted off, I said: "Go to him."

She went at once and kneeled beside him. "Monsieur!" said she.

"If I had never guessed that the soul of Antoinette was the purest gold, I should have known it then as I heard the fear, the hatred, the horror banished from her throat, and nothing but the music of tender pity coming to the ears of that dying man.

He looked up at her with eyes wonderfully bright. And he smiled his delight. "Ah, Antoinette—my beautiful!" said he. "How delightful—how delightful you are! I fill my eyes with you, and so I am sure that I take you with me into eternity!"

All the life that was in him he had saved for that sight of her and for that speech. With the last word the life ran out from that great body, and he was dead without a struggle, without the lifting of a hand, with the smile still on his lips.

This must be the end. I had thought to tell of many other things. Now that

I write of how the breath left the lips of Monsieur, I see that nothing remains of great importance which you should know, except how we laid Monsieur beside Hubert Guillaume. Through my window at this moment I can see the maple leaves sprouting in a delicately beautiful mist of rose above the tomb.

Reynal lies in the little church in the village of Limousin. We placed him where the chanted masses would roll over his grave on every day of the year, because, as we felt then, and as I know now by the sad wisdom which long years give to us, he was a holy man. To-morrow the carriage will roll to the front of the château, and I shall go out and find a little, withered, white-headed man sitting in it. It will be McGurdy. We will drive together to Limousin and enter the church and sit there together. Hardly a fortnight passes that we do not do it. McGurdy, because he had loved Reynal for reasons which I do not know, drops on his feeble knees and prays. I can only sit and think until my heart swells too much and I must hurry out under the kind sky.

Last of all, of my sweet Antoinette, my dear, my dear wife—but, no, I shall not write of this, because I have put down too many words of sorrow, and here I must say farewell.

THE END.

## TRAPPER LEAVES WILL ON CARDBOARD

A TYPICAL old-time trapper was Harry Christie, who recently passed away, at the age of sixty-three, in the hospital at Cordova, Alaska. Before his death, Christie scrawled his will on a piece of cardboard and asked that his remains be taken to his cabin and burned. Christie arrived in Cordova twenty years ago and built his cabin at Alaganik, the original site of the City of Cordova, at the mouth of the Copper River. At one time, he published a book on practical trapping, hoping thereby to make his fortune.

## SEEKING MATE FOR WHITE BEAR

AN attempt is being made to capture alive a mate for Ursus Kermodei, a lonely white bear, the only one of its species known to be in captivity, now housed in a new home of its own in Beacon Hill Park, Victoria, British Columbia. A report has been received from Princess Royal Island, on the northwestern coast of British Columbia, that bears of the same species are at large there. The white bear is smaller than the polar bear and has a limited *habitat*. Owing to the isolated and rugged character of the islands of this region, it is almost impossible to capture a white bear alive.

# Flapjack Elopes

By

## Frank Richardson Pierce

*Author of "When the Bear Went Up the Mountain," etc.*

AS Jud Purdy eased his one hundred and ninety pounds into "Flapjack" Meehan's favorite chair, he said: "Say, Flapjack, if you were going to murder a man how would you go about it?"

"Sufferin' Malemutes!" exclaimed Flapjack, "that's a new one on me. If it was just an ordinary murder I'd probably shoot him. If I wanted to disgrace as well as kill the cuss, I'd probably hang him. They say drowning is painless, so, if any easy death is desired, you might put him into a sack along with a few rocks and dump him into the river. If it is a fancy murder you want, you might take him to the top of a mountain and push him off. A glacier crevasse has its advantages, but if this man is low-down and ornery, a double crosser or a wife beater, I'd say filing to death would be about right. I've got a file, if you need one."

"I'm not kidding, Flapjack," the big boy said. "I'm going to do something. It's all on account of this bird who calls himself Count de la—la—oh, I can't remember his handle."

"No one else can; it's a mile long, but Lamoureaux is the nearest the boys can get to it. Go ahead." Flapjack had an idea he knew what was coming.

"Well, this——"

"Cut out the swearing. My cashier might hear you," Flapjack interrupted. "He's probably all of that, though!"

"Well, this—er—count has been sticking around Hazel Rowan lately. I didn't mind that at first, but now he's making progress. He's got the looks; he's got a great line of bunk. If it happened to be some young sour dough I'd lose like a good sport, after putting up my best fight. I'd congratulate the winner, and I'd wish 'em both happiness and mean it. But I hate to see a girl like Hazel fall for a washed-out, broken-down nobleman—if he is a nobleman."

"Where do I come in?" Flapjack inquired curiously.

"Well, I'm all right in the North country; that's my line. But when it comes to competing with this count, I'm lashed to the mast. Why do sensible girls fall for that stuff?"

"Sensible girls don't," Flapjack replied. "But where do I come in?"

"Hang it," Purdy cried, "I'm trying to get to that. I want to know what to do. My desire right now is to catch him in a quiet spot and take him apart. But I've got sense enough to know Hazel would call me a brute and rush to the hospital and nurse him back to

life. You are a wise old boy, Flapjack; a lot of people have said so. Can't you figure out some scheme whereby this girl can be saved a lot of grief?"

"And incidentally bring you a lot of happiness, eh?" Flapjack dryly remarked. "Does he know you've struck pay dirt in the Rowan Mine?"

"I don't know how he could have found it out, but he's sure making a strong play for Hazel, all of a sudden. She's a beauty, but he's been used to beauties all his life. I'd do anything to make her happy."

"How much, Jud, would you do? If I get her out of the clutches of this obsolete nobleman will you give her up yourself?"

Flapjack's amazing request almost floored Jud. He considered a moment. "Yes, I'll do that, Flapjack. Most anybody is better than the count. Why, I'd rather see her married to—to—you!"

"Thanks!" Flapjack replied, grinning at the left-handed compliment.

"Well, I didn't mean that, exactly. You're an old man, Flapjack——" Purdy was floundering.

"You're getting in deep water, son. Well, as long as you'll give her up if I get rid of the count, I'll see what I can do. See you later."

"Thanks, Flapjack, you've probably saved his life, and me from committing murder. It may seem funny to you but I sure love that girl!"

"Nothing funny about it at all. I'm in love with her myself. Known her ever since she was knee-high to a grasshopper."

Within a few minutes after Jud had departed Nellie Rowan appeared. "Come in, Nellie" said Flapjack and closed the office door. "You seem worried about something."

"Who wouldn't be, when a mother brings her daughter up right and a no-account count appears on the scene, and makes a little fool out of her? I tell you, Flapjack, a mother's life is anything but a bed of roses when a girl reaches the impressionable age. First it was that big Jud Purdy and now it is the Count de la—la—— Bosh! I made a mistake in my own marriage, and I don't propose Hazel should make one, too."

"Well, Jud has agreed to withdraw from the field if I say the word. He was willing to chuck his own chances if I'd get rid of the count."

"You are such an old friend, Flapjack, and I had to come to somebody! Will you do something?"

"I'm not much of a hand at the Cupid business one way or another, but I'm going to do what I can to take the count's measure," Flapjack replied. "Can you arrange to have Hazel call and sort of unburden her mind?"

"I'll arrange anything," the mother grimly promised, "I don't see how a rugged Alaskan girl like Hazel can fall in love with that French poodle. She can take care of herself anywhere in the North, under all sorts of conditions, land or sea, and yet she don't know beans about love. Honestly, Flapjack, don't you believe he is more interested in the placer gold we are going to take out of the mine than he is in Hazel?"

"That's about the size of it," Flapjack replied. "Well, send her around."

Hazel arrived that afternoon, and before she realized how it all happened, she was telling Flapjack all about it.

"No one seems to understand Henri," she said, "but he is an exceptional young man. He seems to know exactly what a girl likes."

"So I've heard!" Flapjack said grimly.

"He is so thoughtful, particularly about the little things that mean so much to a girl." There was a lot more of it. "Won't you help me, Flapjack?" she concluded.

Flapjack considered. He had promised Jud Purdy and Nellie to help them.

He might as well make it unanimous. "Sure, I'll help you, Hazel. I'm not exactly sold on that count yet, but bring him around this evening and we'll talk things over. I'll serve up the best meal in the New Deal Café in honor of the occasion. Make it about eight o'clock."

At eight o'clock the girl presented the count. He was a fair-sized, rugged individual despite Mrs. Rowan's reference to a poodle. He was well-built, and he certainly had a way with the women. Even Flapjack envied his politeness, but it requires something more than politeness to get ahead in the world.

Under Flapjack's skillful handling the count was at his best. He managed to talk entertainingly, yet was never too deep in his subject to neglect the girl. He rendered a half dozen little services for her during the meal.

"Ah, you wish to know something of my family," he said, warming up. "One of the noblest houses in France. My great-grandfather was a brilliant general; and my grandfather one of the foremost diplomats of his time. My father——"

"That's fine!" Flapjack exclaimed. "Every man should be proud of his family tree, but what have you done?"

The blunt query almost floored the count for a moment, but he rose grandly to the occasion.

"Me! ah! I'm young, life is before me, and with the inspiration of a beautiful woman——" He left the description unfinished, knowing the girl would supply herself with a mental picture of his future.

Flapjack watched the couple narrowly as they talked, and gradually he came to a conclusion. "It's going to take desperate measures to put this thing over," he mused. "Well, I'll give it a whirl for luck and trust that no one is physically or mentally hurt." He drew his chair closer to the man. "Well, count, you've some obstacles ahead of you in love. Do you think you can hurdle them?"

The count bowed. "With your assistance, Mr. Meehan, the obstacles will vanish."

"I don't know about that!" Flapjack answered.

"I understand you are to help us!"

"No, I don't know you well enough to help you, but I am going to help Hazel. How soon can you two people be ready to elope?"

Flapjack's bomb exploded with a loud report. Hazel and the count regarded each other in amazement. They had planned a long campaign, and in a single evening he had been won. "Elopement, eh?" muttered the count. Then he brightened. "Darling, this is our opportunity!"

She was very serious for a moment, then she slowly assented.

"We'll be married at once, Mr. Meehan!" the count said quickly, unable to conceal his satisfaction. For the small sum of one hundred dollars he had learned the contents of the Rowan mine. A life of ease, with a beautiful companion, loomed before him. In time he might learn to really love the girl. "Will you arrange the details, Mr. Meehan?"

"Sure, but you can't be married at once. The three of us will elope tonight and be married at Placer Center." In his hurry Flapjack was getting his words tangled, but the pair understood what he meant. "You can't get married here, count, because the commissioner and all the preachers don't like the cut of your jib. They won't perform the ceremony!"

"Then we'll have to catch the morning steamer," the girl suggested.

Flapjack shook his head. "No, your mother would stop you. We'll have to go over the mountains, cross Icy Pass, then down Klootch Glacier. By taking that course they won't know where we are until it is too late to stop us."

The girl debated this course mentally. The count laid his hand gently on her shoulder. "Mr. Meehan knows best, darling. He has the added advantage of being friendly with both your mother and this rude Jud Purdy. Purdy is the sort to become—ah—nasty—even violent. Nothing, however, would gratify me more than to meet him on the field of honor."

"That'd suit Purdy, too," Flapjack mentally observed. He said aloud: "Well, Hazel, what is your decision?"

"I shall go of course. I'll meet you here at two in the morning."

At six o'clock the following morning Mrs. Rowan knocked on her daughter's door. "Six o'clock, Hazel!" she said softly.

Failing to receive an answer, she looked in, then gasped, and reached for a note pinned on the bed. She read it at a glance, almost fainting at the contents. "The villain!" she said. "The long-legged old devil; that deceiving old—old—yardstick!"

The sight of the telephone revived her. Cold Deck's telephone system was like many others in small communities. Central knew everybody by name as well as number. Only strangers used numbers. Mrs. Rowan jerked the receiver from the hook.

"Viola," she said briskly, "get Judson Purdy on the wire, please!" Two minutes later she shouted: "Judson, this is Mrs. Rowan. Come over quick!"

Purdy came on the run and made it from bedside to the Rowan cabin, a mile away, in ten minutes flat, including dressing. "Is Hazel—dead?" cried Jud, sensing something terrible.

"Dead? Oh, Jud! She's worse than dead, she has eloped with Flapjack Meehan!"

"Meehan? Why, the cradle-robbing old—beg pardon, I forgot myself."

"Go ahead and say it," she said, sobbing, "whatever it is say it. You're a man and can. I'm supposed to be a lady, but—darn him! Only yesterday he said he was my friend."

Purdy scratched his head. "Say, how come you turned to me when only two days ago you ordered me out of the cabin saying I was unfit for Hazel?"

"And you admitted it!" the woman replied. "Your frankness made a deep impression, Judson. Oh, Judson, can't you do something?"

"You're darned right I'll do something," he said. "I'm going to shoot Meehan on sight. I don't care if he has got a reputation as quick on the draw. He'll have to be quicker than he ever was before to enjoy this honeymoon. Say, where's the count?"

"Oh, bother the count! This is strictly a family affair. He'd probably weep or tear his hair or maybe beat his breast in anguish! How soon can you take their trail?"

"Right now!"

As he returned to his cabin he passed the New Deal Café and relieved his feelings by glowering darkly at the establishment. "Tubby" Willows thrust his head from the door. "Come here, Jud. Now don't go off half cocked; I'm going to give you some good advice about love."

"I don't care for any. Flapjack gave it to me yesterday and then ran off with the girl."

"Come here and listen to your Uncle Tubby," insisted the genial sour dough. "Come here, you're going to come whether you want to or not. After I'm through, you can take the trail or not as you choose."

Jud Purdy listened in respectful silence, then headed for Placer Center. He did not take the trail Flapjack took, because he did not know just which one Flapjack had chosen.

It was noon, and Hazel, Flapjack and Count Henri de la, et cetera, were resting from a long, steep climb. The

couple sat close together, talking in low tones. Flapjack reclined some distance away, smoking his pipe and observing. "We'd better be going!" he announced.

Inwardly the count groaned; muscularly he groaned also. For a man the count regarded as old, Flapjack was proving a marvel. "Better slow down a little, Mr. Meehan," he suggested several times during the morning. "Remember we have a girl with us."

To which Flapjack had laughed. "Gosh, count, most any Alaskan girl I know, Hazel's age, can put me on my back, when it comes to trail work. This is just a nice exercise for Hazel."

The girl's easy breathing proved it. She was in no way distressed.

That night Flapjack fixed up a little shelter for her, then made a bed for himself and the count on the ground near the fire. The count slept heavily, the sleep of exhaustion. He muttered once or twice in his sleep, and Flapjack opened his eyes wide and looked at the stars. The count muttered in English. It occurred to Flapjack that a French count should mutter in French when asleep.

Flapjack nudged Henri in the ribs at dawn. "A long day ahead of us, count, but we should be there by to-night." The count stifled many groans as he crawled from his blankets. Hazel Rowan appeared as fresh as a daisy and assisted Flapjack in preparing breakfast. The count passed a number of complimentary remarks as a sort of light work-out previous to the day's quota of compliments, then ate heartily.

Again Flapjack led off. They gained the summit, crossed the narrow pass between two peaks of granite and ice, then began the descent. A glacier stretched out at their feet and extended for miles. It was badly broken up, with many deep crevasses in whose blue depths death lurked constantly. Flapjack moved swiftly with Hazel at his heels. This was a part of the North, her life. She accepted it as all in the day's work. The count followed with caution, his nerves tense, stifling his fear.

He stopped in amazement again and again, as Flapjack crossed narrow ice bridges. Shortly before noon Flapjack faced a shoulder of ice and commenced working around on all fours. Suddenly his feet slipped. He held a moment with his hands, then shot furiously down the slope. The girl cried out in alarm, as she saw the crevasse below, its yawning depths silently waiting. Three times Flapjack twisted completely over in an effort to escape death. He stopped abrutly against a hummock of ice, shot upward as if to clear it, then fell back.

"He's dead!" the count exclaimed. Then he placed a restraining hand on the girl's arm. "Don't go down, darling, it is sure death."

"I can make it, I think," she answered and began the descent.

"No, you mustn't!" he insisted. She shook off his arm and then foot by foot crawled downward, digging her creepers carefully into the ice. She was true to type—cool in an emergency.

"I'm O. K.," Flapjack muttered, "but my ankle's gone back on me. That was a close shave. Loosen the pack straps, spread my blankets out, and I'll stay here. You go on. I'll make it!"

"But, Flapjack, I can't leave you!"

"Sure you can. There isn't grub enough for three for several days. Leave me most of it, and you go on. You'd better lead and see that the count does exactly as you tell him."

She regarded Flapjack curiously. "I hadn't thought of that. He doesn't know much about ice, does he? It'll seem queer giving my fiancé orders, showing him what to do."

Reluctantly she left Flapjack behind and joined the count, explaining the situation. He listened gravely. "But, darling, do you think you can get through?"

"I should hate myself if I couldn't. Why, it's simple enough—use common sense and keep going. Come on!" She led and he followed.

Twice in the next hour she had to slow down on his account, but she waited in silence. At noon she made camp and cooked a meal. The glacier was almost behind them, just an arm to cross. With relaxation and a meal behind them, she set a swifter pace, and presently stepped onto dirt once more. The ice had ended in a glacial torrent that ran into a great river. The trail skirted a rocky wall from the start, sometimes narrow, again wide, but always descending steeply. Once or twice she looked back. He was following slowly, so she cut down her pace.

"Hazel, darling!" he shouted after a long period of silence, "isn't there some other way down?"

Below them, a sheer drop of two hundred feet, the river roared over a bed strewn with boulders and blocks of ice. The count was leaning against the wall, almost flattening himself in fact. It was even narrower where she was.

"This is the only way," she replied; "it has been used for years! Here I'll give you a hand!" She got behind him and gripped his elbow. Slowly they progressed for a hundred yards, then the danger was over.

Again she led, setting a pace that was difficult for him to follow. When they reached the river she stopped and searched among the brush for several minutes, then dragged forth a canoe. He stopped. "Hazel, you're not going into that river, are you?"

"Either that or walk twenty-five miles this afternoon, and I'm frank to admit I'm not equal to walking. You understand canoes, Henri?"

"Some. I've paddled around on lakes in France and America!" he replied.

"Then I guess you had better stow yourself in the middle and I'll take the steering paddle."

It was he, who sat surrounded by the packs; she, who shoved the craft into the stream, where an eddy caught them, carried the canoe lazily upstream, then tossed it into the current with a rush.

A flush of excitement came to her. "Don't you love it?" she cried.

"Yes," he said without enthusiasm. "Darling, you are magnificent to-day. You are a creature of moods and this is your wild mood; like—like——" He gripped both sides of the canoe and set his teeth, forgetting moods as they struck the rapids. The canoe seemed to bound from wave to wave. On either side rocks protruded, smooth, substantial boulders that invited destruction, yet denied a handhold on their slippery surfaces.

"Ahead!" she shouted above the roar of the water.

A small wave curled aboard. She twisted the paddle, and the canoe seemed to slide down a white, liquid slope. On either side the water was higher. It seemed to slip constantly toward the center, threatening to swamp them.

"Hang on!" she cried with a final paddle twist.

They shot through the air and splashed and wallowed in a small pool below a low falls. Her face and hair were drenched with water. Spray trickled down her face in streams. The count crouched low, his face deathly white. Would this mad voyage never end?

It seemed not. One hour, two, then three they were swept along on the flood's crest. He regained a degree of his composure. "We'll be there in fifteen minutes!" she suddenly announced. "Now for the real fun!"

They were in it even as she spoke, bucking, wallowing, threatening to overturn, yet always the paddle righted them. The count felt the bow skid across a submerged rock and before his startled eyes the stern lifted so high

in the air he thought the girl would slide upon him. She gripped both sides and waited. He felt the water surge along the bottom. Then things went black.

"It is all over now, count!"

Henri blinked his eyes. They were floating in an eddy close to shore. The river swept lazily by. She beached the craft and picked up her pack; he followed.

"Ah, Hazel, you were magnificent. My darling!"

"I'm sorry, Count Henri, but our trails fork here," she said. "To go on would be a mistake. My life——"

"Ah, but your life will be my life. Foreign capitals, diplomatic circles, great balls, officers in brilliant uniforms, beautifully gowned women and you, the countess, the fairest of all."

"But that is not my life. I'm of the frontier, and, Henri, you are not. I'm sorry!"

His mask dropped. "Bah! A savage who does not know how to appreciate the finer things in life!"

A biting retort was on the tip of her tongue, but she considered a reply beneath her. She made her way toward the road house built close to the river bank. The door opened, and her mother rushed out. "Are you all right?" she cried.

"Quite!" the girl answered.

A canoe bobbed down the rapids and swung in ashore. The tall form of Flapjack Meehan untangled itself and stepped out. Jud Purdy emerged from a thicket. "Say, Flapjack, tell me why in thunder you didn't arrest the count at Cold Deck. Tubby Willows told me you suspected him of being a man the mounted police are looking for."

"Yes, he pulled the count gag on a woman in England, married her, stole her jewels, and drifted to Canada. The Mounted are clever, and, when this suspected Frenchman muttered in his sleep in English, they knew he was phony. He escaped the net by a hair. When Hazel brought him to dinner I recognized him from pictures I had seen."

"But why drag in the girl?"

"You don't know girls, son. If I had arrested him then she'd have believed it was persecution. I didn't want her set down in his cheap society crowd. I wanted him in her setting—the hard trail. I pulled a fake fall; then as soon as they started out I followed. Can you imagine a girl admiring a man she has to help over the dangerous spots? Well, I couldn't either." Flapjack yawned. "Guess I might as well take the count!" he added. "Coming?"

"Guess I might as well see the fun!"

The pair entered the road house the back way. Voices trailed through the open door. "Imagine, mother, I had to take his arm and help him along the ledge. Think of it, take his arm. I'll never forget in the rapids he was deathly white, then fainted. When I marry, thank Heaven, I want a man."

Flapjack nudged Jud. "Go to it, you chump. She's tired of taking men's arms; she wants to be taken. And don't worry about her mother."

"I won't! I brought Mrs. Rowan over." He entered the room and caught her arm. "Hazel, we're going to be married, right now!" He said it almost sullenly. She started to pull away, but he held on. Then she came toward him.

"Look!" she cried, pointing into the other room. "What's Flapjack doing?"

The count was backing away, his pistol covering Flapjack. Flapjack's hands were raised. "Listen, count," he said evenly, "you don't even measure up to our women in this country. You've got me covered. I'm going for my gun, and we'll shoot it out unless you drop yours." The count hesitated; then his weapon clattered to the floor.

Jud Purdy pulled the girl even closer. "Looks like Flapjack had taken the count!" he said, chuckling.

# Your Dog

By David Post

*Author of "The Newfoundland," etc.*

## THE OLD ENGLISH SHEEP DOG

SHEEP dogs, of one kind or another, are among the earliest canine companions of man. With the domesticating of sheep, the keeping of flocks, there arose the need for dogs to guard the woolly bands. Certain types were found to be better than others for this work; these types were trained and developed for this purpose, and became a necessary aid to the sheep-herder.

The old English sheep dog is a product of the British Isles. He is shaggy, bob-tailed, a little suggestive of a bear in appearance. Over his eyes there falls a curtain of long hair so close that one wonders how he can see much of the outside world. No question that he does, however, for he has been a favorite with English herders for many generations, and to-day is employed on many of the sheep ranches of western Canada.

While most old English sheep dogs are whelped with long tails, which are docked shortly after they are born, it often happens that several puppies in a litter may be born with bobtails. The surmised reason for this is a curious one. A tax was put upon all but working dogs in England; to distinguish actively-employed sheep dogs from tax-subject ones, the owners docked the tails of the former. This practice, continued with one generation after another of old English sheep dogs, is believed responsible for the puppies born with a bobbed tail.

Good-natured and intelligent, the old English sheep dog is not only an excellent guardian of flocks, but is also a good companion for any one. He learns quickly, likes the water, and can be taught to retrieve birds. At pastoral work in cold climates, the old English sheep dog can hold its own with any other breed.

The following is the standard of the Old English Sheep Dog Club:

Skull—Rather squarely formed, and capacious, so as to give plenty of room for brain power. The parts over the eyes should be well arched, and the whole skull should be well covered with hair.

Jaw—Moderately long, strong, square, and truncated; the stop should be defined so as to avoid a deerhound face.

Eyes—Dark or wall eyes are to be preferred.

Nose—Always black, large, and capacious.

Teeth—Strong and large, evenly placed, and level in opposition.

Ears—Small, and carried flat to the side of head, they should be coated moderately.

Legs—The forelegs should be perfectly straight, with plenty of bone, and of fair length, without approaching legginess; they should be well coated all round.

Feet—Small, round toes; well-arched; pads thick and hard.

Tail—Puppies requiring docking must have an appendage left of from one and one half to two inches. The operation should be performed within a week from birth, preferably within four days.

Neck and Shoulders—The neck should be moderately long, gracefully arched, and well coated with hair; the shoulders sloping and narrow at the point. The dog should stand lower at the shoulder than at the loin.

Body—Rather short and very compact; the ribs well sprung, and the brisket deep and giving plenty of room for the lungs. The loin should be very stout and arched gently. The hindquarters should be round and muscular and have well let-down hocks. The upper thighs are the most densely and heavily coated part of the old English sheep dog; they should have a thick, long jacket.

Coat—Profuse, and of good, hard texture; not straight, but shaggy and free from curl. The undercoat should be a waterproof pile when not removed by grooming or season.

Color—Any shade of gray, grizzle, blue, or blue merled, with or without white markings, or in reverse; any shade of brown or sable is objectionable.

Height—Twenty-two inches and upward for dogs, slightly less for bitches. Type, symmetry, and character are of the greatest importance, and on no account to be sacrificed to size alone.

General Appearance—A strong, muscular, thick-set, compact-looking dog of great symmetry. It should be covered all over with a profuse coat. Free from legginess or weaselness, it should walk or trot with a characteristic ambling or pacing movement and its gallop should be very springy. The bark of the old English sheep dog should be loud and have a peculiar metallic ring. The dog's expression should be very intelligent, but free from all poodle or deerhound character.

The widely-known collie will be the subject of my article in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

## MORE LAND FOR NEVADA INDIANS

SEVENTY thousand acres of public land were recently withdrawn from settlement, entry, sale or other disposition, and devoted to the use and benefit of the Indians of the Walker River reservation in Nevada, on the recommendation of the secretary of the interior. The lands in question are in Churchill and Mineral Counties, adjacent to the reservation. At present the Indians are using a part of the area, comprising some thirty-four thousand acres, for grazing purposes. The seventy thousand acres are placed at their disposal until March 5, 1927.

# Shorty Goes Loco

By

## Ray Humphreys

*Author of "'Kitty, Kitty,'" etc.*

IT had been a hasty but important conference in Sheriff Joe Cook's office. When it was over, and the agitated outsiders had departed, Deputy Sheriff "Shorty" McKay, who, apparently, had been lost in the pages of a book all during the confab, jumped to his feet excitedly.

"Boss, yuh let me go on that case!" cried Shorty.

"Yuh?" said Sheriff Cook, in disgust, "yuh—why what in Sam Hill do yuh know about it—with yuhr nose buried in a blamed story book all the time we was conferrin'. I'd a called yuh fer it 'ceptin' I didn't care to attract no attention to yuhr plagued indifference."

Shorty put up protesting hands.

"No—no, boss!" he cried fervently. "I wus lissenin' with both ears all the time—honest! I heard it all! I was just pertendin' to be readin'—an' anyhow—it ain't no story book, this book ain't. No sirree—lookit!"

Shorty flipped the volume down on the table, under the sheriff's nose, and the sheriff grunted.

The book was titled—"Detective Disguises."

"Ef yuh ask me," blurted out Sheriff Cook, "I'd say that was worse'n any story book. "Detective Disguises," eh? Waal, yuh lissen here—all the disguisin' in this green world won't make up fer yuhr lack o' brains, y'understand?"

"Yessir!

"An' as fer sendin' yuh on that case——"

"Lissen, boss" pleaded Shorty "it's a cinch yuh ain't hankerin' to go clear to Alamosa in weather like this, an' mebbe have to go from thar to Salida er Pueblo! It ain't gonna be no fun—but me, I'm crazy to go. I'll betcha——"

"It's a touchy kind o' case!" said the sheriff, weakening a little as he realized that he did not have any desire to go on the trip.

"I kin handle it, boss!"

Sheriff Cook deliberated. He focused his gaze on Shorty's offending book as he concentrated. His glare was intense enough to burn a hole through it, but the sheriff was doing some tall thinking. In a minute he aroused himself, grabbed the volume on disguises, and chucked it violently in the waste paper basket. Then he looked up at the flushed Shorty, who was trembling with eagerness.

"Yuh kin go," said the sheriff. "Catch that nine fifteen train to Alamosa —but heaven help yuh if yuh bungle the job!"

"Yessir. Thank yuh boss!"

"Remember, we ain't sure o' our suspicions," said the sheriff warningly. "Yuh gotta verify 'em afore yuh go makin' any rumpus. Yuh got that through yuhr thick noodle?"

"I has," said Shorty, bowing.

Twenty minutes later, as the sheriff tramped the railroad platform, watch in hand, he cussed himself for giving in to his deputy's pleas. Here it was time for the nine fifteen, and Shorty, who had rushed home to pack a grip, had not shown up.

"Blamed galoot!" said the sheriff hotly, "reckon he'll be late an' miss the train. That's just like him. He's a funny combination o' ambition, laziness, nerve an' nobody home in the attic. I told him perticular——"

There was a shrill whistle up the track and the rushing smoke of the passenger train could be seen.

Sheriff Cook looked down the road toward town—no Shorty in sight. The sheriff flung his cigar away.

The train drew in. The sheriff knew it waited five minutes. Perhaps Shorty would make it yet. The sheriff, consulting his watch every few seconds, kept an eagle eye on the road—but no Shorty. It was too late to send after him, he knew, and the train couldn't be held. His deputy was going to miss the train sure as shooting!

Desperately Sheriff Cook poked through his pockets for another cigar. He found it. He fumbled for matches and didn't find them. He glared around the platform. A tall, bewhiskered old rancher was lounging near by, evidently waiting to board the train. The sheriff wheeled on him just as the engine whistled—it was too late for Shorty to make the grade now!

"Gotta match?" muttered Sheriff Cook, choking with ill-concealed rage, "I gotta have a light."

The rancher produced a box of matches, and his hand shook violently as he handed them to Sheriff Cook, who noticed the stranger's great nervousness.

"Goin' out on the train?" asked the sheriff.

The stranger didn't answer. Instead his whiskers began to shake, then his shoulders, finally his whole body. The man quivered as though he were in a convulsion, and the sheriff stepped back a step in alarm.

"Yuh sick, mister?"

There was a long shriek of the locomotive's whistle before the stranger could reply. Then the train began to move. The rancher sprang for a coach and made it, then swung around and waved at the sheriff.

"It's me!" cried a familiar voice, "it's me—Shorty—in disguise. I ain't sick; I'm laffin'!"

The train was gone!

In Alamosa, some five hours later, Shorty was still chuckling to himself as he remembered the look of mingled surprise and rage that had flashed across the sheriff's face as the deputy had spoken to him! In fact, Shorty had choked and giggled and shook in laughter during the whole trip. The brakeman and the conductor had both noticed it and decided that Shorty, whom they did not recognize, was crazy. They were relieved when he picked up his little black grip as Alamosa was announced and alighted at that town. The conductor, however, got off and pointed Shorty out to the Alamosa town marshal, who always met the trains.

"See that ol' bird with the billy-goat whiskers?" asked the conductor, pointing at Shorty. "Waal, marshal, yuh keep an eye on him. He's plumb loco is my guess; got on the train at Monte Vista an' I seen the sheriff up thar lookin' him over close just afore we pulled out."

The marshal's eyes popped.

The eyes of two strangers, who lurked near by, and who had heard the

conductor's remarks, also popped—but discreetly. As Shorty shouldered through the crowd on the platform the strangers nudged each other and followed him. Shorty didn't glance back once. He plowed right up the main street and entered the Grand View Hotel as though he owned it.

"Well," said the tall stranger, "he's our meat. Him bein' a stranger here will make things all the better!"

"We'll wait here," said the other man, "and brace him when he comes out—ef he comes out soon enough!"

Shorty, meanwhile, was examining the Grand View register with deep concern. The clerk asked him if he cared to register, but Shorty ignored the suggestion. Presently—apparently satisfied—Shorty looked around the lobby until he saw a batch of grips on the floor, evidently belonging to guests about to depart on the next train for Salida. Shorty added his grip to the group. He crossed the lobby and looked into the dining room, but ducked back immediately.

Then, whistling softly to himself, Shorty returned and reached for his grip, where he had left it with the others. Now he hesitated. He was not quite sure, it seemed, which was his bag. Eventually, after pawing them all over, and squinting at initials on some of them he chose one and departed with it. The clerk watched him go with keen regret. The regret vanished a few minutes later when the town marshal, dropping in, announced that a crazy man was in town. When the marshal began to describe the fellow the clerk interrupted with a hoarse cry.

"He was in here not ten minutes back! I knowed he was looney the way he acted! Reckon he's a dangerous feller!"

Meanwhile, on the street, Shorty had been accosted by the two strangers who had followed him from the depot. They watched him come from the hotel, and they overhauled him in rapid strides. One passed to either side of him.

"Stranger here?" asked the tall man, and Shorty stopped.

"Yep," said Shorty suspiciously, "an' who are yuh?"

The tall man pulled back his coat to disclose a scintillating badge on his vest. The other man did the same.

"Detectives!"—whispered the tall man. "We want yuh to help us, brother; yuh look honest!"

"I am!" said Shorty, but his knees shook. He was in for it, he figured. Detectives! They must have seen he was in disguise! Well, there was nothing to do now but see it through.

"What do yuh want me to do?" faltered Shorty.

"Yuh look purty smart fer a hayseed," said the tall detective, patting Shorty on the shoulder. "That's why we picked yuh out, brother, an' further, yuh're a stranger. Now can we trust yuh to help us?"

Shorty, stealing a glance at the unmistakable bulge on the stranger's hip, nodded.

"Yuh sure kin, mister!"

"All right," said the tall man, talking rapidly, "here's the dope, brother. We're here after a feller—a blamed crook—an' we wanta take him quietly, without fuss, fer we think the town marshal here is shady, too. See? Waal, here's what we want yuh to do. We'll point out the feller we're after, an' we want yuh to pass him on the street an' speak to him."

"Speak to him?"

"Yes, speak to him, and that'll give us an excuse to grab him. We'll be right behind yuh. All yuh gotta do is to speak to him and pass on. We'll go up an' flash our badges on him and put him under arrest—see?"

Shorty was perplexed.

"An' what'll I say to him?" he asked.

The two detectives laughed.

"Anything," said the taller of the pair, "but mebbe yuh better just say 'Hello thar—pard!' as yuh pass him."

Shorty nodded understandingly.

"All right. Whar is he?"

"In the hotel," said the officers, "but he'll be hotfootin' it down here purty pronto to catch that Salida train. We'll wait for him here—in this doorway."

Shorty, at the strangers' suggestion, stepped into the doorway. Then the taller of the pair noticed his grip.

"That grip don't look right," he said. "Hardly be right fer yuh to be airin' the fact that yuh're a stranger here when yuh speak to our man. He might not speak back, and that's what we want him to do. All depends on that, brother. Say, I'll take yuhr grip an' check it fer yuh at the station. Yuh kin git it after we pull our stunt, how's that?"

Shorty hesitated.

"Waal," he said, finally, "ef yuh gents will excuse me while I git out a clean hankerchief——"

"Sure, hop to it!"

Shorty, turning his back on the pair, opened his bag and then snapped it shut quickly. He pulled a handkerchief out of one pocket, surreptitiously, and then put it back again with such a flourish that the strangers could not fail to see it.

"All right," he said, "yuh kin check the grip!"

The short man took the grip and went briskly down the street while Shorty held his breath in dismay. What if that grip was lost! But the short man was back in a few minutes and handed Shorty the claim check for the grip.

"Yuh kin git it after yuh help us," he explained.

"Our man will be due in ten minutes!" said the tall man, consulting his watch. "Now, brother, yuh know what to do? When we see him come outta the hotel yuh start walkin' toward him, an' when yuh git close to him, slow up an' just say 'Hello thar—pard!' Then pass on. We'll be right behind yuh. When he speaks to yuh, we grab him an' hustle him off. Yuh better keep right on goin' an' don't look around! We'll attend to him. He might shoot, yuh know—so yuh don't stop. Yuh go an' git yuhr grip, see?"

Shorty nodded. It was all beyond him. Still he had no choice. He was on the verge, once or twice, of confiding the fact to the detectives that he, too, was an officer, but somehow he couldn't get the courage.

"Now!" said the short man suddenly, pointing.

"Yes!" cried the tall man, "that's him—thar he comes with a bag in his hand. Git goin', brother!"

Shorty, however, his eyes bulging, stood rooted in the doorway until the strangers gave him a shove. Then he started. He walked briskly toward the man who was coming down the street with the grip. Shorty's heart almost stopped beating, but he got a hold on himself and threw back his shoulders. He could hear the two strangers right at his heels.

"Remember!" he heard one of them hiss at him.

Shorty tugged at the collar that seemed to be choking him. He staggered a bit, but went on.

Now the man with the grip—the crook—was but a few paces ahead. Shorty took his courage in his hands.

"Hello thar, pard!" Shorty sang out.

"Why—hello—hello yuhrself!" said the man, hesitating and peering hard at Shorty, who kept on going.

In a twinkling, the two men who had followed Shorty up the street, jumped for the man with the bag. They grabbed him by the arms. He endeavored to jerk away, and they threw back their coats, displaying their badges.

"We want yuh!" Shorty heard the tall man say. "We're officers! We want to know who yuh are—and why yuh just spoke to that criminal yuh just passed?"

Shorty, almost believing his ears had deceived him, stepped nimbly to one side and vanished into a doorway, where he crouched, hardly daring to breathe. The officers had said he was a criminal! Then they must have seen through his disguise. Still——

"I'm no criminal!" the man Shorty had spoken to, under orders, was protesting, "I'm a bank cashier; that's who I am! And I swear I didn't know that fellow. He spoke to me—yes—but I didn't——"

"He called yuh 'pard'!" cried the tall detective, "an' yuh answered him! He's a desperate crook we've been trailin'—an' we want to know ef yuh're another one?"

In vain the man with the grip protested his innocence; in vain he tugged and struggled.

"We'll take yuh up to our headquarters an' find out who yuh are," said the tall detective. Shorty was straining his ears to get the gist of the conversation. "Here, put out yuhr hands—straight out—an' drap that bag!"

The astonished stranger dropped the bag. The short detective grabbed it up, while the tall officer snapped a pair of handcuffs on the man's wrists.

"C'mon with us, bo!"

Shorty, peering around the doorway, saw the two detectives marching their captive diagonally across the street. He watched them gain the other side and disappear up a rooming house stairway. It was dusk, and the struggle on the street had not been noticed. Shorty, throwing his shoulders back, and breathing free for the first time in an hour, stepped out from his hiding place

"Hey, yuh!" cried a voice.

Shorty turned, to behold the town marshal walking toward him. As Shorty halted the marshal stopped, too.

"I just wanted to tell yuh," said the marshal, in a quivering voice, "that yuh better leave town purty sudden. We ain't used to nuts here in Alamosa."

Shorty grunted savagely, then dashed across the street, and vanished up the rooming house stairway, leaving the marshal gasping in astonishment. At the head of the stairs Shorty hesitated, then pussyfooted it down the corridor, listening. There was a light through one transom and voices from within that room. Shorty halted when he recognized the whine of the man the two detectives had nabbed a few minutes before on the street.

"I tell yuh I'm Grant Loren, cashier o' the Front Range bank at Monte Vista!" the man was crying. "That's who I am, and I swear it to yuh! I don't see why yuh handcuff me. I'm no robber, or gunman."

Shorty heard the taller of the detectives speak.

"But yuh acknowledged the greeting of that crook who spoke to yuh on the street," he said, suavely, "an' do yuh think we don't know who he was? That was Bill Means, the rustler! Yes, that's who—an' birds of a feather flock together. What yuh got in that grip, mister?"

"About eight thousand in cash," he sputtered, "an' I ain't no rustler! I didn't know that feller with the whiskers at all."

Shorty, his ear glued to the door, had not heard the stealthy footfalls behind him. He jumped a foot when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder and he swung around to stare the town marshal straight in the face. The marshal retreated.

"I tol' yuh," he said, shaking a finger at Shorty, "that yuh better leave town."

"Say!" whispered Shorty, beckoning to him. "How many detectives yuh got in this town, marshal?"

The marshal's face went a shade whiter.

"Yuhr sure plumb loco, mister!" he gasped out. "How many detectives? Why, we ain't got any!"

Shorty grinned broadly.

"Thought so!" he said, and the next minute he reached under his long duster and whipped out a six-gun. The marshal faded down the corridor, but Shorty paid him no heed. Instead he put his ear to the keyhole once more, and listened intently.

"How yuh open this grip, mister?" he heard the shorter of the two detectives ask. That was all Shorty waited for. He seized the door knob and threw his weight against the door, crashing into the room like a young cyclone.

"Hands up, yuh hombres!" he cried.

The two detectives instantly reached for the ceiling. They had been taken by surprise. Shorty, passing one swift hand over them, in turn, tossed two revolvers to the floor. Then he turned and gave the man with the handcuffs a look.

"Hello, Loren!" said Shorty. The bank cashier cringed in his chair and put up his manacled hands to ward Shorty off.

"I—I—dunno—yuh. I swear it!" cried the cashier.

"Blamed right yuh don't!" retorted Shorty and then he turned on his captives with a sneer.

"Back up agin the wall and keep yuhr hands reachin', yuh fake detectives!" he cried. "I reckon I got yuhr number! Detectives—bah! I noticed when yuh showed me yuhr badge, yuh tall buzzard, that it didn't say 'detective.' It said 'water inspector.' I only got a glimpse, but my eyes are good."

"Yuh—yuh—rustler!" stuttered the tall man.

"Rustler, bah!" said Shorty, "I'm on to yuh fellers, but yuh fellers ain't on to me. I been studyin' up on detective work, I have, an' I know yuhr game. Yuh got me to speak to this cashier here, so yuh'd have an excuse to grab him an' hustle him off the street to a room, whar yuh meant to rob him. Ain't that it? Waal, it sure is! It ain't such a bad trick, at that, but th' bird yuh picked fer a dupe was the wrong guy, gents. It was me!"

The detectives sputtered.

"Yuh said the marshal o' this town was crooked," went on Shorty, "and—"

"They did, eh?"

The marshal, who had crept back down the corridor, bounced into the room, but Shorty ignored him.

"Waal," said the tall stranger, "I guess the jig is up. Yuh got us; mebbe we did mind to rob this cashier, but we hain't done it yit, so yuh ain't got anything on us. We recognized him as the Monte Vista cashier when he came in town this mawnin' an' reckoned he had dough in that bag."

"Yep," said Shorty, "that's Grant Loren!"

The bank cashier was still too puzzled to make things all out. He glared at Shorty.

"I don't know yuh!" he cried.

Shorty chuckled.

"Of course yuh don't," he agreed readily.

Then he snatched at his false whiskers and his wig; both came away in one hand, "but now yuh oughter. I'm Shorty McKay, deputy sheriff o' Monte Vista, Mister Loren!"

"Awk!" gurgled the cashier, sinking back in the chair.

"An' while I'm arrestin' yuh two fake detectives fer attempted robbery," said Shorty, turning to the two men along the wall, "I want to thank yuh both fer putting the handcuffs on Loren here. He was the man I was after! He blew out of Monte Vista early today, with about eight thousand dollars in bank funds in his bag. The bank officials hushed it up, an' I came after him, in disguise."

"Whew!" said the town marshal in admiration.

"And that grip," said Shorty, laughing again as he pointed to the black bag that the shorter of the two bandits had been trying to open as Shorty had

busted into the room, "is really my grip. I switched grips in the hotel after I saw Loren in there. His grip had initials on it. I had it with me when yuh birds stopped me. When I excused myself to get a hankerchief out of it I was just peekin' inter it to see if the money was thar as I expected. It was. That confirmed the fact that Loren here was runnin' away with it. That grip, I believe, one o' yuh boys kindly checked fer me at the depot; isn't that right?"

The two pseudo detectives, now shown up as plain robbers, were too completely dumfounded to make any coherent reply; they just stood and stared.

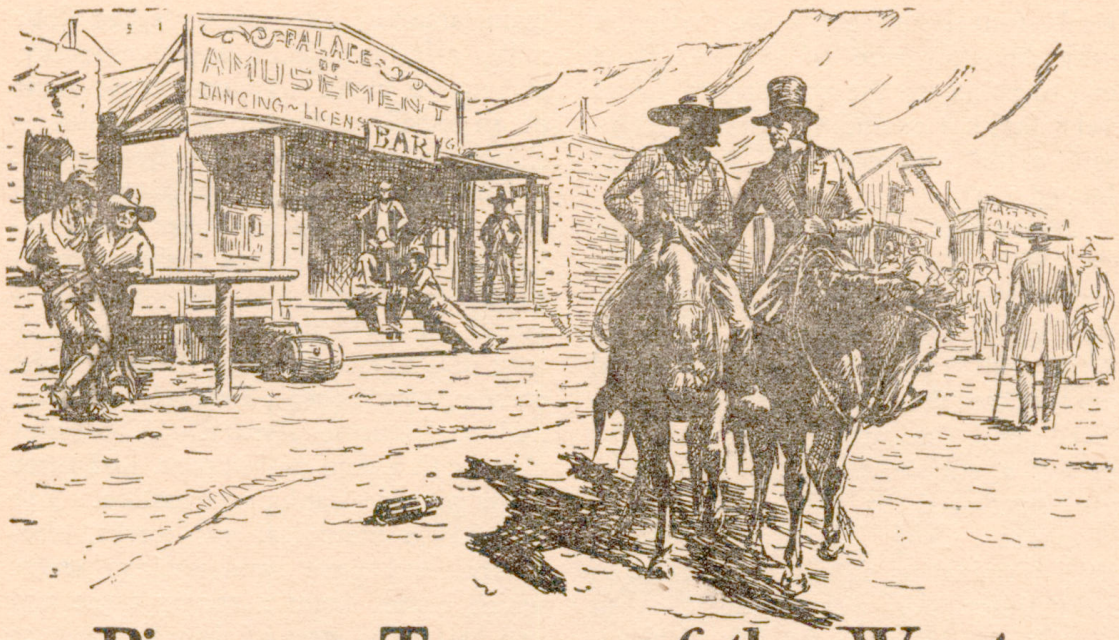
"An' that train conductor," gasped out the old town marshal, as Shorty slipped the bracelets on the two bandits, "said yuh was plain loco—an' here yuh git three birds with one stone. Ef anybody is loco, it's the conductor himself!"

## PASSING OF A WELL-KNOWN RANCH

RECENTLY the Nations Land & Cattle Co., formerly the largest and most noted ranch in Catron County, New Mexico, was sold and converted into a sheep range. Organized years ago in direct opposition to the sheep interests many cowboys and old-timers feel deep sorrow at the change. Its area was larger than some States, its employees numerous and politically powerful. Uncle Natt Kellogg, seventy-five-year-old cowboy and the only rider employed at the beginning who has never been off the pay roll, when told of the impending sale, remarked: "Have it stopped or I will have no home."

## OLD-TIME PROSPECTOR STILL AT IT

ONE of the best-known of the old-time prospectors of the North, J. D. Meenach, has taken two other men with him on a prospecting trip in the hills of Kinai Peninsula this summer. He had with him a six months' outfit, a mule, a horse, and a German police dog. Before setting out, he announced his intention of staying in the hills until the snow should drive him out. Mr. Meenach was formerly owner of the Ellamar Mine in the Prince William Sound country. Prior to that, he was in the Klondike and Fairbanks districts where he operated placer mines.




# Pioneer Towns of the West
## (Abilene) by Erle Wilson

*Author of "North Platte," etc.*

ONE of the most celebrated of the cattle towns of the early West was Abilene. The first settler to locate here was T. F. Hersey, who came to Kansas in 1857, and it was the wife of this lone pioneer who gave the future town its biblical name of "Abilene," which signifies "beautiful city of the plains." The original site of this border outpost was an eighty-acre tract of land, owned by Charles H. Thompson in 1862. It was situated in eastern Kansas, where the rolling uplands merge into the fertile valley of the Smoky Hill River.

For many years Abilene was the western terminus of the old stage line, later of the Kansas Pacific Railroad, now the Union Pacific. Tributary to this town on the border were western Kansas, Texas, and the Indian country. The tramp of the longhorn, the whir of the cowboy's lariat, and the bark of the six-shooter were familiar sounds.

Along about 1867, Joseph McCoy selected Abilene as the most available point for assembling cattle for shipment, as there was an abundance of grass and water in the neighborhood. Circulars were sent out widely, and soon the Texas cattle trade began to come here over the dusty old Chisholm Trail, some thirty-five thousand head arriving that first season. The drive grew annually until the cattle shipments in the latter part of the '60s often totaled one hundred and fifty thousand head.

Population also increased by leaps and bounds, mounting from a scant three hundred and fifty settlers in 1867 to around three thousand in 1871. Abilene became a typical border town of the West, the rendezvous of the cattle buyers from the East, the cattle drovers from Texas, and Mexican cowboys by the hundreds. Lawless men from Quebec to Santa Fe swarmed here. Saloons sprang up on every corner, and gambling dens stayed open

twenty-four hours every day, offering every known game of chance, from faro to poker, to the adventurer. And every day, not excluding Sunday, trainload after trainload of cattle was shipped east.

Abilene was incorporated in November, 1869. The next year Tom Smith, a well-known character in this section, was made town marshal. In 1871 "Wild Bill" Hickok, the most noted gun fighter that the West ever produced, and the surest shot that ever leveled a six-shooter at a desperado, was appointed to this office. Mad escapades, daily shooting matches, often terminating fatally, and crime of every description were rampant. But Hickok was equal to the job of cleaning up the town, and gradually order was brought out of chaos. A little later Wichita drew the cattle trade away from Abilene.

To-day this Kansas city on the north bank of the Smoky Hill River, about ninety-five miles from Topeka, the capital of the State, has a population of about six thousand people. The seat of Dickinson County, Abilene is in the midst of a rich grain-growing and dairying country. It is one of the great agricultural markets and livestock centers of the State, and has manufacturing interests including flour mills, alfalfa mills, a large creamery, and an ice plant. Abilene is the home of an excellent mineral water which is shipped widely throughout the country.

Abilene is also a city of good schools, attractive churches and delightful homes. It has eighteen miles of paved streets and forty miles of paved road, extending east on the Victory Highway. Located here are the county courthouse, Federal building, and a Carnegie library. A country club, with a fine golf course, and three parks provide outdoor recreation. The city has a municipal gas works, electricity, and pure sand springs water which comes from a spring three and one half miles west of the city. A free camp ground is also maintained here for the convenience of motorists. Transportation is well cared for by three railroad systems.

The commission form of government is in effect in this Kansas city, the present mayor being the Honorable Harry C. Litts. Among the older and prominent citizens of Abilene are J. B. Edwards, D. R. Gordon, J. B. Case, J. F. Forney, J. G. Landes, C. M. Harger, C. L. Brown, M. H. Malott, George Rogers, W. A. Chain, and R. M. White.

**In next week's issue Hays, Kansas, will be described.**

## TOURISTS USE LYNX AS WATCHDOG

MR. and Mrs. R. H. McNee, of Nyssa, Oregon, are enthusiastic travelers over the motor trails of the Northwestern States, and when they go on trips in their car, they are invariably accompanied by Bobby, their trained pet lynx. Bobby, they declare, is better than any watchdog. He has a kindly disposition, but when he is on guard over his master's car, no one dares approach it. Bobby is now four and a half years old and is said to be the only trained lynx in the world. His owners have him insured for five thousand dollars, which is more insurance than most human beings carry.

# Rangers of the Air

By H. Mortimer Batten

*Author of "Wild Mercy," etc.*

HIGH in the dazzling light, a thousand feet above the topmost peaks, the five crows were flying. To any earth-bound pilgrim in the valley, they would have appeared as the merest specks. Without the aid of glasses it would have been hard to judge their movements. Yet a few seconds of observation would have shown that there was some kind of system in their madness, for there, amidst unlimited space, they hung ever in the same area, rising, falling. wheeling, gliding, their harsh clamor floating down in the merest particles of sound.

Of the five, one could pick out the youngsters from their parents, by their strained and shuffling flight; it was evident that they were measuring their powers for the first time. Nor would they have remained where they were but for the old birds, who, circling just above, were calling and encouraging. When now and then a youngster staggered and cried, one or other of the adults would sweep down to inspire confidence.

There was an additional attraction, which kept the chicks away from themselves and held them up; each of the parents carried something in its bill, the one a stiff flight feather, the other a piece of stick about the same length. These articles they dropped at intervals. First, the feather would waft earthward, diving, spinning, changing its angle as a feather does. The young would flutter after it, trying to catch it in mid-air, calling loudly in the heat of rivalry as, time and again, they missed. Then, to show how easy it was, an old bird would dive headlong, dip below the clamoring chicks, and, catching the feather with a click, mount heavenward, the youngsters rising in pursuit. The stick was easier, for though it fell faster, it fell straight. When one of the chicks finally caught it, he was so hotly pursued by his brother and sister that he was glad enough to let go his unenviable prize.

When the sun dipped from view, though the heavens remained radiantly aglow, the young crows descended to their native tree, flapping and circling. Ninety or a hundred feet above, their parents still wheeled, and even when the last of the chicks had shuffled awkwardly into the home pine, the old birds remained aloft, searching evidently for a possible intruder. Then they closed their wings and lightly dropped.

For all the peace and glory of that sundown flight, these birds were real blacklegs; of this there was evidence enough the following morning—before, indeed, there was sufficient light to see objects clearly. A cold mist hissed across the mountain face, but it did not prevent the crow parents from seeing the mother ptarmigan squatting over her chicks with wings half spread. The crows were ranging the country after the systematic manner of their kind, the old birds leading, while the chicks flew from rock to rock, guided by their call notes. Thus they were learning to hunt as they had learned to fly, when presently the father crow alighted on a boulder and uttered a dismal croak.

The ptarmigan crouched lower, deadly afraid but equally prepared; in the space of a few seconds the crows were all round her on the rocks. Knowing now that she was discovered, she uttered a desperate, rattlelike croak, and started to run toward the nearest snow drift, sweeping her young along before her outstretched wings.

In an instant the crows were there, buffeting her with their wiry pinions, striking viciously with their sable beaks. The young crows alighted in the heather, bristling and shaking their wings, their mouths wide open, but taking no actual part in the encounter save that they completed the ring. While one crow held the ptarmigan's attention, the other aimed at slaying the chicks with lightning thrusts of its beak. There, among the dripping rocks, in the cold, dim light of the cheerless dawn, was a little tragedy in the making.

Yet things did not pan out just as the robbers had intended, for there sounded overhead a strong burr of wings. A patched and camouflaged apparition came hurtling down to join the fray. The father ptarmigan was brave, and he knew how to use his feathered, owllike feet. He was quick as a weasel; bristling with fury, he caused just that diversion which enabled the ptarmigan chicks to slip under the snow drift, the edges of which were eaten away by the action of trickling water. They were safe, and another burr of wings bore off their parents, like the wraiths of the mist they were.

Ten minutes later, the family of crows might have been seen, feeding on the carcass of a prairie hare, in the clear atmosphere at the creek edge a thousand feet below—a hare who had hit hard times. When they had finished, nothing was left of that hare save the skin, deeply trodden into the mire.

Though there had been plenty of rain in the plains and sleet in the hills, that spring was remarkable for its absence of wind. A day or two later a tearing nor'wester swept the range as though to make up for lost time. It was a living, palpable thing, that gale, and on the same day the crows were seen for the first time in the valley bottom. Hitherto, they had ranged little lower than their home pine, which stood at top-timber level.

On the morning of the gale a squatter, about the only human soul who used that trail, came round a corner on his pony to find three crows in the center of the way, clearly in a great state of agitation. Almost immediately he realized what was amiss, for the crow between the other two was obviously a youngster. Its parents were on either side, debating eagerly, for the young crow, who had been swept into the sheltered hollow, sat all hunched up, evidently determined not to lose the hold on *terra firma* he had at last obtained.

At the man's approach, the parents rose desperately cawing, fighting the wind. So close did they fly that the man was half afraid they would attack him. The chick, however, did not stir till he actually stretched out his hand to lift it, whereupon it rose with a frightened croak, to be caught by the gale and borne off like a rag. Next moment, it

crashed headlong into the wire fence, falling to earth, a crumpled mass of feathers.

That indeed was an anxious day for the parent crows. It was as though Dame Nature had sent that gale to scatter wide the fledglings of the year. Another of their two remaining chicks was swept clean away, how and where they never knew. Doubtless, the wind caught her when they were busy elsewhere; perhaps she was swept into the great lakes. The cowboy in the next valley, who saw a falcon descend from the crags and knock down a young crow, simply because it was helpless in the wind, might have enlightened the parents. The falcon did not want the crow, of course, but there is no love lost between the feathered hunters of the air.

As for Cornix, the third young crow —who had caught the stick in mid-air, and who now had proved himself the fittest—he was safe that day in the heart of the second-growth spruce by the trail. There, among the goldenrod, he had sense to remain till the gale had blown itself out.

Cornix and his parents lived and hunted together through that summer, as the whole family would have done had they remained united. This respect, and many others, they had in common with the ravens, their near relatives who shared their environment. But the bonds between the crows and the ravens was an antagonistic one.

Often Cornix and his parents fed at dawn or dusk on some stranded hulk along with the raven family, seven strong, born on the same slope. At these gatherings the crows and the ravens seemed to be on the friendliest terms, their soft croaks, as they exchanged observations, reminding one of the voices of Southern negroes idly conversing in the grass. One morning Cornix went alone to the feast, and, though the ravens came with their usual profession of friendship, one of them tried to stab him in the back. He had to flee in peril of his life. Similarly he and his parents set about a young raven whom they found bathing in a crystal stream, and they gave him a hammering he was not likely to forget for many a long week.

When the winds of autumn began to blow, a strange restlessness fell upon the crows. With the cold bustle of November days, Cornix and his parents were wont to rise cawing. Sometimes, soaring in the uppermost, they played the game with which this record opened. True that Cornix never learned to master the gale and to mold it to his will as did the eagles, the buzzards, and the great black-backed gulls. He was always clumsy in a wind, but now that the home pine had lost its ties, the three of them, with the spirit of exploration upon them, were wont to circle down the gale, steadily eastward, over hill and valley and prairie and lake, alighting to feed where the waterfowl were feeding. Sometimes they soared heavenward in the stillness of evening with those vast armies of feathered folk, which ever grew on the southward trails as winter came on.

Food did not trouble them, for the crows could eat almost anything—insects, vegetable matter, carrion. They could live as the small birds lived about the grain elevators, as the prairie chickens lived, as the gulls lived, and they could snatch a fragment of floating food from the bosom of the racing surf as adroitly as the swiftest gull. They learned, moreover, what the gulls already knew—that where the plover flocks had gathered, there was insect fare. If one watched the plovers, they were easy to rob by dint of swift wing beat and dagger thrust. So, traveling eastward with the prevailing wind, the day came when the crows could travel no farther, unless they crossed the sky on earth—which is the sea.

To Cornix it was strange, but evi-

dently his parents knew the place, for they alighted at once upon the shore, which was littered with boulders and draped with weed. Here there were many other crows, and all of them seemed to know the business well. The tide was running out, and the crows were moving abreast of it—scores and scores of sable-billed ruffians, extending all along the sands, keeping pace with the receding tide. They hunted among the weeds, glancing into the pools, stabbing here at a stranded starfish, snatching up a shrimp or a prawn, or anon gathering in a noisy scramble for some stranded delicacy of greater bulk than the finder could conceal. Cornix, being adaptable, fell in line. Before the tide was fully out, he flew back with his parents, gorged and satisfied, to preen his feathers on a high-tide bank along with a company of dapper oyster catchers.

As dusk gathered, what was perhaps the most mysterious chapter of the crows' lives turned its opening page, for, along with his parents and many of his kind, Cornix wheeled and circled over a narrow cañon which cut the sea cliffs clean asunder at their highest point. It was a closed-in, desolate little cutting, which only the sunlight of dawn could gain—a valley of stunted, twisted pines, cowering low with knotted grasp. It was a valley of dead and dying trees, stark and dim and cheerless, through the depths of which a white torrent thundered, while the rocky slopes rose sharply to the heights above.

Over this washout—truly a washout—the crows hung that night, an inconceivable company of them, circling and crisscrossing. This was the first great gathering of the clans. Solitary at all other times, they had now united. Not till the sun was gone, leaving the coast in purple shade, did the crow army descend, led by their veteran leader. They settled in the stark and twisted trees—a single clump of trees deep down in the cañon gloom—and there, fluttering their wings and extending their necks, they croaked and clamored and carried on what might have been an unholy ritual.

The oldest settler along that stretch of coast would have told you that on a certain day in November the crows gather thus. There, night after night, that fringe of trees is grotesquely crowded with their monklike forms. At sunrise they are gone, each family to its individual hunting, but each dusk through the winter they return to hold their strange meetings, perhaps to decide those things by which the crows, cursed above other vermin birds with the blast of shot and powder, are yet enabled to keep their hold on life.

At these gatherings Cornix had little to say. Like other youngsters of that season, he preferred to be apart. Only when another crow alighted alongside him and challenged him, did he open his capacious beak and croak his sepulchral contribution.

Thus daily Cornix and his parents scoured the shore following the tide. When hunger held the hills, the sea brought its daily bounty, and of the bitter pinch of winter the crows knew nothing. Once, to be sure, Cornix all but lost his life. He found a monster shellfish lying open, and he aimed a dagger thrust to snatch out its heart. The shellfish was in the act of closing when the blow fell, and the viselike grip locked on the young crow's murderous bill. Cornix would have remained a prisoner till the rising tide claimed him, as it has claimed so many long shore feeders, but luckily for him the shellfish was insecurely anchored, and he managed to drag it up and to hammer it to bits on the rocks.

That winter was one of hunger and hardship in the hills. Even the ravens paid with their lives the price of famine. But the crows lived in plenty by the endless bounty of the sea.

One bright and sunny day early in February, Cornix and his parents were busy harrying three or four small trout up and down the tiny unfrozen pool in which the fates had stranded them. Suddenly his father set upon him, much as he and his parents set upon the young raven. I do not think his parents would have killed him, but at any rate, Cornix was glad enough to quit the place. When at dusk he got back to the washout where they had rested all winter, he found only a smattering of the original company gathered there—the young birds of last season. Like himself, all seemed a trifle ruffled and ill at ease, for all of them that day, or during the gleams of sunshine of the preceding days, had lost parents, to whom the call of spring had come.

For Cornix another phase of life opened. He became a pack hunter in the true sense—that is, he threw in his lot with any company he came across. As spring advanced, the straggling bands of youngsters passed inland again. Cornix did not mate, though truly he had many a lively struggle with some gay young bachelor like himself, when a lady hove in view. One might have seen this heedless gathering of crows scouring the shores of a forest-marooned lake, the next day basking on the mud flats with the swarms of black-headed gulls, who at this season were also thronging inland.

Again, a lumberman saw them gather —fifty crows if one—in the dusk of evening about the branches of a mighty pine which that day the camp had felled. It seemed that the crows were holding an indignation meeting on man's vandalism. When the lumberman found in the topmost branches of the pine the old nest of a crow, and was told by a ranger that for many years a family had been reared there, he thought he understood. He knew that the crows are mysterious birds.

As food became more plentiful, the band of youngsters split up. By the end of May, Cornix was a solitary crow, who looked to his fellows for nothing, and met them as strangers or as deadly rivals. So he lived his life till November came again, and with the falling of the leaves and the ghost dance of the prairie grasses he turned eastward to the sea.

It was, of course, to the same place, with its twisted trees and its thunder of white waters, that Cornix returned. There, as the dusk fell, the mighty gathering of the clans again took place, but Cornix no longer remained in the background. Instead, he was a leading light on a topmost branch. Understanding had come to him, for he was among the first to take his place beside one of his choice. Thereafter daily he and she flew in double harness. Of love making there was none. They simply linked arms, as it were, and through the chill blasts and the storms and the thunder of the wintry sea, Cornix and his mate lived and ate and had their beings always within a few feet of one another. So other young crows met and married in the first days of winter, and, be it understood, they married for life, unless some misfortune came to sever them.

One night a very old crow came in to join the company. She was alone, and she had lost one eye, evidently through a desperate encounter of some kind; she was wet, wretched looking, and clearly suffering. She alighted on a branch a little apart from the rest as though she preferred to be alone—alone for the first time in all her winters. Nature is often merciful in her most inexorable moods. Was it by an act of mercy that Cornix and his fellows rose and beat the old crow to the ground, leaving her there with wings outspread? She had served her useful part, and could aid her kind no longer. Did Cornix know that it was his own mother at whose funeral he had figured—if not

as chief mourner, at any rate as chief pallbearer? That much I am inclined to doubt.

Till spring came, Cornix and his mate lived in cool and indifferent partnership. When, one February day, hunting the pools together, the sun shone out with a warming glow, Cornix rose and stabbed viciously at the young gentleman who was fishing the pool with them—as a year ago, indeed, his own father had stabbed at him. Then, in the slanting rays of the sunbeams, one might have witnessed, there on the glistening sands, what is one of the most ungainly but at the same time one of the most graceful love dances in all wild bird life—the love dance of the crow, resplendent in the simple harmony of his purple summer dress.

A few days later, two crows—they might have been the same two who for the past twenty years had nested there—set to work to renovate the old aerie in the pine far inland, high above. It was here, two years ago, that the parent crows, who now were gone, had taught their young to fly.

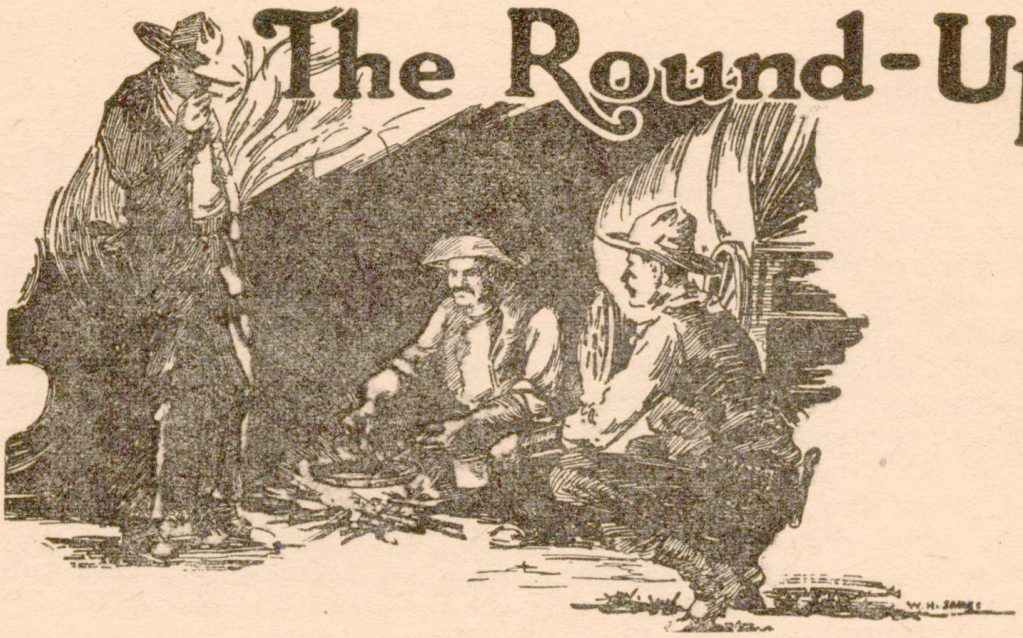
## MAY ADD LARGE TRACT TO YELLOWSTONE

THE addition of a tract comprising some two hundred thousand acres to the Yellowstone National Park is at present under advisement. The suggested addition is a part of the Teton National Forest, and, according to R. H. Rutledge, of the United States forest service, who went over the ground with the president's committee that visited the region in question, no wide roads would be built, but trails would be improved and the district would be a pack-horse resort. Another part of the Teton Forest containing five lakes may also be added to the Yellowstone.

## MISSING TRAPPERS FOUND DEAD

MEMBERS of the provincial police of British Columbia recently reported the finding of the bodies of two trappers, Peter Ackerman and George Williams, in a cabin in the wilds of the northern part of that province. The two men had evidently been overcome by sickness. They had been missing for more than a year. A note left by Williams for a son in Edmonton gave directions for finding a fur cache valued at two thousand dollars. All around the bodies, prowling wild animals had scattered furs. A note evidently left by the dead men said: "The roof leaks."

# The Round-Up



FOLKS, here is a feller as sure needs helpin' out. He's too bashful to give his name. Who can give him the info he's hankerin' for? Ask 'em, Al:

"FOLKS AND BOSS: Could you tell me where I could send for cowboy overalls without the bib and with copper rivet pockets? I think they are E. Straus overalls. They don't have to be the same make, just so they are the cowboy styles. I used to be out in Montana on a ranch and got used to them. I suppose they come from California or some of those Western States. Could you let me know through the WESTERN STORY, care of the Round-up or Hollow Tree? Hope some of you good people will speak up here in the Round-up very soon. Al."

This is what happened to Jack Clary, Greely, Colorado, because, so he contends, he didn't treat 'em rough. Wonder what would have happened, Jack, if you had?

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I see by the papers, some time ago, that a society for prevention of cruelty to animals is after the cowboys for roughin' it up with horses and steers. I wonder how many of those folks in that society have met a horse face to face and know what one is. I used to have the same idea—treat them nice—until I met Deck.

"Deck's mother got killed when he was an infant, and we raised him on a bottle. He was a cute colt, all legs, as colts are—and extra smart. We treated him as one of the family and finally had to break him to work, and then the fun began. He was used to doing as he pleased and loafing. He reminded me of a spoiled child. Say, there wasn't anything mean that that fool horse didn't try, and after we had worked him a day he up and walks through the gate and up on the back porch and broke it through. You would have thought that he was human to have seen him lay his head on my sis's shoulder after that first day's work. And now, mister, I'll give you that horse if you can do anything with him—he'll kick you out of the barn. I've hung logs behind him to try and break him, but it don't do any good. Mean? Say, I'll never raise another by hand. You'd think he had been eating loco weed all winter.

"Then I met Buck. He was a good cutting horse, a buckskin, and you couldn't ask for any faster little worker. He seemed too good to be true, and I was treatin' him real nice, and then one day he decided he wanted to go one way and I wanted to go the other, and after my saddle girth busted he went his way, and I carried that saddle four miles on my back. Well, after that we got along all O. K., me a-tryin' my best to be nice to that Buck, till one day we argued again about the same thing, and, boy, we' sure put on a show. We'd brought a bunch of doggies down to the cattle shute and we was right by a three-wire fence and that dog-gone buckskin put me right through the two top wires, and me a-pullin' leather, too. Now I ain't no Cheyenne rider, but I don't need my feet tied together under 'em neither, and after we caught him I had to climb him again and have it out. Well, it was good until he started walkin' on his hind feet and tryin' to fall on me, and after he'd tried it a few times I began to lose my friendly feelin' for that fool that was tryin' his best to kill me, and I got that old loaded quirt untied off my saddle horn—where I'd left it too long—and as he reared up I hit him a lick between the ears, and he lit on his chin and from then on he was my horse. We'd sure had some parties, me and that animal.

"Maybe I just had bad luck pickin' horses that couldn't be treated gentle-like. Now Bollie, he was a Western horse like the others, and I used to take a tug off of the harness and wallop some sense into him once a week. Then I got this crazy idea about treatin' 'em gentle, and I let him get away with puttin' his tail over the line and startin' to run once or twice, and what does he do but run off with my mother and break her leg. I went back to usin' the tug. About ten years after I had quit foolin' with horses, I got the yellow jaundice and my liver was on the blink. A friend of mine, a doctor, told me to get a-straddle a horse for a month and I'd never have any more trouble. I went out and bought me a white Western horse from some Wyoming boy that was drivin' cattle through. He was sure a pretty horse; all white and pink, and had his brands and counter brands pretty well hidden. Well, to make a long story short, I found that my liver got all O. K. I don't know what the doctor's bill was. I remember getting on and setting down and sayin' to the boys, 'He ain't goin' to do nothin."

"That was at four p. m. About midnight Doc Miller brought me out of it by askin' me how I felt.

"Well, I rode him for about a week, though I had a thirty-foot rope on him to catch him by. Somebody had spoiled him by ropin' with the rope tied to the saddle, and I never did get him broke to me ropin' any, but I stayed on him, and his stiff-legged runnin' cured my liver.

"As for bein' cruel to steers—anybody that's been around 'em any knows they ain't got no sense at all, and how in the world can anything that don't savvy understand bein' treated gentle? I tried bein' gentle to a bunch of Texas longhorns, and after I looked at the boards they broke gettin' out of the corral to chase me, I said I'd never go near one again without a horse under me. You know, if you ever tried to run in high-heeled boots, that they are the reason a cow-puncher rides all the time—the darn things are no good to walk in. Some of you 'society of cruelty' people come out and try out some of your ideas and you'll be passin' a law agin' horses and steers hurtin' people next."


**Miss Helen Rivers, 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 Rivers 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.**

SO many requests have come in of late for information about the forest service, that this letter, which has just been dropped in the Hollow by a ranger, seems to fill a long-felt need. Read it carefully, all you would-be rangers, as it tells not only the duties incident to the service, but how one should prepare for an appointment as ranger.

DEAR GANG: I am employed in the U. S. Forest Service as a guard or ranger, on the Malheur National Forest, which is located in the Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon.

The primary duties of a forest ranger are, of course, the caring for and protecting our national forests. His work may include the counting of sheep or cattle which are grazed in the national forests, the appraising, marking, and scaling of timber, the planting of fish fry in local streams, the making of surveys of forest boundaries, construction or supervising the construction of telephone lines and trails, and assisting in enforcing the State game laws. But, in many places, the most important duty is fighting forest fires; this has become almost an art in itself.

The duties and encounters of a ranger require a strong, healthy body able to cope with the elements of a wild, unsettled country. He must care for himself and his horse in remote parts of the country under all kinds of conditions.

It is advisable to work at trail construction, in logging camps, with reconnaissance parties, to operate a lookout, et cetera, two or more years before attempting to secure an appointment as ranger—the same being appointed through competitive civil-service examination.

A ranger lives in close touch with nature; it is quite possible to be many miles from a human being with the surrounding country just as it was many, many years ago. It is no place for a man who is looking for a few years' vacation or for light duties; the service usually provides work enough to keep one occupied.

The national forests were created to prevent our woodland from being ruthlessly destroyed and to insure a sufficient and perpetual supply of timber both to ourselves and posterity. These forests belong to the people, and they are encouraged to avail themselves of their resources. They have become Meccas for tourists and campers, also large game preserves.

A trip through a forest is an inspiration to any one; it fills one with higher ideals and forms in him a contempt for the baser things of life, which are more prevalent in overcrowded places. M. KLEMME.

Burns, Ore.

Greetings from a real Western girl.

HOWDY, GANGSTERS: I'm sitting here alone miles from the mart o' the world. In dreams I am carried miles away globe trotting to the home State of each of my pen pals.

I was born in the West, and have lived here most of my twenty-two years. I'm an old-timer in the Gang and enjoy every minute I spend with these delightful friends. Like "Alice of Wonderland," I stepped, not through a looking-glass, but a Hollow Tree, into a realm of friendship's wonderland.

Won't some of you Gangsters help me use up my few vacant lonesome hours? Young folks are few and far between out here, and I depend on my pen to widen my scope of acquaintances. Cowgirls, sisters in foreign lands, please write. I want to hear from more of State sisters, too (Washington) and I'll be right pleased if some Spanish señorita will add her letter to my share of the owl's mail.

Don't you catch the waft of pine, of cedar, of fir, as I toss aside my boots and fling myself down on the fragrant woodsy boughs? Overhead the copper stars wink down, peeping in at my little domain, winking in perpetual surprise that any one should linger in this lonely spot.

A GIRL FROM WASHINGTON.
Care of The Tree.

Take care of this shut-in, folks.

MISS RIVERS: I am writing these few lines, wondering if you would put them in The Hollow Tree. I have been crippled by rheumatism for six years. I am forty-one years old, and up till six years ago was quite a roamer and did my bit of knocking around the world.

I get lonely and would like to have some correspondents of about my age to help pass away some of the long winter days.

HAL DAVIS.
Men's Hospital, County Home, Columbus, Ohio.

DEAR GANGSTERS: I wonder if I could be admitted around the council fires in the sacred council lodge of the Indians? Although I am a white man, my nature and point of view are in harmony with the Indians.

I have ridden the range in Montana for three years. I was on Tongue River, the home of the northern Cheyennes. I know the West and love it. I love to watch the sunrise, and would rather see the sunset than the finest palace ever built. The howl of a coyote is music to my ears, and there is nothing more soothing to my soul than to hear the wind whispering through the pine trees.

What attracts me most to the Indians is the atmosphere of harmony that prevails in their camps. The Indian is religious, patient, trustworthy, brave, and true. I hope I hear from lots of them.

RUSTY, A FRIEND OF THE INDIAN.
Care of The Tree.


**Mrs. K. Tobie, 1825 Tenth Street, Rockford, Illinois:**

**"I certainly am pleased with my badge, and wear it everywhere I go."**

**Twenty-five cents in stamps or coin sent to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, will bring you either a button for your coat lapel or a pin. In ordering be sure to state which you wish.**

DEAR GANG: Please excuse my gallopin' up in this manner, but I've sot back here under cover eavesdroppin' on you folks till I'm plumb bursting with what I got to say. I'm a Montana homesteader's wife, an amatoor poetess, and just have to burst out once in a while. You've all had something to say about your States. Here's what I think of mine.

When it's spring in Montana, the warm chinnok blows and softly caresses the cold winter snows. The robin is singing, the bluebird is here; the woods with new life is teaming, in the spring of the year. When it's summer in Montana State, with July knocking at the door, you sniff the sweet-scented sagebrush—you can't worry—you're up and away with rod and line to fish for the day. Then comes August and haying time, and you put away pleasure to make a dime. But in Montana the best time of all is the red-and-yellow autumn—"hill billies" call it fall. Time for the round-up. How your heart thrills when you see the big herds drive down the hills! Then winter and nothing to do but cook and eat your beans or a wild-meat stew, or put on your skis when the snow is three feet or so; lots of fun—away you go. Sitting around my fire I calculate there's none to compare with my old State.

MRS. W. C. G. OF MONTANA.
Care of The Tree.

Another lonely cowboy.

DEAR GANG: I'm a cowboy away out here in the mountains of Nevada on the open range.

I haven't been down in this country long. I came from Idaho, was cow-punching up there. I am breaking and gathering wild horses off the range here, for this is more of a horse country than anything else, though there are several large cow ranches around here.

I have just got in from a three-week trip, trailing a band of horses; caught seventeen head.

Limber up your fingers, brothers. I'll gladly give information about Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, or old Mexico. I'm twenty-four and get very lonely. COWBOY CHARLIE.

Care of The Tree.

Leonard Duggan, a British soldier stationed far from home, says he's one of the loneliest people in the world, and wants to be "overflowed with letters." He promises interesting answers and views of places he has seen in his travels to those who respond to his appeal. His address is 1421355, First Pack Battery, R. A. Khartoum, Sudan.

After working mines and factories, Albert Symons, 122 West Ontario Street, Chicago, Illinois, is in poor health. He'd like to go West with his wife and child, and wonders if Gangsters can suggest a small town or village where the climate and working conditions are good.

"I want to find some one interested in Mexico, who wants to go down there, or some one who has been there and can tell me all about the possibilities and opportunities there," writes W. E. O., Box 116, Manassa, Colorado.

Edward J. Keys, 61 Boyd Street, San Francisco, California, would like to hear from Hollow Tree brothers who'd welcome a personal call from him on his way East; he is planning to motor there soon.

Eighteen, freshman in college, loves motoring, dancing, and outdoor sports —that's Just Bobbie, who wants to hear from sisters everywhere and will send snapshots as long as they last. I'll forward letters to her.

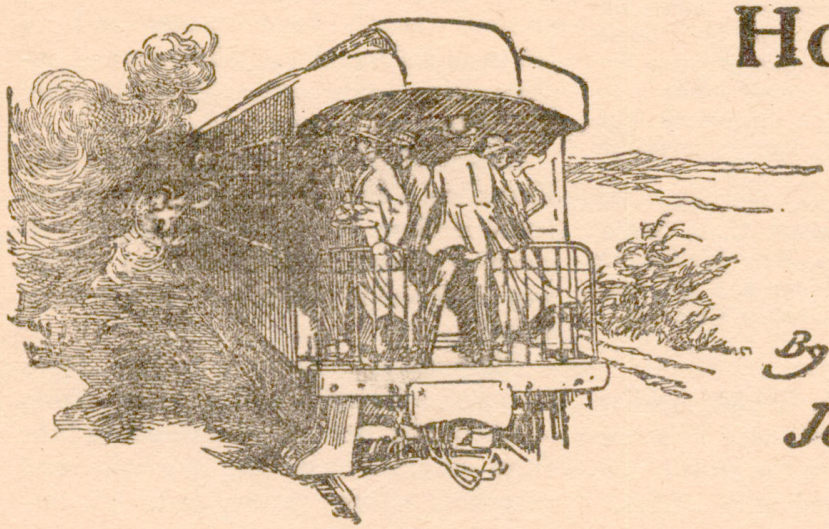
Mrs. Grace Patty, Chula Vista, California, asks for letter pals between thirty-five and fifty-five years of age. She has lived on a homestead in Colorado, and will answer questions about that State or about California.

Rosella Marriott, P. O. Box 263, Bassano, Alta., Canada, invites every sister in the Gang to write her and rashly promises to answer all. Don't fall down on that promise, Rosella, when they come pouring in.

## COLUMBIA RIVER PROJECT NOT FEASIBLE

A SPECIAL commission appointed to look into the proposed Columbia River basin reclamation project recently reported to Secretary of the Interior, Work, that the time had not yet arrived, in their opinion, when local and natural interests required its construction. The report of the commission points out that the cost of the project has been fixed at $193,260,000, which is $158 per acre, and that the bureau of reclamation is not possessed of the information needed to formulate a development plan as costly and complex as the one outlined for the Columbia River basin.

# 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.**

## OUR NATIONAL PARKS IN WINTER—WIND CAVE

THE Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota was established in order that the immense Wind Cave and the territory surrounding it should be preserved for the American people for all time. The cave itself is one of the natural curiosities of the world, and it is claimed that sufferers from asthma or hay fever find instant relief when they enter, due to the entire absence of vegetation here. Another opinion is that the cure is brought about by an unknown ingredient in the air of the cave. Whatever the cause may be, the fact remains that hundreds of victims of these troubles come here every year, to seek the relief afforded by a visit to Wind Cave.

This section of the Black Hills was famous for many years as the scene of Indian fights and frontier lawlessness. In our day it has gained renown through its wonderful scenic attractions, its forests, its game preserves, and its wonderful limestone cave, with its gorgeous decorations. The cave contains many passages and chambers, masses of quartz, calcite, and aragonite, stalactites, stalagmites, and other wonders that have taken thousands, perhaps millions, of years to acquire the forms that we now see.

The cave was given its name from the current of air that blows intermittently in and out of its mouth, and which is, at times, very swift, varying in speed and direction according to atmospheric conditions. This variability was regarded in former days as something mysterious and ominous, giving rise to many tales of superstition and of ghostly inhabitants who made their home in this uncanny cavern.

The walls and ceilings of the various passages and chambers are elaborately covered with traceries and carvings of the most surprising description. In places the ceilings and walls look as if they had been sprinkled with snow-white popcorn, while in other portions of the cave one could imagine that a crowd of boys had just pelted the walls with

snowballs. Then there is the wonderful frost work that is the chief beauty of the cave. In places it resembles the finest white cotton, and would deceive the sharpest eye at some little distance. Some of this, called Noah's Beard, is several feet long, and as white as snow. This hangs beyond the Pearly Gates, and when the calcium light is thrown on it, it flashes and sparkles like diamonds.

Wind Cave once served as channels for subterranean waters which now follow other courses. The water which made this cavern came from the surface through cracks which now are mostly covered by earth washed into them. Some are open, notably the one at the entrance and some others near by. Through these there is the remarkable circulation of air which has given the cave its name. The extent of the cave can only be guessed, as much of it has not been explored, and innumerable crevices and chambers are not accessible. Explorations are always in progress and the making of new trails seems unlimited.

This cave has the deposits made by the waters that created it, and the variety of formations is a continual source of delight, from the gossamer threads of the frostwork, which looks as though a breath would move them, to the deep-blue crystals luminous under the guide's lamp. The enormous chambers and intricate passages give surprises at every step. There is no sense of fatigue, as the cool atmosphere is bracing, and most persons can keep up with the guides all the way through without feeling tired at the end of the journey, which occupies from two to four hours.

Wind Cave is twelve miles north of Hot Springs, and was made a national park in 1903. The game preserve in the northwest corner of the park was established by Congress in 1912, in order to provide a suitable location for a herd of buffalo offered to the government by the American Bison Society. This preserve covers about four thousand, one hundred and sixty acres, sheltering not only buffalo, but also elk, mule, white-tailed deer, antelope, and other wild animals.

Wind Cave National Park is open all the year, although the regular tourist season is from June 1 to September 30. Many of those who come in the summer make a return visit during the winter months, and some of them declare that this is the most enjoyable season.

The representative of the National Park Service in charge of the park is the superintendent, Mr. Roy Brazell, whose address is Hot Springs, South Dakota, and who will be glad to give prospective visitors any information relative to the park.

### ABOUT THE APACHE NATIONAL FOREST

DEAR MR. NORTH: In your article on the Apache National Forest in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for October 31, 1925, I would like to add a few facts.

The Apache National Forest comprises mostly white pine. There have been sawmill operations in this forest for the past nine years, first by the Apache Lumber Company, until 1923, when it was taken over by the present operators, the W. M. Cady Lumber Company.

The site of this company is at McNary, Arizona—formerly Cooley—in the White Mountains, 7,280 feet above sea level, with a population of 2,500, with schools, banks, theater, church, and hospital. It is twenty-three miles north of White River, headquarters for the Apache Indian Reservation Agency, by auto mountain road. The climate is ideal, ranging around sixty-five degrees during the heated term. In winter there is much snow and also zero weather.

McNary is the largest town in Apache County, and is the jumping-off place for hunters and fishermen, being adjacent to all the streams in which trout are plentiful. On account of the Indian Reservation, the hunting of small game is restricted, but there is plenty of bear with open season all year, and tourists are welcome. J. W. COONEY.

McNary, Arizona, W. M. Cady Lumber Company.

# MISSING

This department is conducted in both 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 well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

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," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

---

**HALL, LYNN** or **ISABELLE.**—Write to your old friend Mickey, 6523 West Twenty-seventh Place, Berwyn, Illinois.

**McCART, MILTON E.**—Heard from in 1910 at Norborne, Missouri. Has dark hair and blue eyes. Please write to A. B. C., care of this magazine.

**HAHN, WALTER CHARLES.**—Last heard of in Miles City, Montana, in June, 1922. Twenty-three years old, scar across forearm. Mother has good news. Mrs. Lena Hahn, Box 352, Miles City, Montana.

**LUNDBERG, ANDRES JOHNSON.**—Mechanic, medium height, blue eyes, black hair, and limped slightly. Has three children, Lydia, Signa and John. Last heard of in Chicago thirty years ago. Please write A. M. W., 571 First Avenue, San Francisco, California.

**McCLURE, LEROY.**—About twenty-five years old, dark hair and eyes. Was a miner in California. Please write Mrs. E. H. Swisher, 609 Sixth Avenue West, Kalispell, Montana.

**CLEVE.**—I still love you. Write or come home. I am paying back the money. A. M. C.

**BRENNAN, PHILIP.**—Medium height, weight one hundred and seventy pounds, age thirty-eight. Last heard from at Radium, Colorado, in 1922. Address H. A. Brennan, R. F. D. 2, Barnum, Minnesota.

**MEMBERS.**—Of Battery B, Ninth Field Artillery, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, 1918-1919, and any of the boys from the Great Lakes in 1920, or the navy yard at Portsmouth, please write to J. A. Warren, Box 12329, Represa, California.

**RANDOLPH, CHARLES H.**—Last heard from in 1898 at Helena, Montana. Address your sister, Mrs. Cordelia Taylor Carey, 2546 Glenarm Place, Denver, Colorado.

**SHELNER, BESSIE E.**—Lived in Butler, Pennsylvania, nine years ago. Please write to your old friend, Cecil Adams, 17980 Waterford, Redford, Michigan.

**ANDERSON, Reverend JOSEPH.**—Of Waterbury, Connecticut, in 1865. His friends or relatives please write to M. Ray Sanborn, 189 Leete Street, West Haven, Connecticut.

**O'CONNOR, JOSEPH HENRY.**—Wanted before 1926 in order to receive benefit of father's will. Tall, sandy complexion, bushy eyebrows. Last heard of in Oregon. Address your sister, Gertie Moore, 252 Central Avenue, San Francisco, California.

**HOWARD, HARRY P.**—Please write to M. M. L., care of this magazine.

**JONES, GEORGIA.**—In Claremore, Oklahoma, about six years ago.

**HALE, AMY.**—In Bristow, Oklahoma, three years ago.

**McCARTHY, LLOYD.**—In East St. Louis three years ago. These people are asked to write to "Okoline," care of this magazine.

**STEWART, FOSTER.**—Left Canada in 1917 for America. He has fair hair and is about twenty-eight years old. Please write to your cousin, William Morgan, 74 Lawnbrook Avenue, Belfast, Ireland.

**WHEELER, MARY ELLEN.**—Twin of Michael Dillon. Was in West Virginia in 1915. Address Mrs. Mary Ellen Wheeler Jones, 1337 Fifteenth Street N. W., Washington, D. C.

**MARTIN, T. M.**—Baker by trade. Last heard from in Oklahoma. Please write to E. F. Martin, 1614 Brawns Avenue, Olympia, Washington.

**GREINER, NICK.**—Forty-nine years of age and bald. Lived in Kansas City last year. Address Charles L. Barnes, 533 Town Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

**SULLINS, JOE.**—Was a seaman aboard the U. S. S. "Oklahoma" in 1924. Please write to Dorothy Miller, R. R. 1, Buhl, Idaho.

**WOOLSEY, CECIL.**—Believed to be working in the oil fields near Corsicana or Mexia. Address Box 77, Wortham, Texas.

**LATTRIDGE, Mrs. ROBERT.**—Formerly of Montreal. Last heard of from Toronto in 1917. Has a child, Maxine, twelve years old. Write to "Campbell," care of Mrs. J. Mays, 114 King Street W., Kitchener, Canada.

**HARRISON, JOHN.**—Thirty years of age, medium height, dark hair and eyes. Was in Danville, Illinois, in July, 1925. Address Miss Florence Hull, Kinderhook, Illinois.

**CARPENTER, Mrs. ELIZABETH.**—Last seen in Watertown, South Dakota, in 1914. Please advise her husband, Bert Carpenter, 10 North Broad Street, Johnson City, New York, care of Mrs. Ethel Martinos.

**MINTIE, ALICE PODGETT.**—Blond, blue eyes, short, about twenty-six years old. Please write her old chum, Rodah M., care of this magazine.

**SCHLICHT, Mrs. JOSEPH.**—In New York City in 1900. Please notify William Schlicht, 846 West North Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland.

**BOY.**—Please come or write. All would be well with other party. No one blames you. Your own Vee.

**JOHN.**—Come home at once if you want to see your mother alive. Mrs. J. Dervin.

**SHEPPARD, JOHN, EDNA, ABRAHAM, RALPH, JOE, and EDDIE.**—In Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada, eleven years ago. Please write C. S., care of this magazine.

**MYERS, Mrs. J., nee MARGARET TWOOMEY.**—Formerly of Cardiff, England. Later heard of in Fort Sydney, Nebraska. Her brother, John J. Twoomey, of 276 Canning Street, N. Carlton, Victoria, Australia, would like to hear from her or her descendants.

**CARTER, FREDERICK H.**—About forty-five years old. Formerly of London, England. Last heard of in New York City. Please write to Marion C. Stiles, P. O. Box 176, Verdugo City, California.

**CALLAWAY, WALTER S.**—Twenty-three years of age. Left Idaho for Texas in 1914. Please write to your sister, Mrs. J. A. Young, Cedar City, Utah.

**STALLSWORTH, JOHNNIE.**—Last heard of in Oroville, California, in 1922. Medium height, one hundred and thirty-five pounds in weight, dark-brown hair, blue eyes, quiet disposition. Address his mother, Mrs. Irene Buster, care of W. N. Barton, Pratt, Kansas.

**O'BRIEN, JOHN.**—Please come home or write. Mother.

**TRACY, WILLIAM HOWARD.**—Last seen in Waterloo, Iowa, in April, 1925. Short, light, ruddy complexion. Important news. Address F., care of this magazine.

**Mr. ROBERT B. KING.**—A cow-puncher, age forty-one years, six feet tall, brown hair, gray eyes and scar on side of cheek. Write A. G. Siew, care of this magazine.

**GRIFFIN, HENRY S.**—Born in London, England, in 1865. Lived in New York City twenty-five years ago. Please write to your sister, Mrs. E. M. Barnes.

**FLOYD, CHARLES.**—Please write to your sister, Laura, at Union Gap, Washington.

**DADY.**—Have important news. Am lonely and need you. Am at Marg's. G.

**JONES, HOMER LEONARD.**—About forty years of age. Last heard of in Evansville, Indiana. Please send any information to his son, Cecil H. Jones, 425 Bond Avenue, East St. Louis, Illinois.

**HOLLAND, FRANK S.**—Age forty-eight years, weight one hundred and ninety-five pounds, dark complexion. Address your wife, Mrs. Rose Holland, 10100 San Corlos Street, Home Gardens, Los Angeles, California.

**BENSON, HENRY.**—Forty-one years old, medium height, blue eyes and black hair. Please write to your mother, who is in poor health. Mrs. F. Benson, care of Mr. Healey, West Spring Street, West Haven, Connecticut.

**GENTRY.**—Last heard of in Sacramento, California, Ironworker by trade. Jack Proctor, 617 East Broadway, Louisville, Kentucky.

**KELLY, H. G.**—Yours received. Folks all well. Send me your address. Mae B.

**CHEESMAN, VERNON.**—Carpenter, about thirty-two years old. Was in Mound City, Kansas, ten years ago. Had a sister, Dorothy. Address your uncle, James C. Kelly, 339 Church Street, Redlands, California.

**O'NEILL, HUGH.**—Left Loughlin Bridge, County Carlow, Ireland, many years ago. Believed to be living in Michigan. He is about seventy-five years old. Please write to your sister, Lizzie O'Neill, 3 Poplar Square, Naas, County Kildare, Ireland.

**JOHNS, Mrs. EMILY.**—Formerly of Omaha, Nebraska, who over thirty-five years ago parted from her husband, kept her older girl and gave her baby, Bessie, to Mrs. P. H. Burns, then of Lodgepole, Nebraska, who adopted her. Address Mrs. O. E. Dye, R. R. 1, Neponset, Illinois.

**ANDERSON, CHARLES F.**—Your mother and I want you to come home. Please write to your wife, Gladys.

**BADEAU, W. H.**—Last heard from in Matawan, New Jersey. Please address Mrs. P. H. Smyth, 1629 North Santa Fe, Wichita, Kansas.

**SHOCK, WALTER.**—Left Camp Fremont, California, in 1918 for Siberia, with the Thirty-first Machine Gun Company. Please write your old pal, M. Nored, care of D. F. Patrick, Noti Lumber Company, Noti, Oregon.

**ENNIS, HARRY.**—Last heard of from Haver, Montana, in 1923. Age fifty-three, weight two hundred and thirty pounds, height six feet, wavy-brown hair, blue eyes, florid complexion, upper teeth gold, walks very erect. Would follow garage work or railroading. Please write A. E., care of this magazine.

**COURCHENE, HOMER B.**—Formerly of Chicago, Illinois. Write your buddy of the A. E. F., Don S. Cutter, 1243 Calaveras Street, Altadena, California.

**MAJAIS, C. M.**—Left Ferguson, Kentucky, in 1902 for Canada. Address your brother, Hugh Majais, 617½ North Illinois Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

**ANDERSON, CHARLES F.**—We all want you back. Don't worry about money matters. E. H. Anderson, 2533 Twenty-fifth Avenue, South, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**COOK, HOWARD W.**—Ruth died in 1924. W. C. C. was killed in August. Please write G. Slatton, 107 South Morgan Street, Chicago, Illinois.

**RODAMAKER** or **HAYDEN, MARY.**—In Seattle, Washington, ten years ago. Had two children, Ora and Floyd. Everything is all right. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. John Koebrick, R. R. 1, Bassett, Iowa.

**BURKS, JAMES E.**—Last seen on the firing line in France, July, 1918. Member of the Machine Gun Company, Ninth Infantry, Second Division. Address Henry O. Burks, Box 152, Glen Lyon, Pennsylvania.

**AUNTIE BALES.**—An elderly lady with white hair. Was in Los Angeles, California, in 1922. Please write to Gertrude, care of this magazine.

**WOLFF, WILLIE.**—The daughter of his brother, Alfred, would like to hear from him. Miss Wilma Wolff, Box 146, Schofield, Wisconsin.

**MOTHER** and **FATHER.**—Last heard of in Milwaukee. Please write your son, Roy T. Graves, 901 George Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

**CLARK, PHIL M., TODD** or **HARRIS.**—Or relatives, please write to Mrs. Anna Todd Clark Hoxie, Motor Route C, Eugene, Oregon.

**PALMER, ARTHUR.**—Lived with the H. S. Tomkins family of Hamilton, Ontario, in 1917. Please communicate with them through this magazine.

**ASSENHEIMER, PAULINE.**—About fifty years of age, of Russian-Polish descent. Lived with a family named Schwartz in Brooklyn. Please write to your son, Rudolf Assenheimer, Langenberg Rhineland, Huserstrasse, 30, Germany.

**BROWN, GEORGE WARREN.**—Age twenty-two. Last heard of in Rawlins, Wyoming.

**FINLEY, RICHARD R.**—Painter and decorator, last heard of in Pueblo, Colorado.

**FINLEY, WILLIAM.**—Last heard of in Pennsylvania. Address Mrs. Bessie Brown, care of this magazine.

**MANN, TERRY.**—Last heard of in Salt Lake City, Utah. Please write to your son, Melvin Dured Mann, Paragould, Arkansas.

**WHEELOCK, RUTH.**—Her school chum would like to hear from her. Alice Kierstead, care of this magazine..

**R. L.**—Will do all I can for you. Herb Roland.

**WATSON, PETE.**—Dark eyes and hair, short. Have news for you. Coates, Ord. Company, Texas.

**SETTLE, BRYAN F., DICK RISSLER, DAVID CROCKET SIMPSON,** and **WILLIAM F. LESCALLEET.**—They worked at the American Steel Shipyard, Pensacola, Florida, in 1918. Please write to an old friend, B. B. E.

**TOWNSEND, ARTHUR.**—Believed to be in Florida. A navy man, short, deep-sunken blue eyes, sallow complexion, high forehead, sandy hair, bald in front, gray eyebrows meeting, over forty years of age. Please communicate with your wife, Mrs. Arthur Townsend, 1334 Ninth Street, N. W. Washington, D. C.

**REEVES, WILLIAM SHERMAN.**—Last heard from in western Colorado. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Ethel Witcher, Deertrail, Colorado.

**BARNES, MELVIN.**—Was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in March. Kindly write to your mother. Address Mrs. G. Dorsey, 3388 Boulevard, Jersey City, New Jersey.

**TRADER, HARRY.**—Was a soldier in Hawaiian Islands. Last heard from in 1919. Please write to Margaret, care of this magazine.

**RENNERT, EMIL** or **ELMER.**—A soldier. Last heard from at Seattle, Washington. Please notify Thelma Clague, 1950 East Seventy-ninth Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

**MAHONEY, SPEED** or **JOHN.**—I made a big mistake and am sorry. D. B. M.

**CREAGAW, JOHN.**—Write to your mother and children. I am living at 18541 Drew Street, Chicago, Illinois. Sis.

**CLARK, JOSEPH KIRBY.**—About twenty years old. Please address your uncle, George Clark, 422 Floyd Street, Toledo, Ohio.

**CAIN, EARL.**—Tall, dark, twenty-three years old. Last heard from at Pioneer, Texas, in 1923. Mrs. W. J. Ward, Box 873, care of Carter Oil Company, Cromwell, Oklahoma.

**GWIN, TOM** and **JOHN.**—Left Texas twenty-six years ago for Old Mexico. Please write to Mrs. Beulah Lindley, Box 96, Mankins, Texas.

**SHIRK, DWIGHT** and **ORAL.**—Were in Salina, Kansas. Please write to E. H. Shirk, Eldorado, Kansas.

**HENSON, GEORGE.**—Has not been heard from for thirteen years. Please write your son Gordon, care of this magazine.

**GREENE, HANNAH** and **IRVIN.**—Last heard from in California two years ago. Please send news of either of them to Mrs. Hazel Addison, Box 271, Mt. Morris, Michigan.

**HULTQUIST, ARNOLD E.**—Wanted to settle brother's estate. He is forty-one years old, tall, brown hair, blue eyes, and left hand missing. Address your sister, M. K., Box 543.

**DAWSON, WALTER.**—Overseas veteran of the A. E. F. Last heard from in California in 1920. Address your cousin in care of this magazine.

**KALPANSOS, STAHL** or **STEVE.**—Please write or come home The children need you. B. K., 3210 Seventeenth West, Seattle, Washington.

**LAWSON, ANNA.**—Last heard of in Lamar, Colorado. Please write to L. W. Flaherty, Exchequer, California.

**KALLENBAUGH, MEREDITH.**—Once lived at Lorain, Ohio. Address M. A. T., care of this magazine.

**SCAIFE** or **SCAFE.**—Any descendants please notify Mrs. A. S. Gates, Winnsboro, Louisiana, who is completing a family tree.

**REED-ROBERTS, VIRGINIA V.**—Formerly of Sterling, Colorado. Please write to Gertrude M. Forbes, Box 13, Riverton, Wyoming.

**SANIBEL ISLAND, FLORIDA.**—Any one having lived there the past fifteen years, please write to Gertrude M. Forbes, Box 13, Riverton, Wyoming, who wishes to locate a relative.

**TURNER, E. S.**—Write to your father. He will not tell any one where you are. M. C. O.

**WILLIAMS, BILL.**—Formerly of Idaho. Please come back. All is forgiven. Peggie A.

**ANDERSON, FRED.**—Please write to your mother, Mrs. Higgins, 30 South Lawton, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**TAYLOR, VERNON FRANK.**—Please write to Helen and Frances A. We are worried about you. Address, 275 Turk Street, San Francisco, California.

**SCLATER, WILLIAM JOHN.**—Last seen in Detroit in 1923. Age, forty. Comedian ability. Native of Glasgow, Scotland. Address his brother, George, care of this magazine.

**The Southern lady** who advertised for her son, who was killed on the railroad near Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1905, may receive helpful information by writing to A. B. Drumbeller, 801 Douglass Street, Reading, Pennsylvania.

**BIXLER, HARRY.**—Please write to us. We are worried about you. Mrs. Mary Bixler, Dyas, Alabama.

**YUNGHANS, CHARLES.**—Last heard of in Detroit, Michigan, in 1919. Please write to your wife, Hildur.

**CONNOLLY, WILLIAM FRANCIS.**—Forty-three years old, short, weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds, has black hair and blue eyes, and tattoos on both arms. Brownie, care of this magazine.

**WRIGHT, ALEXANDER GRAY.**—A Canadian, twenty-three years of age. Has been missing eight years. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Wright, 2565 Esplanade Avenue, Montreal, Canada.

**KOUSE, ELNORA.**—Last heard of in Oakland, California. Twenty-eight years of age, medium height, blue eyes, and light hair. Needed to settle estate. Write your brother, Melvin Rouse, 127 River Street, Oneonta, New York.

**VAN ARMAN, GEORGE D.**—Last heard of in Seattle, Washington, in 1923. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Imogene Goodwin, 2220 Madison Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland.

**SMITH, GEORGE E.**—If any of the boys who were in the medical corps at Camp Sevier, Greenville, South Carolina, prior to 1918 know his address, please write to Anxious, care of this magazine.

**MacC——, STEWART.**—Father, please write to me. Sadie, care of this magazine.

**STREET, MRS. LIZZIE.**—Her children are anxious to hear from her. Mrs. Etta Lee, 1513 North Twenty-fifth Street, East St. Louis, Illinois.

**COOK, ROBERT.**—Forty years of age, medium height, weight about one hundred and seventy pounds, brown eyes, and auburn hair. Heard of about ten years ago in Seattle, Washington. A. B. Cook, Dora, Alabama.

**JUMPER.**—If anybody of this name will send a brief sketch of their family history, I will send very valuable information in return. Address P. O. Box 555, El Paso, Texas.

**WISEMAN, C. T.**—About fifty-nine years old. Last heard of in Savannah, Georgia. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. B. Van, Box 308, Magnolia, Mississippi.

**JAMES, ROBERT B.**—It is very important that you write to your mother.

**WILLARD, FRED D.**—Last heard of in Pasco, Washington, two years ago. He is about sixty-two years old. Please write to your brother, Howard, Box 277, Lynn Haven, Florida.

**MILLER, MAE.**—Last seen in Philadelphia in 1924. Steven Csaki, 237 Third Street, Passaic, New Jersey.

**McCOMAS, WILFRED R.**—About forty-nine years of age. A telegraph operator. Last heard from at Joliet, Illinois. Please address your cousin, Mrs. Katherine Davis, 517 North Sixteenth Street, Parsons, Kansas.

**HARTIN, BENJAMIN.**—A cousin would like to locate some of his descendants. Perley Hartin, Canterbury Station, York County, New Brunswick, Canada.

**YOUNG, OLGA.**—I would like to hear from you. Charles A. M., Westwood, California.

**HELTON, LILLIAN.**—Last heard of in Charlotte, North Carolina. Nobie Grant, 12 Bennett Street, Greenville, South Carolina.

**LOGAN, O. C.**—Was with the Twenty-second Ordnance Guards at Portsmouth, Virginia, in 1919. Write to Miss Marie Smith, 615 Grape Street, Syracuse, New York.

**BYRGE, or CARROLL, ELI.**—Was sent to a home in Louisville, Kentucky, after his mother's death. Is twenty-two years of age now. Please write to George Byrge, Blue Diamond, Kentucky.

**CAMERON, KATE and CLEMANTINA.**—Were in a girls' school in Perth, Scotland, in 1895 and believed to have gone to Amhurst, U. S. A., in 1896. Please write to your brother John, care of this magazine.

**GORDON, WILLIAM HARVEY.**—Has gray hair, dark eyes, is medium height, has deep scar back of right ear and crippled finger on right hand. Lawyer by profession. Mother is dead. Please write to your son, Goodman Gordon, 1618 Fourth Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

**SMITH, HENRY.**—Left Detroit fourteen years ago, presumably to take up land in Edmonton, Alberta. Please write to Mrs. J. D. Young, 810 Delaware Street, Detroit, Michigan.

**FERRIS, JAMES.**—He staked in Wisconsin about forty years ago. Please write to your nephew, Edward Albert Ecklund, Box 57, Worcester, Massachusetts.

**FRIEND, GRANT.**—Formerly of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His son, Frank, would like to have news of him. Write to S. H., care of this magazine.

**WALLER, SIDNEY E.**—Age twenty, brown hair, hazel eyes. Believed to belong to the navy. Please write to Miss Ollie Mae Spivey, Box 564, Punta Gorda, Florida.

**MINNIE.**—Mama came to see me. All well and send love. Please write. Catherine.

**MILNE, WILLIAM.**—Native of New Hampshire. Medium height, thirty years of age. It is important to write to D. D., care of this magazine.

**CHARBONNEAU, FRED.**—Left home thirty-two years ago. Please write to your sister Laura, 4231 Parthenais Street, Montreal, Canada.

**ROLAND, EDWARD D.**—Everything is forgiven. Please write to me care of this magazine. E. R.

**ALLEN, EARLE BARNARD.**—John B. wants to see his daddy. We are truly sorry. Please write to "Buster."

**WEEKS, FRANKLIN.**—Disappeared from his home two years ago. Please write to your cousin, Miss Hazel Moore, 223 Blandina Street, Utica, New York.

**McDONALD, or GRIFF, MILICY.**—Please write to your mother, Mrs. Mabel Gardiner, Roscommon, Michigan.

**MILLS, SAMUEL A.**—Native of Rhode Island. Believed to be in California. Write to Helen, care of this magazine.

**JENSEN, JAMES J.**—Age twenty-five years, light hair and eyes, six feet tall, and weighs about one hundred and seventy-five pounds. His mother is worried. Please write to Clarence A. Jensen, Box 671, Rock Springs, Wyoming.

**PECK, HELEN.**—Of St. Paul, Minnesota. Write to Box 136, Temperance, Michigan.

**BROOKOVES, R.**—Last heard of in Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1923. Dad is worried. Please write to mother, 408 St. Mary's Avenue, Marietta, Ohio.

**T. A. W.**—Please write, as I am so worried. Babe W.

**MacNAIL, F. W.**—Last heard from in East St. Louis. Please write to Mrs. Ada Phillips, Box 327, Granite City, Illinois.

**GAULET, LORETTA.**—Please write to John Corcoran, 2352 Cartier Street, Montreal, Canada.

**MHOON, ALLINE.**—Black hair, blue eyes, tall. Please write to A. L. Collins, 2913 Nussbaumer Street, Dallas, Texas.

**WUMMER, JOHN.**—Believed to be in Detroit. Write to your Philadelphia friends. Fred, care of this magazine.

**CLYDE.**—Mother is worried. Please let us know how you are. Sister Dorothy, care of this magazine.

**HILL, PRESTON BERRY.**—Left Kentucky about 1890. He had two brothers, John Allen and Jose Sire Hill, and a sister, Nancy Ellen. Please write to his son, James Walter Hill, 1020 Twentieth Street, Bakersfield, California.

**CALLARD, OSWALD F.**—Thirty-four years of age, tall, brown eyes and hair. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Helen Callard, Ocean Beach, San Diego, California.

**JOHNSON, W. A.**—Middle age, medium height, gray eyes, short spoken. His children are anxious and would like to hear from him. Laura Johnson, Box 117, Lovelock, Nevada.

**PARKER, ESTHER.**—Twenty-four years of age. Formerly of Milwaukee. Please write to Ralph McK, care of this magazine.

**YOUNG LADY** from Houston, Texas, who attended a Confederate Veterans' meeting at Abiline, Texas, in October, please write to me care of this magazine. "Yankee."

**LANDIS, MR. and MRS.**—Formerly of Kent, Ohio. Their children, Leona and William, would like to know where their parents are. Write H. T., care of this magazine.

**GRAHAM, LETHA.**—Eighteen years of age, medium height, dark hair. Believed to be in East St. Louis. Please write to Corporal James Todd, Service Battery, Eighth Field Artillery, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

**WILLIAM.**—I need you and will come to you. Please write to me. Della.

**ROBERTSON, D. F.**—Medium height, brown hair, blue eyes. Last heard from in Ogallala, Nebraska. Please write to J. M. R., care of this magazine.

**LAYER, MARIE or MARIGOLD WINTER.**—Was adopted under false pretenses when three years of age from the Band of Mercy Club of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church by Mr. and Mrs. Fred Layer, of Spaulding, Saskatchewan, whose address is now unknown. She has parents, sisters, and a home waiting for her. She is fifteen years of age. Address R. M. Winter, Noxon, Montana.

**NELSON, GLADYS DOROTHY or PANSY WINTER.**—Adopted by Mrs. Will Nelson, of Edmonton, under false pretenses. She is now thirteen years of age, and has parents, sisters, and a home waiting for her. Address R. M. Winter, Noxon, Montana.

**STANLAKE, ROY L. or SMITH.**—Formerly switchman on Pennsylvania Railroad. Address Helen Stanlake, 212 Reo Avenue, Lansing, Michigan.

# I will make this contract with you—


Your name here Wm. C. Campbell

When you enroll for my home-training in ELECTRICITY I agree to give you:

1. Complete training, including Electrical Engineering, Ignition, Radio, etc.
2. Four outfits of standard tools and materials, including a $10 motor.
3. I WILL HELP YOU GET A GOOD JOB AND A RAISE IN PAY.
4. —or I will refund every cent of your money.

AMERICAN SCHOOL

By Chief Engineer Dunlap

AMERICAN SCHOOL — the Million Dollar Educational Institution

AMERICAN SCHOOL CHARTERED 1897

**I send you 4 Costly Electrical Outfits!**

*The third free outfit is a $10 motor.*

*The first two free outfits prepare you to do Wiring Jobs like these.*

*The fourth free outfit is a Kar dio Set.*

## Electrical Home-Training

### now backed with FREE JOB SERVICE

I am pushing thousands of men ahead to success in Electricity by a wonderful new method of home-training. Now we announce a new feature for students and graduates of the American School —a nation-wide Employment Service under the direction of Mr. H. A. Burgkart, Job Expert. Burgkart is placing men in fine Electrical positions as fast as they qualify. The Electrical business needs more Experts. Go into Electricity and you're sure to find a good job when you're ready for it. **You can get ready with Dunlap Job-Method Training:**

### 1.—because it's complete

We guarantee this training is both up-to-date and complete. Without extra charge I give you Electrical Engineering subjects, Electrical Drafting, Ignition, Radio, and many business subjects.

### 2.—because prepared by 23 noted Engineers

This is no one-man, one-idea school. America's greatest Electrical Engineers helped me prepare this training, and **their work vouches for its high-standard and thoroughness.**

**Instruction prepared by men from:**

1. General Electric Co.
2. Commonwealth Edison
3. Crocker-Wheeler Co.
4. Cutler-Hammer Mfg.
5. American Telephone & Telegraph Co
6. Westinghouse Electric & Mfg. Co.
7. Western Electric Co.
8. Underwriters Lab.
9. Columbia University
10. Dartmouth College
11. Massachusetts Inst.
12. Lehigh University
13. Univers'y of Vermont
14. Armour Institute
15. University of Kansas

### Small Monthly Payments

Our educational standards are high, tuition is within reach of the untrained man who needs this training, and small monthly payments accepted. So you need not face the world without training—let me show you how to get this million dollar No-Profit institution back of you in your fight for success and independence.

### Get My JOB AND RAISE Contract—Quick!

Now you can put your time and money into home-training with a positive agreement that it will lead to a better job and increased pay. Get the facts about my amazing offer. Find out about the opportunities and jobs waiting for you in Electricity. Act quick and make the next few months the turning point in your life. Coupon brings complete information.

**CHIEF ENGINEER DUNLAP, Electrical Division**
**AMERICAN SCHOOL, Dept. E-2197**
**Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago**

**3 because I train you by the Job-Method**

These pictures show how my students learn Electricity by doing actual Electrical jobs with standard materials and tools which I supply without extra cost. **Four costly outfits given!** Students make fast progress by this wonderful Job-Method. Many do similar jobs for pay in their spare time and earn more than enough to pay for this training.

## Send JOB and RAISE Contract

to.....

St. No.....

City.....State.....

(Mail immediately to Chief Engineer Dunlap, American School, Dept. E.2197, Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago)

# Velour Table Scarf With this 8 Piece Suite

Your Choice of two finishes, Nut Brown Fumed Oak or Highly Glossed Golden. Be sure to state your choice.

HERE is the suite that will make your living room more inviting, more comfortable; a pleasanter, a more home-like place for family and friends. You will take great pride in the dignified design of these 8 big pieces. The high-quality construction will serve you for many years. Just $1.00 with order brings the entire suite, and the Fine Scarf right to your door. The monthly payment is so small that you will never feel the outlay. My money-back bond protects you to the limit. You will make a big mistake if you don't take advantage of this offer NOW!



## 8 Solid Oak Pieces On 30 Days' Free Trial

$1 WITH ORDER

Use this suite for 30 days at my risk. See how stunning it will look with the background of your draperies and rugs. If you are not perfectly satisfied after a month's trial you may return it. I will refund your first payment and all transportation costs. The trial will not cost you a penny. You cannot be disappointed.

## Home Furnishing Guide FREE

My New Catalog is a treasure house of Home Furnishing Ideas; a delightful guide to happy home making. It shows Thousands of Bargains in Furniture, Carpets, Rugs, Stoves, etc. Write for it Today. My Prices are the Lowest. I Give the Longest Time to Pay. Everything sent on 30 Days' Free Trial.


**Only $3 Monthly** } **Sale Price $39.95**

**If you are not convinced that this is $50 Value, you may Return the Suite.**

Consider these outstanding points of excellence: (1) Kiln-dried and air-seasoned Solid Oak throughout; (2) Strong Construction, Upholstered Full Length Backs and Seats covered with Rich, Brown Spanish Artificial Leather, and very well padded with rest-giving, upholstering materials; (3) Wide, roll arms on Arm Chair and Rocker; Sturdy Posts on all pieces; (4) Every piece of large, full size: The Library Table 24 x 36 inches with Writing Desk Drawer, and big lower shelf, a table of striking beauty, Rocker and Arm Chair are both 37 ins. high and 25 ins. wide, with seats measuring 19 x 19 inches. Sewing Rocker is 34 inches high and 17 inches wide; Side Chair is the same size. The Taborette is 16 inches high. The Waste Basket is 14 inches high. The 2 Book Ends give a desirable and artistic touch. **Writing Desk Drawer, An Exclusive Spear Feature:** The Library table is equipped with a desk drawer which when pulled out can be used as a writing desk. It has a pen and pencil groove, ink well receptacle and ink well. The lid is removable; writing supplies can be kept in the drawer. This special feature makes the table serve the double purpose of library table and desk.

**You have your choice of two finishes: Nut Brown Fumed Oak or Highly Glossed Golden Oak. Be very careful to State Your Choice of Finish in Ordering. Complete 8-piece Suite, order No. TA625, Price $39.95. Terms: $1 with order, balance $3 monthly.**

*NATHANIEL SPEAR, Pres.*

**Velour Scarf with Tapestry Ends** Send your order for the library suite QUICKLY. I will include a Handsome, rich blue Table Scarf. It is made of a good velvety quality Velour with floral tapestry ends, and silky tassels. It is 12 inches wide and 55 inches long, just the right size for the table.

**SPEAR & CO., Dept. S203 Pittsburgh, Pa.**

Send me at once 8 piece Library Suite and Fine Velour Scarf as described above. Enclosed is $1 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of the 30 days' trial I decide to keep it, I will send you $3.00 monthly. Order No. TA625, Price $39.95. Title remains with you until paid in full. Send me your Big Free Catalog also.

**Please print or write name and address plainly**

**If you want Nut Brown Fumed Oak put an X in this** ☐

**If you want Golden Oak put an X in this** ☐

Name.....Occupation.....

R. F. D., Box No. or Street and No.....

Post Office.....State.....

**If your shipping point is different from your post office fill in line below**

Send Shipment to.....

FREE CATALOG { **If you want Free Catalog Only, Send No Money, put an X here** ☐ **and write your name and address plainly on the above lines.**

**SPEAR & CO.** **Dept. S203 Pittsburgh, Pa.**

***Home Furnishers for the People of America***